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To all members,

Interdepartmental Committee on Immigration,
Asylum and Related Issues

Please find attached a note received today from the D/Environment and Local Government regarding accommodation of asylum seekers, including the question of dispersal.

I will circulate other notes as they are received.

Doncha O'Sullivan,
Immigration & Citizenship
3 July, 1998

ACCOMMODATION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

1. Most asylum seekers are located in the Dublin area where the Eastern Health Board arranges emergency accommodation (funded by the Dublin local authorities who are 90% recouped by the Department of the Environment and Local Government) and provides rent supplements towards the cost of private rented accommodation (the rent supplements are 100% recouped by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs). There are approximately 3,000 cases (family units) in accommodation funded by the Board, of which just under 50% (1,440 in late May 1998) were in emergency accommodation while just over 50% were in private rented accommodation. Emergency bed and breakfast accommodation is directly provided to asylum seekers. The payment arrangement is between guesthouse operators and the Health Board (whose costs are met by the local authorities). *(no money changes hands)*.
2. In early March 1998, Dublin Corporation expressed concerns to the Departments of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Environment and Local Government about the Corporation's ability and that of the Eastern Health Board to meet the increased demand for emergency accommodation following on a sudden large increase in the numbers of asylum seekers. The Department of Justice convened a meeting of a sub-group of the interdepartmental committee to consider whether asylum seekers should be dispersed throughout the country. Following discussion at the Committee, the Department of the Environment and Local Government contacted local authority managers to establish the potential to provide emergency accommodation outside of Dublin should the need arise.
3. The Department's survey of local authorities revealed that little emergency accommodation could be brought on stream quickly outside the Dublin area. The principal reasons given for the lack of availability was the pressure on bed and breakfast type accommodation during the spring and

summer tourist seasons and the general unwillingness of bed and breakfast operators to accommodate asylum seekers. This overall picture is supported by problems experienced in accommodating asylum seekers arriving in Wexford where as of early June 1998 69 family units (mainly single people but some families with children) were in a mix of emergency and private rented accommodation.

4. In the meantime Dublin Corporation, in conjunction with the Eastern Health Board, placed an advertisement in the newspapers inviting owners of hostels, guest houses, bed and breakfast premises and persons with apartments or houses for letting, to furnish details of suitable accommodation which could be used to accommodate persons, including asylum seekers, in emergency need of housing. The Corporation had a good response to their advertisement, including proposals from outside the Dublin area, and have been evaluating these since then, in conjunction with the Eastern Health Board. Arrangements have been made with the operators of some guest houses to provide bed (but not breakfast) on an emergency basis to asylum seekers.
5. The Department contacted a number of the larger local authorities (County Boroughs) and suggested that they, in conjunction with the local health board, should place similar advertisements to the Dublin Corporation/Eastern Health Board one in the local newspapers. Only one local authority, Waterford Corporation, did so and the response was minimal (one response). This would probably apply in the other areas.
6. On the basis of 1,884 applications received by the Department of Justice in 1998 up to Mid May (which averages approx. 100 per week) a further 3,000 - 3,500 applications can be expected in the remainder of 1998. The actual figure may be considerably higher. The vast majority of asylum seekers make their way to Dublin. Given the pressure on existing private rented accommodation which is suitable and within the price range of rent supplements, in

the Dublin area it is likely that most of the new arrivals will require emergency accommodation. Apart from the cost (which is considerably higher than rent supplements for private rented accommodation) it is unlikely that these numbers can be accommodated in emergency accommodation in the Dublin area while, as indicated above, there is little scope for locating them outside the area. The Eastern Health Board have been successful in providing emergency accommodation in the area so far because of the lucrative nature of the business but there is no reason to believe this can continue.

7. Conclusion

There is little prospect of significant additional accommodation becoming available in the short term outside the Dublin area. Asylum seekers in some numbers are already in Wexford (69 family units) because of its proximity to Rosslare, in Ennis (about 90) because of the existence of a Red Cross hostel and support of individual family units in other, mainly urban, areas but we have no information on overall numbers outside Dublin. International experience suggests that the bulk of asylum seekers will gravitate towards the capital in any case and that is where the accommodation problem must be addressed.

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