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**Statement by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr. John O' Donoghue T.D. in reply to Report launched by the Irish Refugee Council entitled "Beyond the Pale: Asylum Seeking Children and Social Inclusion"**

Commenting on the claim made by the Irish Refugee Council report "Beyond the Pale: Asylum-Seeking Children and Social Exclusion in Ireland", the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, John O'Donoghue has pointed out the following.

- The sample which forms the basis of the report was based on 43 families in Limerick, Ennis and Cork. According to the report, 30% of these families were in direct provision. Currently 5000 asylum seekers are accommodated in 85 centres in 24 Counties in direct provision.
- All accommodation providers and other companies engaged by the State are required under contract to ensure that all accommodation centres comply and operate in accordance with all statutory requirements of local authorities and other agencies in relation to planning, building bye-laws, bedroom capacity, food, food hygiene, water supply, fire safety and general safety. It should be noted that there continues to be a severe housing shortage of all tenures in Ireland and for example, the total housing stock here relative to population is the lowest in the EU -334 per thousand at end 1999 compared to an EU average of 440. Against this backdrop, the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) continues to experience grave difficulties in meeting the needs of up to 1,000 newly arrived asylum seekers every month. To date the RIA has arranged for accommodation for over 15,000 asylum seekers.
- The RIA is currently embarked on a programme of constructing purpose built accommodation centres for asylum seekers. These centres which are specifically designed to meet the needs of asylum seeker families and single persons will have full facilities on site including medical, welfare and recreational.
- In circumstances where asylum seeker parents and their children are accommodated in centres operating under the aegis of the Reception and Integration Agency, particular emphasis is placed on meeting their needs. It is the policy of the RIA that cots are provided in each reception and accommodation centre where infants are accommodated and that toilet and bathroom facilities are provided in accordance with relevant statutory requirements. In this regard, the Memorandum of Agreement between the RIA and accommodation providers stipulates that, at a minimum, in addition to cots, the following should be available:-
  - Infant formula;
  - Infant food;
  - Access to fresh water (for the preparation of infant formulas);
  - Sterilizers (sufficient for the number of infant children);
  - Kettles (for boiling water);
  - Fridges (for infant formula bottles);
  - Microwave/bottle warmers;
  - In addition packed lunches are provided for school going children.

- #EXPIRED
- In relation to food, over 120 nationalities (with hugely divergent cultural, food and ethnic needs) are catered for and all accommodation providers are required under contract to meet the reasonable needs of different ethnic groups accommodated at each centre. This means that menus have to be cycled on at least a seven day basis to provide variety. The contract requires that three main meals be provided every day with snacks available outside meal times (sample menu attached).
  - Where exceptional circumstances arise, including where an asylum seeker is prescribed a special diet, arrangements are put in place to facilitate this requirement.
  - In addition, the Agency is involved in a training programme with accommodation providers and their staff which includes further development on the provision of various ethnic dishes.
  - In relation to meeting the wider needs of children, the situation is that all children of asylum seekers are entitled to the full rate of child benefit. In addition, Community Welfare Officers may approve a weekly supplement payable to parents for expenses associated with new born infants including nappies and other toiletries.
  - Community Welfare Officers also make "Exceptional Needs Payments" to asylum seekers to meet unforeseen expenses, such as clothing and footwear needs.
  - Single mothers have an entitlement to lone parents allowance on the same basis as the indigenous population.
  - The Inspectorate Unit within the RIA conducts regular detailed inspections of each location where asylum seekers are accommodated and any diminution in standards which come to light as a result of such inspections are treated very seriously and can lead to termination of contracts where this deemed to be warranted.

The Minister in conclusion said that the system in place in this country to meet the needs of asylum seekers more than matched up to that in place throughout the EU and further afield. Anybody who cares to review the situation will quickly establish that fact and no amount of hyperbole can disguise this.

#ExploringDP  
**APPENDIX IV**

**Breakfast:** Minimum choice of 6 cereals, e.g. Muesli, Cornflakes, Porridge, Branflakes, Rice Krispies, Weetabix.

And

Choice of 3 or 4 Juices, e.g. Orange, Grapefruit, Cranberry, Apple.

And

Selection of Fruit and Cheese e.g. Melon, Pears, Grapefruit, Apples, Oranges, Cheddar

And

Milk / Tea / Coffee / Toast / Brown and White Bread / Rolls

**Lunch:** Choice of 3 light main courses, to vary daily and consist of e.g. Lasagne, Pasta, Spaghetti, Curry, Quiche, Soup, Chicken Nuggets, BBQ Spare Ribs, Toulouse Sausages, Saurkraut, Salads, Pizza, Burgers or selection of Sandwiches, etc.

**Dinner:** Must include:

Choice of 2 starters, (one hot and one cold) or Dessert

And

Choice of 3 Main Courses (to vary daily) to include a meat dish, a fish dish and a vegetarian dish e.g. Chicken, Fish, Curry, Lasagne, Romanian Chicken Stew, Ogbuno Soup + Pounded Yam, Lamb Kleftico, Lemon Pepper Haddock, Pork Paprikas and Roast Joints (Beef, Pork, Lamb, etc.)

And

Tea / Coffee / Milk / Soft Drink Beverage

**NB**

It is recommended that both rice, as well as potatoes and chips, be served with all main dishes at lunch and dinner.