

# SVP response to the Consultation on National Standards for accommodation offered to people in the protection process

Social justice and policy team

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Society of St Vincent de Paul

## **Introduction**

The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the draft national standards for accommodation offered to people in the protection process. SVP is the largest charity of social concern and action in Ireland. The Society's mission is to provide friendship and support to those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, to promote self-sufficiency and to work for social justice. SVP believes that the system of Direct Provision is fundamentally flawed, placing individuals, families and children deep into poverty and social exclusion for an extended period of time in many cases.

## **Current consultation**

The current consultation refers only to the quality standards in the accommodation which is provided for those seeking protection and contains a number of recommendations which SVP welcomes, in the areas of providing access to cooking facilities, providing appropriate play, recreation and study space for children and young people, the recognition of the importance of privacy for residents and families and a clear process for making complaints. The requirement to provide accessible information about local statutory and non-statutory services is particularly welcome, and should include information about the Community Welfare Service, public health nurse, citizens information service, youth and community centres, free legal advice centres and local parent support groups such as toddler groups, play cafes, breastfeeding support groups etc among others, with centre managers/staff forging links with these services locally.

## **SVP recommends that:**

- Accommodation centres should take into account the very low level of the personal allowance of €21.60 per week provided to asylum seekers and their children when considering the provision of food and non-food items and products for residents of the centres. This should also be considered when assessing whether leisure and other activities for both adults and children are accessible to residents, as supports other than transport may be required for residents to participate.
- It should be made clear in the standards that a reception officer must be appointed in all centres and is accessible as a support for all residents, and not only those with identified special reception needs.
- Centres should support celebrations for the residents (in consultation with the residents and where relevant and appropriate), for example, children's birthdays, religious celebrations such as Christmas and significant life events.
- The requirement and process for centres with current contracts to provide services to meet the new standards within a certain timeframe should be outlined.

## **Conclusion**

Monitoring compliance with the standards when they are introduced will be key to ensuring that their introduction will make a real difference to the lives of residents. The implementation of the other recommendations contained in the McMahon report will also serve to improve the protection process for people seeking asylum and should be progressed.