

Responses to Parliamentary Questions

For Oral Answer on : 29/04/2025

Question Number(s): 122 Question Reference(s): 20837/25

Department: Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Asked by: Matt Carthy T.D.

QUESTION

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the details of any reviews carried out, sought or received by her Department, into contracts for international protection accommodation centres in the past five years; if any value for money reviews were carried out into contracts for the provision of IPAS centres in the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

REPLY

Thank you for your question, Deputy.

Providing reception conditions – accommodation and other basic supports – to people seeking international protection is part of Irish and EU law and is also part of our humanitarian duty to provide shelter to people fleeing war and persecution in their home country.

The State is currently accommodating over 33,000 people in over 320 IPAS centres around the country, about 9,000 of whom are children with their families. By comparison, in August 2021, our system was accommodating approximately 7,000 people, meaning that IPAS has increased capacity by more than 400% in that time.

In meeting our obligation to provide material reception conditions to people seeking international protection, the Department can consider offers of accommodation from a tax-compliant company, subject to compliance with statutory requirements and minimum standards.

Accommodation centres are of varying types, some permanent centres and some emergency centres contracted to the Department to provide accommodation.

When an external offer of accommodation for international protection applicants is received, the International Protection Procurement Service sends a proposal template to the prospective provider that they are required to complete and return. The proposal template seeks to gather as much information as is reasonably practicable to facilitate an objective assessment of the suitability of the premises to accommodate people seeking IP, and the right of the proposer to make the offer.

The provider must ensure that the property is of an adequate standard and that the provider will provide the services in accordance with good industry practice and comply with all applicable laws including but not limited to all obligations in the field of health and safety, environmental, social, child protection, and labour law that apply at the place where the services are provided.

If a property is contracted and it is later brought to the attention of the Department that a provider might be in contravention of their contractual obligations, the Department will take the appropriate steps to ensure an accommodation provider rectifies these matters in compliance with the relevant legislation.

IPAS regularly engages with centres to ensure compliance with contracts and standards with particular focus on the wellbeing of international protection applications.

A small number of compliance issues have arisen across IPAS's property portfolio. These issues are actively addressed with service providers as they arise and are followed up in terms of any regulatory issues, or welfare issues for residents.

Where my Department becomes aware of potential issues with a provider or where a specific concern is raised by residents, the property will be inspected and, where there is a failure to address contractual breaches outlined, this may impact on payments and may also result in termination of a contract if deemed appropriate.

For Oral Answer on : 29/04/2025

Question Number(s): 146 Question Reference(s): 20838/25

Department: Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Asked by: Matt Carthy T.D.

QUESTION

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth given the HIQA overview report on the first year of inspecting international protection accommodation centres, published on 5 March 2025, found that 56% of centres inspected did not have effective governance and management arrangements in place, had poor, or no, reporting systems, and that 35% of staff across the centres HIQA inspected in 2024 were not appropriately vetted by An Garda Síochána, if she will now initiate a review of the granting of IPAS contracts; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

REPLY

Thank you for your question, Deputy.

The Department has welcomed the publication by HIQA of its 2024 overview report on inspections of over 50 International Protection Accommodation Centres.

The report made many positive findings of compliance with the National Standards identified in this report, and also acknowledged that partial compliance and non-compliance with the National Standards have been identified during the course of these inspections.

HIQA found that many service providers ensured that their centres were of a good standard and that the services they were delivering were safe, of a high quality and promoted and protected the rights of residents.

The Department and I welcome the comments from HIQA noting improvements in centres during the period, and that most adults, children and young people reported generally positive experiences living in IPAS accommodation centres.

Of the over 800 adult residents HIQA met as part of their review, 88% said they felt safe in their accommodation and 79% said the centre supported them to live meaningful lives. Of the over 300 children and young people HIQA met, 79% said their centre was a safe place.

In terms of vetting, the Garda National Vetting Bureau prioritises vetting of staff for family accommodation centres where children are accommodated. This is because under the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016, all staff of international protection accommodation centres who work with children are required to be Garda Vetted prior to commencing employment. Staff working at centres where children are not accommodated may be within the cohort of staff reported as awaiting vetting within this review.

Where any centre, following an inspection, had areas of partial or non-compliance identified, a bespoke Compliance Plan was agreed, noting the specific and time-bound measures which have to be taken in order to ensure full compliance with the National Standards and HIQA. IPAS have noted that ongoing improvement is seen in compliance through this process.

The seven key recommendations made by HIQA within the report and HIQA's commitment to engaging with Government will continue to support and inform future plans for the development of the sector.