



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

Press release: Immediate

Report finds serious human rights concerns for homeless non-UK nationals in Northern Ireland

An investigation report by the Human Rights Commission has identified serious human rights concerns for homeless non-UK nationals in Northern Ireland who are excluded from accessing public funds. The 'No Home from Home' report released today (1 September 2009) finds that restrictions in current immigration legislation often prevent access to even the most basic levels of support from government agencies.

The investigation examines the practices of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Social Security Agency and the Health and Social Care Trusts in Belfast, Cookstown and Dungannon. It looks at how day to day decision making impacts on access to welfare benefits and homeless assistance.

Sorcha McKenna, co-author of the report commented:

"During this investigation we found that immigration legislation severely restricts what each of the agencies can do to assist homeless non-UK nationals. Whilst the investigation found largely good practice among agency staff there is still room for improvement particularly in the area of training and inter agency co-operation. These recommendations are aimed at supporting staff and to ensure that where a person is homeless all options for assistance are explored."

In addition to interviews with government agency staff and input from the voluntary sector, 'No Home from Home' includes personal accounts from homeless individuals.

Roisin Devlin co-author of the report, added:

"Those who took part in the investigation explained how they had become homeless. Their experiences included domestic violence, ill-health and racial intimidation. In many instances, they did not have access to the basic means of shelter or subsistence. Often charitable organisations were called upon for help because, under various laws, individuals were not entitled to State support."

The interviews provided during the investigation highlight how immigration legislation fails to take into account the human rights impacts of denying access to welfare benefits and homelessness assistance.

NIHRC Chief Commissioner, Professor Monica McWilliams, stated:

"Overall, the investigation demonstrates how those in extremely vulnerable situations are often excluded from even the most basic levels of homelessness and financial support. We have made a wide range of recommendations; the most pressing of these is that government should ensure that regardless of nationality or immigration status no one is allowed to fall into destitution."

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Further information

For further information, please contact Claire Martin, Press and Public Affairs Worker: (028) 9024 3987 (office), 0771 7731873 (mobile).

Notes to editors

1. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was established in 1999, by the Northern Ireland Act 1998, to protect and promote the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland. The powers and functions of the Commission include reviewing law and practice, advising the government, promoting an awareness of human rights and taking cases to court.
2. The Commission's new investigation report 'No Home from Home: Homelessness for People with No or Limited Access to Public Funds' was co-authored by Roisin Devlin and Sorcha McKenna both of whom are investigations workers with the Commission. It will be available from the Commission's website, www.nihrc.org on 1 September 2009.
3. The Commission will launch the report at 10.15am at Clifton House in Belfast on 1 September, 2009. Members of the press are invited to attend a press conference at 9.30am at Clifton House on this date.

4. 'No Home from Home' looks at the causes and consequences of homelessness, examining the extent to which legislation, policy and practice affects access to, support and welfare benefits for those facing destitution in Northern Ireland. Among the issues examined within the report are ill health and disability, domestic violence, labour exploitation, refugees and asylum seekers, and racial intimidation.
5. This investigation started in May 2008 and covers three areas of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Cookstown and Dungannon. It examines three government agencies Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Social Security Agency and Health and Social Care Trusts as they were identified as having a key role in relation to homelessness and destitution.
6. The report considers access to homelessness services for non-UK nationals 'UK national' and 'non-UK national' are defined as follows:
 - 'UK national' refers to all British and/or Irish nationals residing in the United Kingdom.
 - 'Non-UK national(s)' is used to refer to individuals who are not nationals of the United Kingdom and/or Ireland including:
 - Persons from the A8 accession states (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia)
 - Persons from the A2 accession states (Bulgaria, Romania)
 - Persons from other EU member states
 - Persons from outside the European Union