

***The Needs of Asylum Seeker Men
Living in Viking House
Direct Provision Centre,
Waterford***

***Waterford Area Partnership
The Men's Development Network
&
RAPID***

November 2006



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Nicholas Clarke
Research Co-ordinator MDN

Introduction

This report will focus on the findings from a survey carried out within one direct provision hostel in Waterford City. The research was carried out between the months of June to October and was funded by Waterford Area Partnership in conjunction with Waterford RAPID and in consultation with The Reception and Integration Agency. The research was conducted by the Men's Development Network. This needs analysis survey is based on the one designed and carried out by Collins (2002) in Cork. This survey was aimed at understanding the needs of asylum seekers in a range of areas.

- Accommodation
- Food
- Work, Training and Education
- Health and welfare
- Information
- Legal
- Interpreter
- Social and Cultural
- Religious

Rationale for Research

Waterford Area Partnership along with other agencies such as the RAPID programme, St. Brigid's FRC, and the Health Service Executive met to discuss issues of best practice in relation to a number of Direct Provision Centres within Waterford City and County. There was concern around applicants receiving status and leaving the area with no tracking system in place or that they may not have been fully equipped to adapt to the Irish system of housing and domesticity. Childcare needs were being met and training was being provided, through Waterford City Childcare Committee. It was agreed that the direct provision centre in Birchwood, which mainly housed women and children, would be targeted in relation to providing basic courses in domestic issues and budgeting. St. Brigid's FRC were exploring how these programmes could best be delivered as there were already groups meeting in that facility. In this regard there was agreement that services were generally aimed at female asylum seekers rather than males. The direct provision hostel, Viking House, specifically houses men of which there were ninety-four residing at the beginning of the research.

This group appeared to have no developmental supports in place and little activities to occupy their time. Living conditions are not ideal. There had been some previous attempts to engage with this group. There has been no detailed research into the needs (emotional and psychological), fears,

educational attainment and skills base of this group. The Men's Development Network was approached by RAPID to address this particular group. In response the Men's Development Network devised an integrated approach to providing a means of identifying and addressing the men's needs.

The concept for the research derived from discussions at the interagency meeting between the Men's Development Network, Waterford RAPID and the Health Service Executive community care section. This meeting was convened to look at identifying the issues which male asylum seekers in Waterford face. It has been recognised that there are little if any services being provided for men who are seeking asylum in Waterford City, especially those housed in direct provision in Viking House.

Waterford Area Partnership

Waterford Area Partnership tackles social exclusion in Waterford City by working with community groups and organisations to alleviate social disadvantage and the effects it has on society.

The Partnership provides support to 14 target groups and all communities regarded as socially excluded on a city-wide basis.

The 14 Target groups that the partnership supports are as follows :

Unemployed People, Early School Leavers, Women, Travelling Community, People with Disabilities, Older Persons, Substance Misusers, Ex-prisoners, Youth, Young Offenders, Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Gay and Lesbian Community, Lone Parents, Family & Children, and the Homeless.

Waterford Area Partnership Ltd. is one of the network of 38 Partnerships countrywide supported by Pobal. The main role of Pobal is to support integrated social and economic development through managing Programmes targeted at countering disadvantage and exclusion and promoting reconciliation and equality.

Joe Stokes
Director WAP

The Men's Development Network

The Men's Development Network: A Multi- Functional Organisation.

The MDN is a developmental and consultative organization that works on four levels; locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Nationally the Men's Development Network has 35 representatives across Ireland. The distinct functions of the Men's Development Network feed into and inform each level so that the benefits of the work are spread across all of our programmes.

The aim of the Men's Development Network (MDN) is to develop a network of support, development, resource, and progressive leadership by men in order to achieve better lives for men affected by marginalisation, poverty, unemployment, disadvantage and men's gender conditioning. The MDN has core characteristics:

- An anti-poverty, anti-exclusive focus.
- Works from community development principles and methods.
- Provides support and acts as a catalyst for men's development.
- Act as a resource for men.
- Provides co-ordination and co-operation between men and community, vountary and statutory groups.
- Involves representatives of groups which experience poverty and social exclusion within our management structures.
- Is committed to gender equality and gender equality mainstreaming
- Sees the work as being bedded in development of self, family, community, and society.

The mission statement of the Men's Development Network "**Better Lives for Men, Better lives for all**" informs the progressive, changing effect of our work on men, their families, communities & society.

Alan O'Neill
Director MDN

Contents

Acknowledgments	1
Introduction	2
Contents	5
List of tables	6
Summary	7
Section 1 – Seeking Asylum in Ireland	10
• Current Trends in Asylum Applications in Europe and Ireland	
• Current Policy on Asylum Seekers in Ireland	
• Needs within Direct Provision	
Section 2 – Methodology	20
• Introduction	
• Data Collection Instrument	
• Sample	
• Data Analysis	
• Limitations	
Section 3 – Findings on the Needs of Male Asylum Seekers in Viking House direct provision accommodation centre, Waterford	25
Profile of Respondents	26
Needs	
• Accommodation	28
• Food	32
• Work, Education and Training	35
• Health and Welfare	39
• Information needs on being an Asylum Seeker	41
• Legal needs	46
• Interpreter Services	48
• Social and Cultural needs	50
• Religious needs	53

Section 4 – Conclusions and Recommendations	55
Bibliography	64

List of Tables

- 1.1 - Number of new applications 2002 – 3rd Quarter 2006
- 1.2 - Number of new applications by month – 2006
- 1.3 - Top asylum applications lodged in industrialised countries by country of origin in first six months of 2006
- 1.4 - Gender breakdown of applications for asylum in 2003 – 2006 (30-09)
- 1.5 - Gender breakdown of applications for asylum 2006 (30-09)

- 2.1 – Length of time in asylum process and in Viking House
- 2.2 – Where are your children?
- 2.3 – Satisfaction with food
- 2.4 – Various types of employment before coming to Ireland
- 2.5 – Various types of training undertaken before coming to Ireland
- 2.6 – Areas of interest for further training
- 2.7 – Satisfaction with medical services
- 2.8 – Where do you access information?
- 2.9 – Where do you go to meet friends and acquaintances?
- 2.10 – How do you keep occupied during your day?

List of Figures

- 2.1 – Geographical breakdown of respondents
- 2.2 – Relationship status of respondents
- 2.3 – Satisfaction with accommodation
- 2.4 – Satisfaction with... (Various)
- 2.5 – Satisfaction with privacy
- 2.6 – Work before coming to Ireland?
- 2.7 – Undertake training before coming to Ireland?
- 2.8 – Highest level of education
- 2.9 – What medical services do you attend?
- 2.10 – Does your allowance meet your needs?
- 2.11 – Do you have enough information in relation to being an asylum seeker?
- 2.12 – Are you registered with the Refugee Legal Service?
- 2.13 – Have you spoken to a Lawyer about your application?
- 2.14 – Is the asylum process fair and impartial?
- 2.15 – Have you ever needed the help of an interpreter?
- 2.16 – Satisfaction with interpreter services
- 2.17 – Do you have any Irish friends or acquaintances?
- 2.18 – How many Irish friends or acquaintances do you have?
- 2.19 – Will you remain in Waterford if you application is successful?
- 2.20 – What religion do you practice?

Summary

Accommodation

- The average length of time a respondent had spent in the asylum process in this research was 18 months, with the longest being 48 months and the shortest being 3 months.
- The average length of time a respondent had spent in Viking House was 15 months with the longest being 36 months and the shortest being 1 month.
- Seventy one percent of respondents were dissatisfied with the condition of their accommodation, with issues such as sleeping space, washing facilities, cooking facilities, activities and social space being particular areas of concern.
- Sixty three percent of respondents stated that staff/ security was either very satisfactory, satisfactory or fair.
- Thirty seven percent of respondents were dissatisfied with staff/ security. The main reason for their dissatisfaction was that some staff could not speak English and therefore communication was difficult. Respondents believed that those staff members who could not speak English were belligerent towards them.
- There was an average of four men to one room. In some case five and six men shared a room.
- Sixty seven percent of respondents were dissatisfied with the level of privacy they had.

Food

- Almost 53% of respondents were not satisfied with the food served in Viking House, particularly those from African and Asian nationalities.

Work, Education and Training

- All respondents (100%) expressed the desire to work if they had the right to.
- Sixty seven percent of respondents had undertaken training prior to coming to Ireland.
- Respondents had worked in many different fields before coming to Ireland and had also been trained in many different areas.
- Almost 63% of respondents had a level of education at certificate level or higher.

- Many respondents expressed the desire to undertake training and education in a range of areas. Respondents also stated the need for extra English language classes as those available to them at present were insufficient.

Health and Welfare

- Ninety percent of respondents used the G.P. as their primary source of health care. Seventy nine percent of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the medical care they had received.
- Some men also expressed a desire for a support group where they could discuss their situation, daily lives and any other concerns they may have.
- All respondents stated that their allowance of €19.10 per week did not meet their needs.

Information

- Seventy two percent of respondents reported that they were unsure or that they did not have enough information on being an asylum seeker.
- The types of information respondents felt they needed included the length of time they would be in the asylum process, their rights as asylum seekers, their case information and decisions of the government on asylum seekers.
- Asked how their access to information could be improved respondents suggested more computers and internet access in the hostel, a resource/ information centre, and talks and seminars from Department of Justice, Equality and Law reform, Reception and Integration Agency and The Refugee Legal Service. Other suggestions included more English Language classes and providing newspapers in the hostel and support group work.

Legal

- Ninety eight percent of respondents were registered with the Refugee Legal Service.
- Eighty seven percent of respondents had spoken to a lawyer regarding their case.
- The 13% of men who state they had not spoken to a lawyer about their case had been in the asylum process for 3 months, 4 months, 7 months, 17 months and 48 months respectively.
- Forty four percent of respondents believed that the asylum process was not fair and impartial while 29% were unsure.

Interpreter Services

- Fifty six percent of respondents had required the use of an interpreter at some point.

- Sixty one percent of those were either very satisfied or satisfied with the service provided.
- Asked how interpreter services could be improved suggestions include the use of men within Viking House who spoke good English and other languages and extra English language classes.

Social and Cultural

- Eighty eight percent of respondents had Irish friends and acquaintances.
- Fifty eight percent of respondents felt they had integrated with the Irish community.
- Sixty nine percent of respondents felt either welcome or very welcome by the Irish.
- Eighty percent of respondents stated that they would remain in Waterford if they were successful in their application.

Religious needs

- The majority of respondents (61%) were of the Islamic faith with 13% being Catholics.
- Ninety percent of respondents could practice their religion locally, while 10% could not, these being of the Russian Orthodox and Pentecostal faiths.

Section 1

Seeking Asylum in Ireland

“[Ireland has] the chance to do properly and with pride what so many other countries failed to do or did with ill-grace, to make good neighbours of strangers and fully committed citizens of all’

(President Mary McAleese, 2006)

This section will present a picture of the asylum process in Ireland today. Firstly current trends in asylum applications in Europe and Ireland will be presented. Following from this there will be a brief discussion of current policy on asylum seekers in Ireland including a discussion of the policy of direct provision. Finally a discussion of the needs of asylum seekers living in direct provision will be presented, with reference to other needs analysis research carried out in the past.

Current trends in asylum applications in Europe and Ireland

The numbers of asylum seekers in Europe and in the non European industrialised countries declined sharply from the year 2001 to 2005 (UNHCR, 2006a) The numbers of new asylum applications peaked in 2001, when 655,100 asylum seekers were registered by the fifty industrialised countries analysed in the UNHCR report. Applications have halved (-49%) since then. The twenty five countries of the EU received 46% fewer requests for asylum in 2005 than in 2001. With 43% fewer applications, the ten new EU member countries were only marginally smaller (ibid).

In Europe 97,000 new asylum applications were submitted during the first six months of 2006, 19% fewer than the same period in 2005 and 21% lower than the second half of 2005 (UNHCR, 2006b). This figure represents a 35% drop compared to the first half of 2004 (148,300). For the old member states of the EU (24 countries, as no data is available for Italy) a 21% fall in new asylum applications was recorded. This decline has been steady since applications peaked in 2001.

In Ireland the picture has been much the same with new asylum application peaking in the year 2002 and steadily declining since. Table 1.1 below outlines the numbers of new asylum application from the peak in 2002, with table 1.2 showing the breakdown of new applications by month for the year 2006 up to the third quarter.

Table 1.1

<i>Number of New Applications, 2002 - 3rd Quarter 2006</i>					
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 30/09/2006
No. of New Applications	11634	7483	4265	4304	3139

Source: www.orac.ie

Table 1.2

<i>Number of New Applications by Month 2006</i>									
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Total
400	305	430	275	400	275	310	326	418	3139

Source: www.orac.ie

As can be seen the numbers of asylum seekers coming to Ireland, and indeed Europe, has dropped significantly from its peak in 2002.

According to the UNHCR China was the leading country of origin of asylum seekers (8807) in the first six months of 2006. This was followed by Iraq with 8500 asylum seekers. Table 1.3 below illustrates the main countries of origin of asylum seekers registering in industrialised nations.

Table 1.3

<i>Top asylum applications lodged in industrialised countries by country of origin in first six months of 2006</i>	
China	8807
Iraq	8477
Serbia/ Montenegro	8006
Russian Federation	6941
Turkey	4580
Haiti	4247
Islamic Republic of Iran	3866
Afghanistan	3827
Somalia	3318
Nigeria	3147
Democratic Republic of Congo	3074
Pakistan	2921
Mexico	2785
Columbia	2777
India	2714

Source: UNHCR, 2006

In 1999 eighty percent of all non non-national claimants of supplementary welfare allowance from the Eastern Region Health Authority were male (Faughnan & Woods, 2000). There are more male refugee and asylum seekers than there are female, however it is not understood how services are broken down between males/females, singles/families and those who are couples but residing apart.

According to figures from the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner the number of male asylum seekers continues to increase in comparison to the number of female asylum seekers. Table 1.4 outlines the number and percentage of male asylum seekers coming to Ireland since 2003 up to the end of September 2006.

Table 1.4

<i>Gender breakdown of asylum applications 2003 - 2006 (30-09)</i>				
	2003	2004	2005	2006 (30-06)
<i>Female</i>	3956	2245	1545	1056
<i>Male</i>	3944	2521	2778	2140
<i>Total</i>	7900	4766	4323	3196
<i>Percentage Male</i>	50%	53%	64%	67%

Source: ORAC

From the year 2003 the percentage of male asylum seekers as a whole increased from 50 percent of new applications to 67% at the end of September 2006. Despite the falling numbers of asylum seekers registering in Ireland the figures indicate that the trend is towards more male asylum seekers than female. Table 1.5 below outlines the figures for 2006 and are broken down by month, indicating a peak percentage in February (72%) with the figure levelling out at an average of 67 percent male asylum seekers making new applications.

Table 1.5

<i>Gender breakdown of applications for asylum 2006 (30-09)</i>									
	<i>Jan</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Jun</i>	<i>Jul</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sep</i>
<i>Female</i>	137	87	134	88	122	110	111	120	147
<i>Male</i>	268	226	304	194	290	168	202	213	275
<i>Percentage Male</i>	66%	72%	69%	69%	70%	60%	64%	64%	65%
<i>Total</i>	405	313	438	282	412	278	313	333	422

Source: ORAC

In the case of Waterford, the number of asylum seekers presently residing in direct provision in the area is 242 of which 152 are males (source: RIA). This is approximately 63 percent of the total current population of asylum seekers

in direct provision in Waterford and is almost concurrent with national figures as outlined above.

This trend would indicate that services should be targeted at male asylum seekers going forward and that a strategic plan should be put in place to deal with the needs of male asylum seekers nationwide.

Current Policy on Asylum Seekers in Ireland

Since 1999 the Irish Government introduced the policy of dispersal, which included the policy of direct provision. After making an application for asylum and, while that application is being determined, the person seeking asylum must adhere to the rules set down by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. As such asylum seekers have:

- No right to leave the State without the consent of the Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- No right to local authority housing
- No right to full time education (unless under the age of 18)
- No right to work unless s/he arrived in the State before the 26th of July 1999 and has been here *for more than one year*. Asylum seekers with the right to work are issued with a letter stating this, provided they have complied with all aspects of the asylum procedure.

Asylum seekers do have the right to:

- Medical screening and free health care
- Emergency accommodation
- Direct provision or supplementary welfare allowance and rent supplementation
- Literacy, language provision and mother culture support

(Ward, 2002, 28)

Following requests from the Minister for Justice the Refugee Legal Service was established to provide free legal advice to asylum seekers in 1999.

When a person arrives in Ireland and makes an application for asylum they are first housed in Dublin for an initial period of ten to fourteen days after which they are dispersed to accommodation centres around the country. There are currently 58 centres around the country (RIA website) and asylum seekers are not given any choice as to where they would prefer to go. Asylum seekers must remain in this accommodation centre for the period of their application, including any appeals which are subsequently made. The accommodation is full board. The asylum seeker receives an allowance of €19.10 per week. This allowance has remained unchanged since it was introduced despite rises in inflation and increases in equivalent social welfare

payments to Irish citizens. Supplementary welfare allowances are also available for clothing.

Criticisms regarding the function of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in being the main policy provider in relation to the welfare of asylum seekers have been put forward in a report by the Free Legal Advice Centres (2003). This report questioned whether the Department really has a legitimate role in dictating social welfare policy when its function in this should be marginal. O'Mahony has stated in this matter:

"The adaptation of the policy of direct provision suggests that the hallmark of Ireland's new asylum policy was becoming one of prevention and deterrence. In these circumstances there was little room for the development of policies aimed at supporting asylum seekers beyond providing for their basic needs. The net effect of these measures, combined with a determined resistance on the part of Irish Government to calls from trade unions and representative groups for employees and the unemployed for the right to work to be granted to asylum seekers after six months, has been to effectively guarantee the social exclusion of asylum seekers in Ireland"

(O'Mahony, 2003, 135)

This sentiment has been echoed by Gibney (2004) who has stated that the current response of Western states to refugees and asylum seekers is characterised by a kind of "organised hypocrisy". "Liberal democratic states publicly avow the principal of asylum but use fair means and foul to prevent as many asylum seekers as possible from arriving on their territory where they could claim its protection" (Gibney, 2004, 229).

O'Mahony (2003) argues that there is a contradiction between central government and local government policies. While central government policies on asylum seekers are designed to exclude asylum seekers from measures aimed at their integration into Irish society and the key provisions of the partnership agreement 'Sustaining Progress' drawn up in 2003, local government policy has a remit of social inclusion which also includes asylum seekers. O'Mahony states that "At best, this scenario encourages the interpretation that Irish Asylum policy is fraught with unresolved tensions. At worst, it suggests that the Irish authorities are enforcing and enabling policies of prevention and deterrence through the *de facto* social exclusion of asylum seekers, while at the same time presenting the illusion of making earnest efforts at their integration" (O'Mahony, 2003, 135).

This can be seen in the report 'Strategies to Promote the Inclusion of Refugees and Asylum Seekers' produced by Area Development Management' (renamed Pobal in 2006). Pobal is the body responsible for the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) which forms part of the National Development Plan. Pobal supports and funds thirty eight Area based

Partnership companies, 31 Community Partnerships and two Employment Pacts. These not-for-profit companies were set up in the areas of greatest need in the country, to provide an area-based response to long-term unemployment and to promote social inclusion. The report outlines the areas in which asylum seekers are socially excluded due to government policy, and highlights the point made by O'Mahony (2003) and Gibney (2004) regarding the contradiction between local government policy and central government policy on social inclusion and asylum seekers. "Refugees and asylum seekers experience social exclusion in many spheres, *including employment, education, accommodation*, and through the racism they experience in Irish society" (Brady, 2003, 12) (emphasis mine).

The decreasing number of asylum seekers coming to Ireland, and indeed Europe, may be an indication that such policies as outlined by Gibney and O'Mahony are indeed working, having the desired effect of deterring asylum seekers from coming to our shores.

Needs within Direct Provision Centres

Research carried out on the needs of asylum seekers have identified several issues (Faughan & Woods, 2000, Collins, 2001, Collins, 2002, Ward, 2002). These include the need to provide services to asylum seekers in areas such as accommodation, food, legal needs, education, social support, health and welfare, and social and cultural support. While attempts have been made to provide these services the provision of such services is inconsistent across different counties, with support depending on the availability of voluntary organisations, NGO's and local organisations within the county, willing to deal with asylum seeker issues.

Refugees and asylum seekers do not have the opportunity to work in paid employment, however it is not fully understood how this impacts on life within direct provision centres in the light of the journey which many of the asylum seekers have undertaken. Fleeing hardship in their own country they arrive seeking to begin a new life. Instead they are corralled into cheap accommodation, denied the right to work or advance themselves through education effectively continuing their plight indefinitely.

Findings within a recent study of refugees and asylum seekers (Collins, 2002) in Cork found that 80% of respondents had received training for a job or career (teaching, lecturing, banking, various trades, nursing, business and accountancy etc.) before coming to Ireland. It was also reported that the majority had a formal qualification; however these qualifications were rarely recognised within the Irish system.

The research also reported on a number of issues, in particular for those housed in direct provision.

- 80% of respondents living in direct provision in Cork were not satisfied with the condition of their accommodation. The issues surrounding their dissatisfaction included the food served, overcrowding, unsuitable living and sleeping conditions and a lack of cooking and washing facilities.
- 52% of respondents stated that they did not have enough information related to being an asylum seeker and over half did not know where to get such information.
- 53% of respondents stated that they did not have any Irish friends or acquaintances, indicating a lack of effective integration.
- 66% of respondents stated they did not have anything to do to keep them occupied during the day mainly due to the fact they did not have the right to work or to full time education.

Collins (2002) called for an end to the policy of direct provision and also stated that there was a need for better conditions of accommodation and more standardisation in the conditions, facilities, house rules and management policies between all direct provision centres.

The government's policy of direct provision has been criticised continuously since its introduction (Fanning, 2001, Collins, 2002, FLAC, 2003, O'Mahony, 2003, Irish Refugee Council, 2004). The needs of asylum seekers are mainly met by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) under the aegis of the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform and the Health Service Executive. O'Mahony (2003) indicates that asylum seekers require support at a number of levels such as food and shelter, healthcare, psychological and counselling services, language training, legal representation and integration with their new local community. O'Mahony believes that not all of these needs are being met by the government and that much responsibility has fallen to NGO's, Voluntary groups and local organisations in the areas where asylum seekers are housed.

The effects of living in direct provision accommodation are numerous and can be a very negative experience for the person. The Irish Refugee Council has indicated that between 10% and 35% of all refugees settled in Europe have experienced torture or other forms of serious violence prior to arriving in Europe (Irish Refugee Council, 2004 a.). An immigrant's health and welfare can be exacerbated due to various difficulties such as trying to cope with death, separation from families, anxiety and panic possibly arising from the insecurity of their asylum status, anger, chronic loneliness and social isolation, depression and difficulties arising from cultural barriers and racism. These can be made increasingly more difficult to cope with if living in direct provision. A report on strategies to promote the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers (2001) outlined the reasons why direct provision accommodation should not be a long term solution to housing asylum seekers. These included the facts that:

- It is segregated, with few opportunities for integration and lesser welfare rights than citizens
- It carries the risk of institutionalisation, with people finding it difficult to return to a normal life afterwards
- It creates inequalities between different groups of asylum seekers, with those who arrived before April 2000 having more rights than those who arrived after that date.

(Brady, 2003)

The Irish Refugee Council further state that many asylum seeking families live in extreme poverty and this is directly attributable to the government's policy of providing direct provision accommodation (Irish Refugee Council, 2004 b). Further to this they state that:

"being confined to designated accommodation centres and dependent on hostel staff has a clear impact on the self sufficiency of asylum seekers and their ability to regain their independence and autonomy..... The lack of personal space and privacy tends to become a source of friction and contributes to stress and frustration, particularly so where asylum seekers have to share facilities with conflicting issues of caste, warring and religious factions. Financially impeded from accessing suitable private accommodation many asylum seekers have no control over many fundamental aspects of their daily life"

(Irish Refugee Council, 2004 b, 2).

In O'Mahony's view the policy of direct provision focuses on finding shelter and food and consequently there is little evidence to suggest that other needs are being met. O'Mahony quotes article II of the International Convention on Economic and Cultural Rights 1966 which states "The State Parties.... recognize the right of **everyone** to an adequate standards of living for himself and his family including adequate food, clothing, and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions" (Quoted in O'Mahony, 2003, 136 *fn*).

The remainder of this report will focus on the findings from a survey carried out within one direct provision hostel in Waterford. The survey as stated previously is based on the one designed and carried out by Collins (2002) in Cork. This survey was aimed at understanding the needs of asylum seekers in a range of areas.

- Accommodation
- Food
- Work, Training and Education
- Health and Welfare
- Information
- Legal
- Interpreter

- Social and Cultural
- Religious

Findings will be discussed and commentary made in relation to the findings. Finally a chapter on recommendations and conclusions will be presented.

Section 2

Methodology

This research is exploratory in nature and therefore uses a quantitative research design. The research uses a survey designed to evaluate the various areas of need of male asylum seekers in Waterford. This survey is drawn from the survey carried out in 2002 on the needs of asylum seekers in Cork (Collins, 2002).

The survey is used so comparisons can be made with to the needs of male asylum seekers in Waterford and the needs of asylum seekers (both male and female) reported by Collins in 2002. While in this research only male asylum seekers are surveyed it is felt that the comparison with the Cork needs analysis will provide valuable information on any change which may have occurred in the four years since.

Permission to carry out the research and enter Viking House was sought from the Reception and Integration Agency and was granted after a time.

Data Collection Instrument

The instrument used to collect the data was a semi structured questionnaire. This questionnaire contained both closed and open ended questions in order to give respondents an opportunity to voice their own opinions regarding certain aspects of their situations. The survey covered the topics outlined below.

- Accommodation
- Food
- Work, Training and Education
- Health and Welfare
- Information
- Legal
- Interpretive
- Social and Cultural
- Religious

A pilot survey was run with male asylum seekers living in another county. Overall few changes were required. The survey was translated into three languages (Arabic, French, Russian) on the advice of the manager of the centre and other asylum seekers and people who work with asylum seekers in Waterford.

The survey was used as it was relatively easy to administer and provided a greater degree of anonymity to respondents. This was important as at the outset it was understood that respondents would be reluctant to get involved due to the fact that they may have believed that the questionnaire in gathering information on themselves could have a negative impact on their

application for asylum. As McGivern points out on surveys, “[Surveys] are also effective in collecting data on sensitive topics and for reducing the risks of social desirability bias as they offer respondents a high degree of perceived anonymity” (McGivern, p143).

Posters in Arabic, Russian, French and English were placed around Viking House outlining the purpose of the research and its aims and objectives, the funders and the organisations involved. It was also explained in these posters that the researcher and the organisation carrying out the research was independent of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Reception and Integration Agency.

The questionnaire was administered by the researcher and two volunteers, one who spoke fluent Arabic and English and another who spoke fluent French and English. The volunteers were drawn from the asylum seeker community and assisted in both translating and in encouraging people to participate in the research. The researcher and assistants went to Viking House on various days and times of day. The purpose of varying the days and times was so different residents could be contacted.

Sample

At the beginning of this research there were ninety four asylum seeker men resident in Viking House. A response rate of 43.6% (41 people) was achieved. While this may seem low it is similar to other response rates where asylum seekers were involved (Collins, 2002). The questionnaire was administered to residents as a self completion questionnaire. However many residents requested that the researcher or the volunteers sit with them to complete it. The low number of residents who completed the questionnaire is, in the researcher’s opinion, due to residents feelings of despondency and a feeling that nothing will be done for asylum seekers regardless of how much they become involved in work such as this. Many residents who refused to fill in the questionnaire were angry about the length of time they had to stay in Viking House, the food and the time their application was taking to process. Also the fact that they felt the application process was unfair and that they would probably be refused the right to remain in Ireland meant that they were not very well disposed towards the research. One other factor which was raised was the fact that some residents stated that they had participated in research before and nothing had changed and as a result they refused to fill in the survey.

The low response rate also indicates that asylum seekers living in direct provision are isolated and without a voice beyond organisations such as the Irish Refugee Council, NASC and especially where such organisation are not present in the locality. For those in Viking House there was a feeling that no one was listening to them. It was also difficult to gain access to all the men resident in Viking House and many remained invisible. Another reason why residents would not take part in the research was that there was some belief

that the work was connected to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Reception and Integration Agency despite the researchers and volunteers assurances it wasn't. Suspicion of the motives of the research may have lead some residents to believe that the research could have a negative effect on their case or on their stay in Viking House. Despite assurances to the contrary many residents remained dubious about the aim of the survey. This would indicate that there is a great degree of mistrust when residents feel they cannot voice their opinions.

However 43.6% is deemed to be a sufficient sample as the population is small and confined.

Data Analysis

Data entry and analysis was carried out using SPSS 14. Data was entered and analysed according to the various areas outlined above. Missing values have been excluded except where stated otherwise.

Limitations

This research is limited by a small sample size. This is due to the reasons outlined above. However the sample size is sufficient to gain an understanding of the needs of male asylum seekers living in direct provision in Waterford. The research is also limited in that it has surveyed only one group of men living in one direct provision centre. This was due to funding provisions and time scales. However the research makes recommendations which will be of benefit to all asylum seekers in direct provision if implemented.

Another limitation to this research is the fact that there were additional language barriers and time and resources only allowed for the questionnaire to be translated into four languages. On this basis the sample was somewhat self selecting except where volunteer interpreters were used.

Some respondents were also somewhat biased towards the research in that they believed the research was in some way linked to The Department of Justice and the Reception and Integration agency, despite insistences to the contrary. This had the effect of reducing the number of respondents due to their refusal to take part because of these beliefs. Also respondents who were more depressed or despondent with their situation were also more reluctant to take part, again reducing the number of participants. These limitations were also found among the population of asylum seekers in the Cork needs analysis (Collins, 2002) and are not uncommon in this type of research. Feldman (2003) has also made this point regarding the development of a code of practice for research and development work with ethnic minority communities. One of the reasons given for the need for such a code was the lack of participation in research and development work which has led to

feelings of exploitation and burnout, as well as suspicion regarding the agendas underpinning these projects.

The Men's Development Networks experience with research, of men affected by marginalisation, disadvantage, poverty and male gender conditioning, parallels this. While these groups of men are regularly researched no benefit obvious to the men themselves ever appears to them to emanate from the research. Very little value is put on the time that these men contribute and without which there would be no research. The Men's Development Networks policy is to value the contribution of participants to the research.

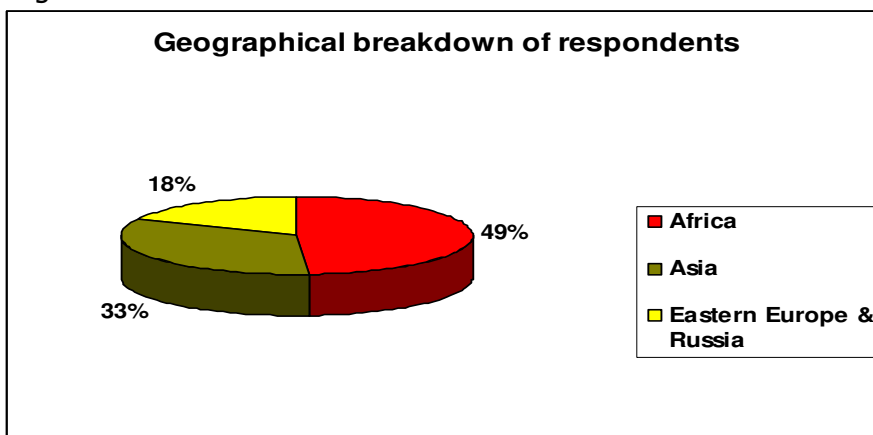
Section 3

Findings on the Needs of Male Asylum Seekers in Viking House Direct Provision Centre, Waterford

Profile of Respondents

The average age of respondents who took part in the survey was 32. The youngest respondent was 21 while the oldest respondent was 49. Due to the low response rate (43.6%) the individual nationalities of the respondents will not be reported, rather a geographical breakdown of the respondents is presented in figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1



As can be seen 49% (n=19) of respondents were from African nations while 33% (n=13) were from Asia and 18% (n=7) from Eastern Europe and Russia (missing values = 2).

Table 2.1

Length of Time in Asylum Process and Viking House			
	Shortest	Longest	Average
Length in asylum process (months)	3	48	18
Length in Viking House (months)	1	36	15

The average length of time respondents were in the asylum process was eighteen months with the shortest time being three months and the longest time being forty eight months or four years.

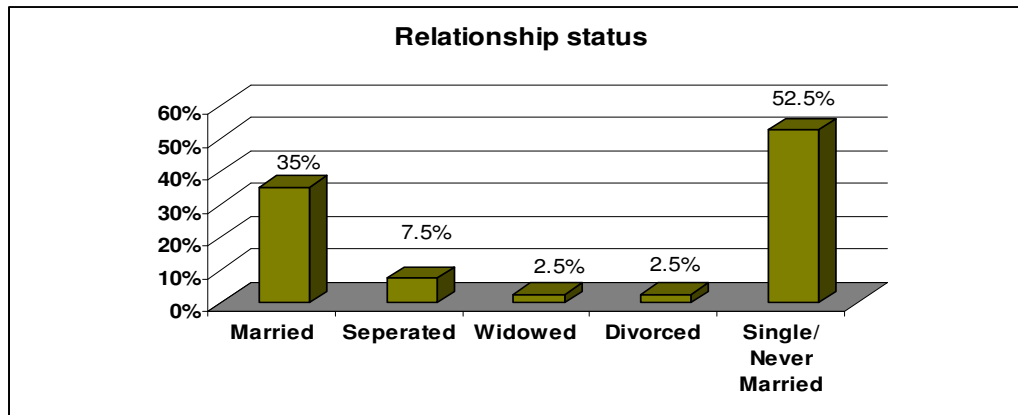
The average length of stay in Viking house was fifteen months with the shortest time there being one month and the longest being thirty six months or three years.

As proposed by the Irish Refugee Council direct provision should only be a short-term solution. The fact that some asylum seekers have been in Viking House for three years should be reviewed and acted upon by the Reception

and Integration Agency. This can only have the effect of institutionalisation and appears to be inhumane treatment. At the most basic level, man as an economic unit, it strikes us to ask is Ireland availing of the potential that is cooped up in these accommodation centres.

Just over 52% (n=21) of respondents were single or had never married. Thirty five percent (14) were married while the remainder were divorced, separated or widowed. Figure 2.2 below outlines the various marital status of respondents.

Figure 2.2



Of those 42% (n=17) had children and 53% did not. Table 2.2 below illustrates where respondents children are.

Table 2.2

<i>Where are your children?</i>		
	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Ireland</i>	23%	4
<i>Country of Origin</i>	59%	10
<i>Both</i>	6%	1
<i>Don't Know</i>	12%	2

Two respondents stated that they did not know where their children were as they had fled their country and become separated. One man believed his children had gone to another country but could not get any information about their whereabouts. The other man had tried to contact his children in his home country but was unsuccessful. He had contacted the Red Cross and UNICEF but was unsuccessful. Forty one percent of the men who had children stated that they had no contact with their children. Asked if they had any problems contacting their children the following statement were made.

"I don't know where to contact them. The last time they were in Ethiopia"

"An earthquake has caused problems with communications"

"I don't know where they are. Contact was lost"

"They have moved to another city because they fear from death"

Others had problems around access to their children in Ireland. Some of these were to do with money and being able to afford to travel to where the children were in Ireland. Others had issues around legal access and relationship breakdown.

"I don't have money to travel to Cork where my children are."

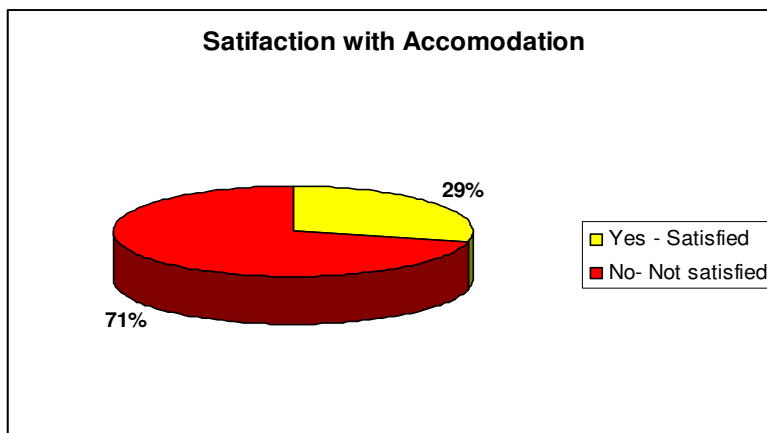
"My girlfriend is angry with me and won't let me see my daughter"

These are both areas where assistance could be provided whether it is lack of contact with children in Ireland or in their country of origin. Issues regarding rights of access and custody should also be considered and information provided where necessary.

Accommodation

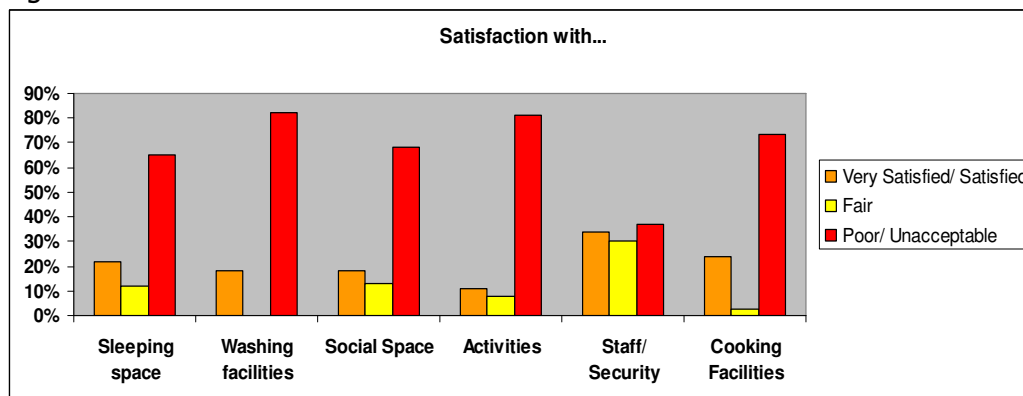
Respondents were asked if they were satisfied or not satisfied with their accommodation. Significantly 71% of respondents replied that they were not satisfied with their accommodation. This is reflected in another question in which respondents were asked if they would prefer to live in private rented accommodation to which 97.5% (n=39) respondents replied that they would prefer to live in private rented accommodation. Only one person stated that they would not prefer to live in private rented accommodation. Many men spoke of the cost of keeping them in direct provision and their own ability to work and provide for themselves. Beyond this others believed that if they were given the money which is paid to the hostel owner several men could afford to live in private rented accommodation and would therefore have their own privacy, could cook for themselves and have adequate washing facilities. As such they believed this would take the burden of their presence in Ireland off the government.

Figure 2.3



Respondents answered questions relating to the facilities within their accommodation as can be seen in figure 2.4 below. Many were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the level of facilities available to them. Sixty five percent (n=26) of respondents were either unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the sleeping space provided to them. This shall be discussed in more detail below. Similarly a large number of respondents stated (82%, n=32) that they were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the level of washing facilities which were available to them. Other areas where high levels of dissatisfaction were reported were in the area of activities and socialising space, 81% (n=31) and 68% (n=26) respectively. This is an area where some immediate assistance can be afforded to the asylum seekers. Activities are relatively easy to organise and as such would have the effect of improving moral and spirits in an otherwise difficult situation.

Figure 2.4



In addition respondents reported high levels of dissatisfaction with cooking facilities (73.5%, n=28) within the hostel. This is a major sticking point with residents. Being from culturally diverse backgrounds it is understood that it is difficult to cater for everyone when planning meals. However as shall be discussed in more detail below some effort should be made to accommodate the various culturally diverse dishes that residents are accustomed to.

Staff / Security

Respondents were asked to rate how well they related to staff/ security in their accommodation. Here satisfaction levels were somewhat higher with 63% (n=24) stating that staff/ security was very satisfactory/ satisfactory or fair. Many stated that staff were only doing their job. In this it is understood

that staff are not the cause of their dissatisfaction with the conditions they must live in. A sample of statements regarding staff are presented below.

"Good communication, very clean."

"I'm having a fair relationship and treated alright by them"

"Staff are co-operative and friendly"

"Staff are co-operative and friendly up to an extent"

"The staff don't bother me"

"They are treating me as a friend and I have no complaints about the Hostel staff"

However as can be seen areas for improvement are possible. Thirty seven percent of respondents (n=14) who were unhappy with staff stated the following reasons for their dissatisfaction:

"Cannot speak English very well and are very unfriendly"

"I don't speak their language"

"Language barrier. All of them speak Polish apart from the manager and two Irish who work at night. Those who do not speak English are not friendly. They are aggressive"

"Many of them don't speak English and when we ask them something it becomes a big problem and they are aggressive"

"They cannot communicate with residents. Can't speak English"

Without doubt the fact that some staff do not speak English is a problem for some residents. One resident even went as far as suggesting that they were fascists, while another stated "Staff treat us like shit. They are thinking we are bastards" While this is most likely an overstatement it does compound the frustration of residents who are living in difficult conditions and then must negotiate relationships with staff who they believe are belligerent towards them. One resident suggested that more Irish staff be employed. It would seem that residents seemed to be better disposed towards the Irish staff as they believed they were more friendly and accepting of them. When asked how relations with staff could be improved respondents replied in the following way.

"Employ Irish or people who are trained to work with people from different nationalities and cultures"

"Employ someone who can speak English and is skilled"

"More staff from Ireland"

"They need to be taught about their behaviour and their rights and our rights as well"

The situation with regard to staff from Eastern Europe within Viking House seems to be one which is inflamed, in particular with residents from African and Asian nationalities. This is a situation which is somewhat dangerous and could degenerate due to the cramped conditions which men are living in. It does not alleviate or assist the situation to have staff that are aggressive or dismissive of residents who are already feeling despondent about their situation. This should be given consideration by the RIA with regard to the employment of staff to see if the same situation exists within other Direct Provision Centres around the country. At a minimum staff who are not Irish should have an adequate level of English so that miscommunication between staff and resident is minimised. On another level communications and listening skills training should be provided for staff of direct provision centres. Staff should have some understanding of the situation which asylum seekers have gone through.

Sharing a Room and Privacy

The 83% (n=34) of respondents shared a room with three other roommates, while 7% (n=3) shared a room with four roommates. One man had a room to himself while one man shared with one other person and one man shared with two people. In one case a respondent stated that he shared with 5 other people. With regard to privacy, and living space it is deemed that sharing a room as a grown man with 3 or more people is unacceptable. Much of the frustration and resentment with regard to how well people get on with their roommates came from the fact that respondents could not do what they wanted to do in their own space because of consideration for others in the room. Some of the statements made by residents with regard to the situation of being in a room with others are outlined below.

"Some want to sleep and some do not. It's unhelpful to have four in a room."

"Some wish to do different things which others do not. Can't do own thing. Its like a prison. It's not a real life. Its mental torture. I'm staying here two years. We need help"

"Our religion and culture is different"

It's a small room and the mattress is so bad we can't sleep well. Some want to sleep and others do not"

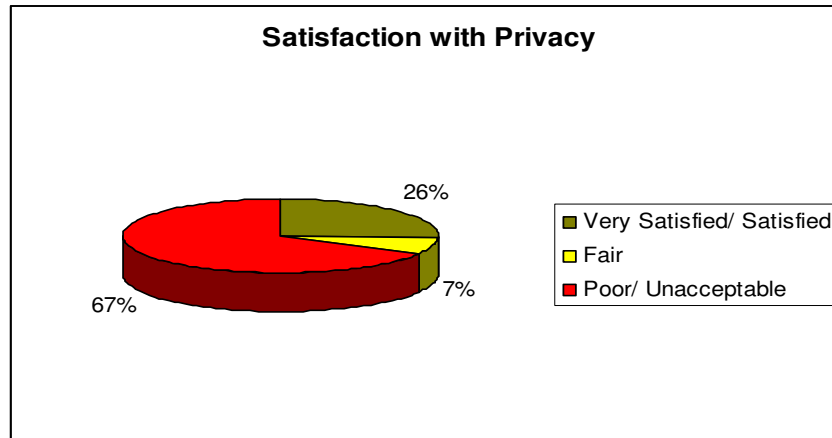
"There is not enough space"

"One of the things is snoring during the night and I don't sleep well"

"Especially with one roommate... he is not friendly. He has depression. He is five years in hostel now and he is going to go crazy"

The lack of privacy is also an issue for the men. Sixty three percent (n=26) of respondents were either unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the level of privacy in their accommodation.

Figure 2.5



The policy of cramming men into small rooms with small amounts of storage space for long and possibly protracted periods is, in one man's words "unhelpful" and should be changed. The objective of maximising profits at the expense of a person's mental health should be stopped. Reducing the number of men per room would have a beneficial effect both for the individual and for relations among residents and staff. Many of the men within the centre spoke about the fact that they were being prescribed anti depressants and sleeping tablets. A reduction in the number of men per room would go some way to improving this situation. The policy of direct provision should take this into consideration.

Food

Table 2.3 below indicates that 52.5% of respondents were not satisfied with the food served in Viking House with 17.5% believing that the food was fair and 30% stating that the food was satisfactory.

Table 2.3

Satisfaction with Food		
	Percentage	n
Very Satisfied/ Satisfied	30%	11
Fair	17.5%	7
Poor/ Unacceptable	52.5%	21

Some of the reasons that respondents were not happy with the food served in Viking House are outlined below.

"The food is always the same"

"Food is tasteless and never changes"

"My wish is to cook my own food for myself"

"Not a good variety and the oil is not changed frequently"

"Quality not good"

"Quality of food not good. The cooking oil quality not good because they only change after long time. Rice quality especially poor"

Some complained that the food served did not take into account the respondents religious restrictions on certain foodstuffs. Muslim respondents also expressed concerns as to whether the meat they were served was Halal.

"Rice everyday. Same food everyday and the quality of the food. I am Muslim and sometimes he put pork in the food and this is not legal according to our Islam."

Respondents also stated that food was often reheated and served on other days.

"Sometimes we eat some food for three days that was cooked three days ago. I mean not fresh food".

"You are given food which is not for your choice. Especially warming leftovers"

Others complained that the chef never served food appropriate for African residents.

"There is never any African food. Chef does not know how to cook proper African food."

When asked if they would like to see any changes to the food respondents gave several responses as outlined below. The answers ranged from the

replacement of the chef to the suggestion that the chef should be trained to cook food from other countries.

"Better chef. Change the oil"

"Proper qualified chef"

"We need a qualified cook".

"Chef should be helped for cooking Asian food by some good Asian chef"

"Chef should be trained to cook other food for other people's countries"

"Chef should know more about Asian cooking"

"Stop giving more of what people don't like and giving little of what people likes. Try to cook different foods like African"

Yes. They should try to cook food in order to satisfy little bit of everyone, like African food, Asian and European food."

It is accepted that catering for 94 men within a direct provision hostel is very difficult, especially in relation to satisfying all tastes. It is also accepted that allowing all residents to cook for themselves would perhaps create more tension and problems. However the situation within Viking House in relation to the food being served is one which seemed to cause much irritation among residents. At the time of the research the researcher was informed that a petition was being sent to the RIA asking that the chef be replaced. Forty men had signed this petition.

Here we suggest that chefs who work within direct provision hostels complete an international cuisine course which would facilitate them to provide food which is both culturally appropriate and cooked in the correct manner. This is a simple measure which could be carried out by the RIA or local authorities with a remit for Asylum Seekers. This would also have the effect of reducing tensions between residents and staff and make life a little easier for those living within direct provision. While we in Ireland may think it is acceptable to use cooking oil on several occasions, in countries where oil is used on a regular basis both in the preparation of meals and for the cooking of meals it is not. The use of old oil in food leads to the deterioration of taste and palatability. Chefs therefore should be aware that oil needs to be changed regularly and be aware of the different types of oil which are used in various cultural dishes.

Other suggestion relating to changes which could be made in regards to the food are below.

"Fresh food all the time and more fruit"

"I would like to cook myself if we had that opportunity. This is part of private life. I cannot feed people if they visit"

"I only wish to cook for myself"

"Not eating leftovers"

"RIA should provide us with raw food materials or cash for us to cook for ourselves. It would be better"

"Should be fruit 3 or 4 times a week"

"Yes, food should be Halal"

"Yes good food, another kind of food. The way it is cooked is the same. Cooked with the same kind of oil all kind of food"

As stated earlier only forty-one residents agreed to take part in this research by filling in questionnaires. The low response rate in the researchers view is down to despondency and a belief that nothing will be done for asylum seekers. The negative reaction to the questions about food therefore may be taken to represent a proportion of the views of other residents who did not take part. Food is an essential part of daily life and if one is not happy with the food one receives on a daily basis it can only exacerbate an already depressing situation. Therefore it is recommended that action be taken with regard to the quality and type of food which is served in Viking House and that the recommendation that the chef be trained to cater for the various nationalities that are resident in Viking House, in particular those of Asian and African origin, should be implemented immediately.

Work, Training and Education

Without exception 100% (n=41) of respondents stated that they would wish to work in Ireland if they had the right to. Ninety five percent (n=39) of respondents had worked before coming to Ireland while only 5% (n=2) stated that they had not.

Figure 2.6



Respondents answered the question, What type of work did you do before coming to Ireland? Responses are listed below in table 2.4

Table 2.4

Various types of employment before coming to Ireland
<i>Builder</i>
<i>Car Electrician</i>
<i>Carpenter</i>
<i>Butcher</i>
<i>Driver</i>
<i>Electrical and Electronic Maintenance</i>
<i>Farming</i>
<i>Lorry Driver</i>
<i>Maths Teacher</i>
<i>Mechanic</i>
<i>Office worker</i>
<i>Small scale personal business</i>
<i>Private Presidential Advisor</i>
<i>Sales man</i>
<i>Government Official, Free Trade</i>
<i>Tailor</i>
<i>Waiter</i>
<i>Welder</i>

Sixty seven percent (n=26) of respondents also stated that they had undertaken training before coming to Ireland.

Figure 2.7

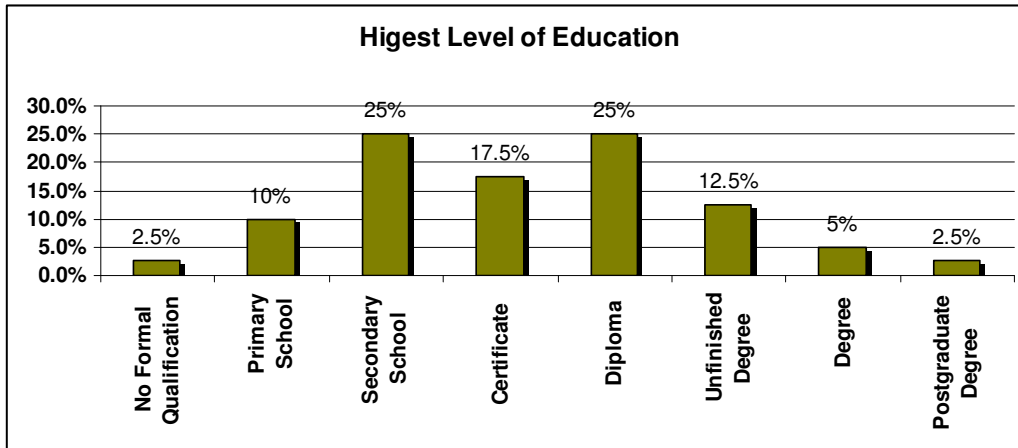


Respondents were also asked what training they had completed when in their home country. Table 2.5 below outlines the various areas in which respondents had undertaken training. As can be seen below the areas which respondents have been trained in would be useful to the Irish work force and economy.

Various types of Training undertaken before coming to Ireland
<i>Accountancy</i>
<i>Administation/ Secretary</i>
<i>Aluminium Company</i>
<i>Auto Mechanic</i>
<i>Bachelor of Civilian Law</i>
<i>Business</i>
<i>Computers</i>
<i>Diploma in Office and Business Administration</i>
<i>Driving</i>
<i>Electronic Repairs</i>
<i>Barber</i>

As asylum seekers do not have the right to work in Ireland these skills could be utilised within the voluntary sector and voluntary jobs could be offered to many of the asylum seekers if they wished to engage in such work. Waterford Area Partnership has generated a list of organisations that are willing to take on voluntary workers however the men in Viking house are unaware of this. Many of the organisations on the list could make use of the skills which the men of Viking House have. This list should be updated on a regular basis. Many Asylum seekers have expressed interest in doing voluntary work but have only found work with Oxfam in their second hand shop. The report "Strategies to Promote the Inclusion of Refugees and Asylum Seekers" (2001) has suggested that for asylum seekers who cannot work some system such as LETS, where labour is exchanged, should be implemented. This would allow these men to engage in meaningful work and to utilise their existing skills. An attempt should be made to allow these men to see the voluntary work on offer and apply if they wish.

Figure 2.8



Also significant is the fact that 62.5% (n=25) of respondents had a level of education either to certificate level or higher, while 35% (n=14) had either primary or secondary education. As such the high level of education held by residents of Viking House who took part in this research should be examined and further training or upgrading of their skills and education should be offered. These skills and educational attainments would be of value to Ireland if they are to achieve leave to remain, but also could be used, as stated above, in a voluntary capacity if the men wish. The furthering of the men's education will not only be of benefit to Ireland but if leave to remain is not granted than the men will have upgraded skills which they can bring back to their own countries. All the respondents stated that they would like to undertake training if they were allowed. The range of training which they are interested in is broad and again could be provided if facilities were available with the involvement of FÁS, VEC, WIT, NALA and others. Training courses could be delivered or access to existing night courses allowed Table 2.6 below outlines the areas of interest with regard to training.

Table 2.6

Areas of Interest for further Training
<i>Building</i>
<i>Business</i>
<i>Business Law</i>
<i>Car Maintenance</i>
<i>Carpentry/ Woodwork</i>
<i>Chef</i>
<i>Communications</i>
<i>Computer Programming</i>
<i>Driving</i>
<i>Electronics and Electronic maintainance</i>
<i>Engineering</i>
<i>English Classes</i>
<i>Health and Wellbeing/ Sports</i>
<i>Information Technology</i>
<i>Internet Design/ Skills</i>
<i>Teacher of Maths</i>
<i>Medicine</i>
<i>Nursing</i>
<i>Plumbing</i>
<i>PSV</i>

There are several areas in which basic training could be provided such as Computer Programming, Carpentry and Woodwork, Business, Internet design and skills, Information Technology, Health and Well being/ Sports, and Electronics. Various bodies such as third level institutions and statutory agencies (VEC, Partnerships, HSE) could combine on an interagency basis to provide such training. The provision of training courses for asylum seekers in Viking House would go a long way towards providing residents with a positive outlook and giving them a structured worthwhile activity with which they can benefit. Asylum seekers are denied access to mainstream education unless they can pay the economic fee for entering into this education. It is recommended that bodies with a remit to Asylum Seekers come together to provide training and education opportunities such as those mentioned above.

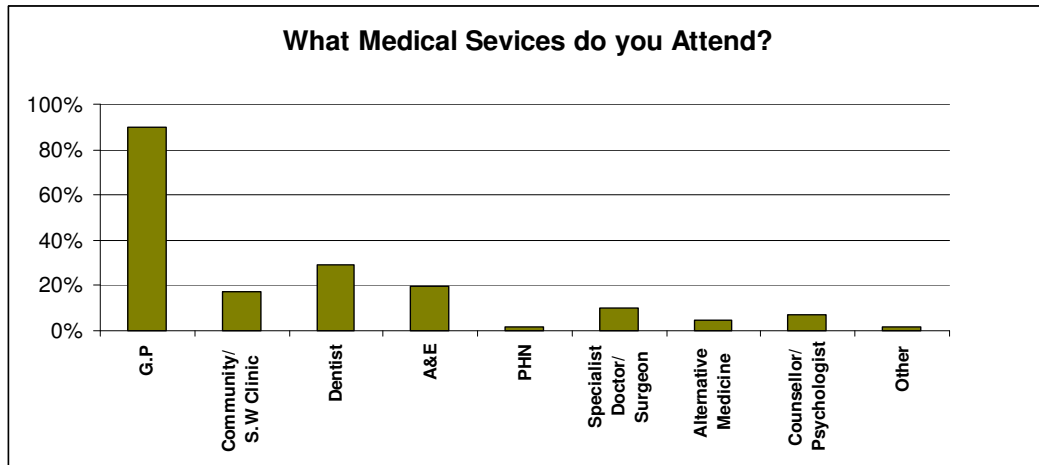
Many respondents expressed the need for more English Classes. While English classes are provided the respondents felt that they were insufficient and that extra classes would be beneficial. This was also reported in the section relating to the needs of residents with regard to interpretative services as will be outlined below. At the time of finalising this report Waterford Area Partnership in conjunction with Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre had put in place a programme to provide extra English classes for immigrants free of charge.

Health and Welfare

Respondents were asked what medical services they had attended in Waterford. Figure 2.9 below illustrates that respondents used the GP as their

primary source of healthcare (90%, n=37). Twenty-nine percent (12) of respondents replied that they had attended a dentist, while almost 20% of respondents replied they had used Accident and Emergency (A&E).

Figure 2.9



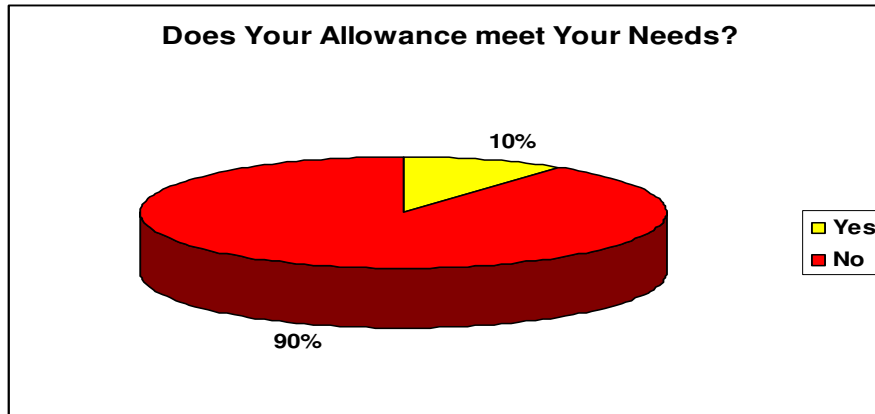
The majority of respondents (79%) were either very satisfied or satisfied with the medical service they had attended, however 16% of respondents were either unsatisfied or very unsatisfied. Some of the reasons respondents were unsatisfied ranged from waiting times for hospital appointments (2 to 8 months) to one respondent feeling that his doctor had not treated him correctly nor how he felt he should have been treated. Far from being a problem specifically for asylum seekers these issues are present in the general population with waiting times for specialist and hospital appointments being an issue on a national level.

Table 2.7

Satisfaction with Medical Services		
	Percentage	n
Very Satisfied/ Satisfied	79%	30
Neither	5%	2
Very Unsatisfied/ Unsatisfied	16%	6

Respondents were asked if their allowance meets their needs. Invariably respondents answered that it did not. One respondent stated that he received a clothing allowance every six months, while another stated that he received an allowance for transport to Dublin when he needed to go there. Obviously these allowances are received by all asylum seekers, however they are not considered to be allowances towards daily living as is the weekly allowance of €19.10.

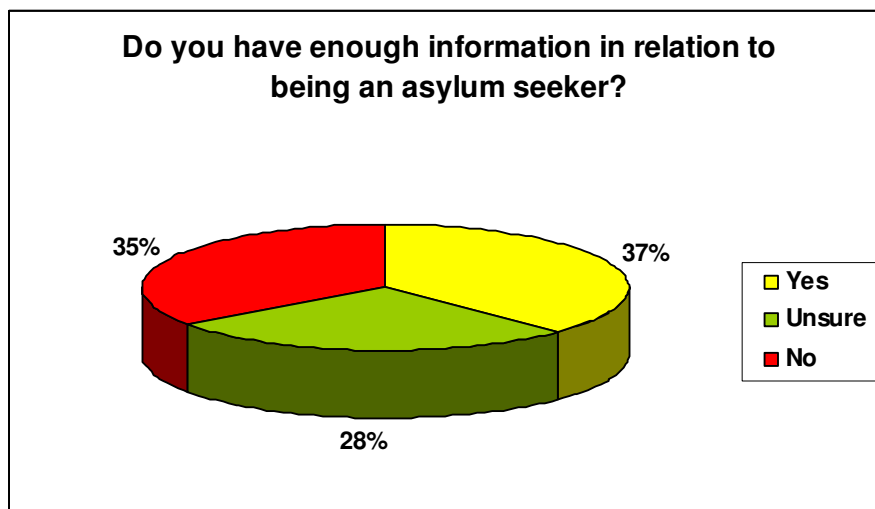
Figure 2.10



Information needs on being an asylum seeker

Asked if they had enough information in relation to being an asylum seeker 37% (n=15) stated that they had, while 35% (n=14) stated that they did not. Twenty-eight percent of respondents were unsure if they had enough information in relation to being an asylum seeker in Ireland. Two thirds of respondents therefore either were unsure or did not have enough information regarding their situation as an asylum seeker.

Figure 2.11



This finding would indicate that there is a need for an information centre or point where asylum seekers can go and receive accurate information regarding their rights and status as asylum seekers. This is also an area in which local bodies such as Partnerships and other community bodies can be of assistance to asylum seekers. At the time this research was being carried out the Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre in conjunction with Waterford Partnership, and with assistance from the Dormant Accounts Fund, were in the process of setting up a community resource centre which will include an information unit that will be accessible to asylum seekers regarding their rights and entitlements. This Information Support Unit should employ a strategy to inform asylum seekers of its presence in Waterford, especially in Viking House. This could be done through Posters (translated into various languages) and information nights and days within the centre and within Viking House and other direct provision centres in the city.

Respondents were asked what type of information they felt they needed as an asylum seeker in Waterford. Many stated that they required information regarding their own case. While others stated they would like to see decisions of the Irish government regarding immigration and the asylum process. Some of the statements respondents made are outlined below.

"Anything relating to my rights. The process at application and my rights after getting status"

"Decisions of Parliament concerning immigration and asylum process"

"Everything about asylum seeker"

"How long am I gonna stay here without legal status, depending on social welfare, no job, no future"

"Information about the asylum application process and the duration for an application to be processed"

"My case information and when I will learn about my status"

"Rights in Ireland to Justice and tribunal. If I get no humanitarian stage do I have right to work"

"Stages of asylum. My rights. My right as an expectant father of Irish born child".

The majority of respondents who replied to this question sought information about the length the process took and that they were not informed regarding how long they were going to be in the system. This is perhaps an area in which some form of information guide could be designed regarding the length the process takes from application, to receiving leave to remain or being refused leave to remain, on to appeals and changing the grounds of ones application if refused. This information should outline in relatively simple and understandable terms the rights the person holds at each point of the process.

Asked where they currently accessed information respondents listed these sources as outlined in table 2.8 below.

Table 2.8

Where do you access information?
<i>Announcements on wall of hostel</i>
<i>Ask friends who understand the problem</i>
<i>Case worker</i>
<i>Citizens Information Centre</i>
<i>Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform</i>
<i>Family in home country</i>
<i>Internet</i>
<i>Library</i>
<i>Newspapers</i>
<i>Refugee Legal Service</i>
<i>RLS Leaflets</i>
<i>Social Welfare</i>
<i>Solicitor</i>
<i>Staff</i>

The provision of information to the men in Viking House would be a relatively easy task. Some of the areas outlined in table 2.8 above such as the announcement wall in the hostel, notices in the library and social welfare etc can be used as points where information can be distributed easily. Some way of receiving feedback from resident's regarding the sourcing of information should also be put in place, that is a comment or ideas card which can be

considered by one person, perhaps from the Information Support Unit within the Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre. Many of the men seemed to be frustrated at the lack of information coming from the official sources such as the Refugee Legal Service and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and from other sources such as their lawyers and solicitors. The feeling of isolation and despondency that men feel in Viking House was summed up by one respondent when he *stated "I need to know about my case but always I am told to wait. I feel maybe they have forgotten me... I have not received any information on my case in one year. I called my case worker but they told me I had to wait"*

Respondents were also asked how they felt their access to information could be improved. Some of the suggestions are presented below.

Computers and internet access

"Computers in hostel"

"New computers in hostel"

"Internet access in accommodation centre and information centre"

Many respondents asked that more computers be provided in the hostel and that internet access also be improved. The only options which residents have in relation to getting internet access are either through the library, one computer in the hostel or internet caf  s, which are cost prohibitive as their weekly allowance would not stretch this far. The Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre will provide some amount of internet access for the men of Viking House however it would be useful if extra computers were provided within the hostel. It is possible that some residents who did not take part in the survey are familiar with computer maintenance and could take responsibility for maintaining the computers. Many companies and organisations in Waterford upgrade their computers and could donate computers which they no longer have a use for. A drive for computers in the town could provide this facility for a very small sum.

Resource/ Information Centre

"Open an organisation to help asylum seekers"

"Refugee information centre so we can go and ask anything we want to ask"

"Set up an information centre"

"To do a seminar. Get together parties on asylum seekers"

As stated earlier the Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre includes an Information Support Unit which is aimed at refugees and asylum seekers in Waterford. This Unit opened on the 16th of November and will be able to deal with many of the asylum seekers requirements for information. The above statement that seminars be run is worth considering and could be organised by this unit.

Dept. of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, RIA and RLS

Many residents expressed a desire to hear directly from The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) and The Refugee Legal Service (RLS) as they felt that they were not adequately informed about the process they were going through.

"More internet access in accommodation and talks from Justice or Refugee Legal Service"

"Send people from Justice to explain what's going on"

"Staff for legal service should be stationed in Waterford not Cork"

"To bring the members of Justice over here to give us some explanation"

"More co-operation from Refugee Legal Service and social officers"

"Regular meetings with people in hostel to let us know our rights. We need someone to come regularly (UN) to look for special cases like those who are going back to their country (Somalia, Iraq, Palestine) and not get deported"

It would be helpful if the RIA through the Integration Unit was requested to come to Waterford and give some talks about the asylum process and field questions which the men may have.

Once again the Information Support Unit within the Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre will be facilitating the RLS to run a clinic once a week in Waterford. This clinic will be by appointment only. Issues such as those relating to the preparations of appeals will still have to be carried out in the Cork offices.

English Classes

"More English language classes"

Once again the issue of English language classes arose. The men believed that if their English improved they would be more adept at gaining the information they needed. While the Edmund Rice International Heritage

Centre will be running English lessons it would be useful if Partnership funded another organisation to run another English course. There does seem to be a great need for these courses among the residents in Viking House. This was also expressed in relation to the needs of asylum seekers in relation to interpretative needs as will be seen below.

"Have a group to talk to and share and express our feelings"

Distribute newspapers everyday in asylum hostel"

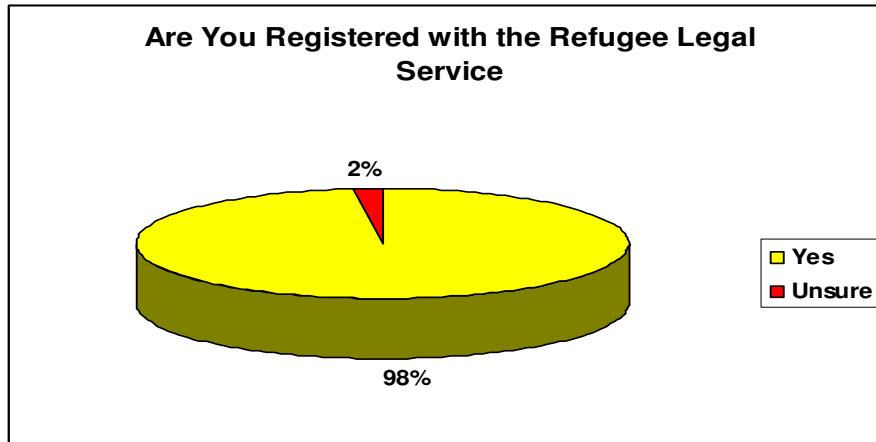
While newspapers are a daily part of many peoples lives the cost of buying a newspaper everyday for an asylum seeker receiving a €19.10 allowance per week is prohibitive. Funding should be provided to deliver a quantity of local and national newspapers to Viking House on a daily basis.

Some respondents also expressed a desire to have groups where men could meet and discuss their situation, daily lives and any other concerns or issues which they may have. This could be provided by the Men's Development Network subject to the provision of funding to run such a group. The provision of a safe and confidential place to vent on issues and emotions which the men have, both from going through their present situation of uncertainty while in the asylum process and living in direct provision, and coming from a situation of hardship or persecution in their own country, would be beneficial to all, most of all the men themselves. This would provide an opportunity to reduce tensions both within the men's lives and within the hostel. This arose in the information section of the research, as such a place to discuss and explore issues with one another. However such a group would also have great benefits for the men's health, both mental and physical.

Legal Needs

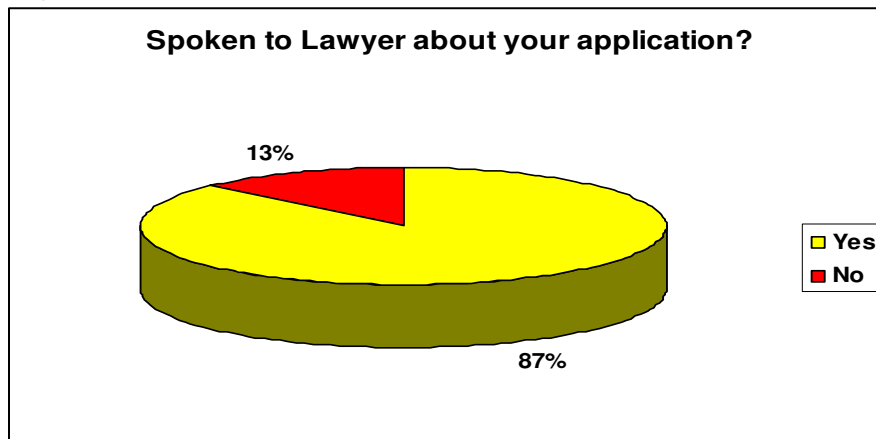
Almost every respondent (98%, n=40) had registered with the Refugee Legal Service. Only one respondent stated that he was unsure if he was registered with the RLS.

Figure 2.12



Thirteen percent (n=5) of those surveyed (excluding missing values, n=2) stated that they had not spoken to a lawyer about their application.

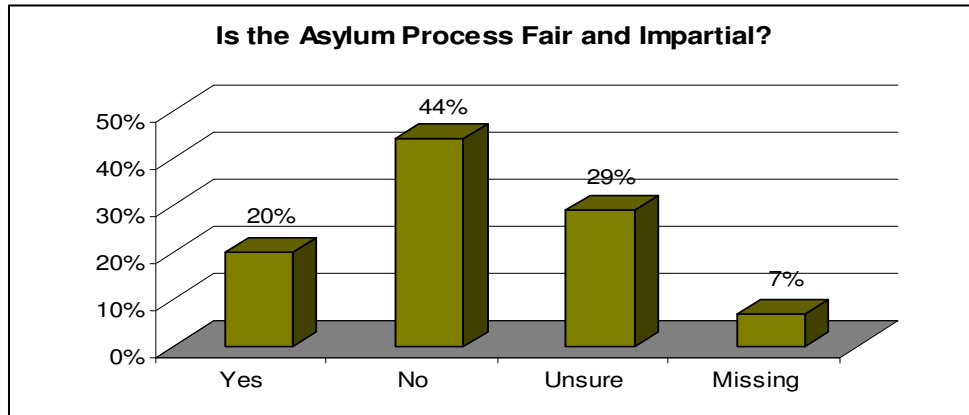
Figure 2.13



The length of time these five men have spent in the asylum seeker process is 3, 4, 7, 17, and 48 months respectively. This situation was also found in Cork (Collins, 2002) and is a concern which should be considered when the RLS set up their clinic in Waterford. This situation could be rectified with the provision of accurate information regarding asylum seekers rights being available in Viking House. It may be useful to attempt to identify asylum seekers who would be willing to nominate themselves as voluntary points of contact in relation to organising the provision of information within the centre in conjunction with the Edmund Rice International Heritage Centres Information Support Unit.

Asked if they felt the asylum process is fair and impartial 44% (n=18) said no, while 29% (n=12) said they were unsure.

Figure 2.14



Some of the reasons respondents believed the process to be unfair are outlined below and warrant attention as they are the result of misinformation and lack of adequate advice and information regarding their own case and the success rate of gaining status.

"Because only 1% of applications are successful"

"If you come from a Muslim country and you're not claiming that you haven't changed your religion then your chances of getting refugee status are remote"

Others felt that the process was unfair because of the time it took and the way in which they perceived the process to work.

"It takes a very long time to make decision on case"

"The asylum application process with some applications is very slow and some applications are very fast"

"The procedure takes a long time and the decisions are not fair"

Others felt that those who adjudicate on their case do not take into consideration all the facts.

"My case is going very bad and I'm not getting any support. Maybe they don't care. My country is democratic but has many problems."

"The only way I can survive is to seek asylum. There is no government and people are killing each other. For me it is fair to seek asylum"

"They are not impartial because most of the cases are not thoroughly investigated before conclusion"

"They don't consider my case in the proper way. I got wounded in my abdomen and the Justice Department did not consider it"

“They don’t examine our cases but our countries. It’s very hard for French speaking countrymen to get papers. They don’t give status to honest people, only the liars!”

Others felt that the process was unfair because people who were dishonest or didn’t deserve status got it when those who deserved it didn’t. The point was also raised that the RLS was not independent.

“It’s a formality if someone is honest they are likely to be refused. Hatred and discrimination as well play a big role for refusing people. Appeals and Refugee Legal Service seem to be the same”

“Need a small committee to make decisions instead of one person to make that decision”

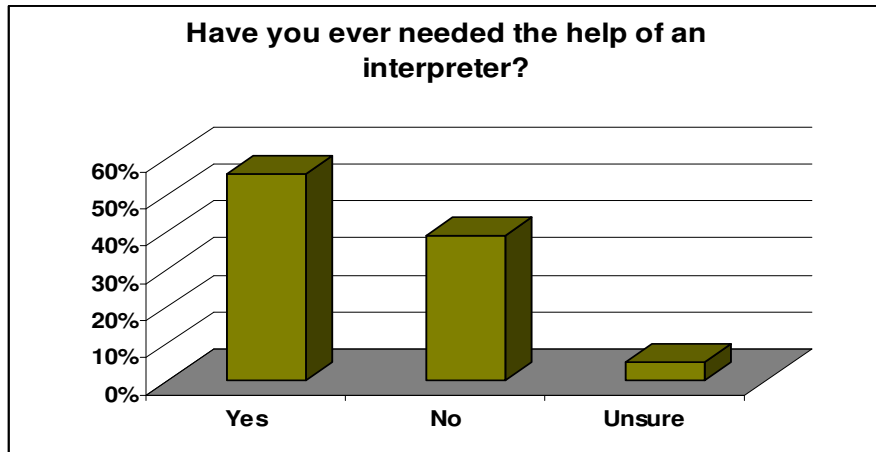
“Some people don’t deserve to get refugee status and those who do don’t get it”

Again the provision of an information centre, as will be provided by the Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre, should seek to deal with the concerns which some of the residents of Viking House have in relation to the fairness and impartiality of the asylum process in Ireland. This should include talks on the asylum process itself.

Interpreter services

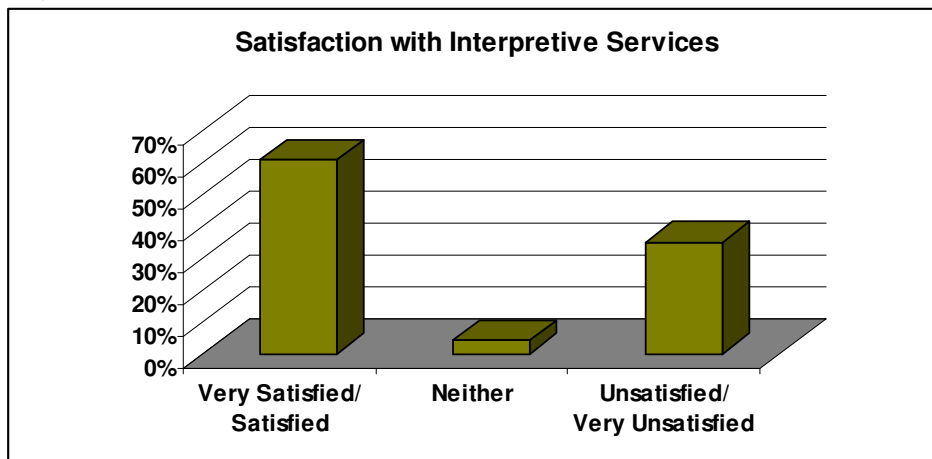
Fifty six percent (n=23) of respondents stated that they had required an interpreter at some stage, while 39% (n=16) stated they had not.

Figure 2.15



Of those who had used interpretive services 61% (n=14) were either very satisfied or satisfied. Thirty five percent (n=8) replied they were either not satisfied or very unsatisfied with the service they had received.

Figure 2.16



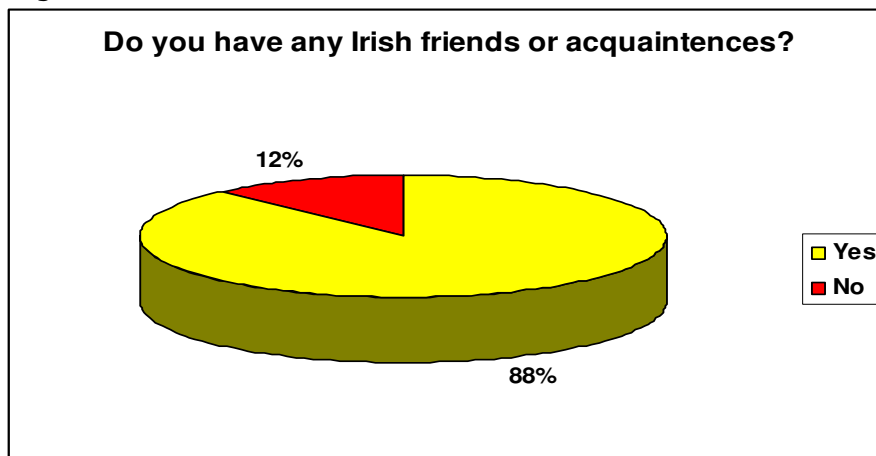
Suggestions as to how to improve interpretive services ranged from using people within the hostel who spoke various languages and who also had a good standard of English, to an increase in English language courses which would negate the need for interpretive services. Again the point was raised by respondents that extra English classes would be of benefit to asylum seekers arriving in Waterford. Over 50% (n= 21) of respondents stated that they did not know where to get the help of an interpreter if they needed one.

Social and Cultural Needs

Eighty eight percent (n=36) of respondents replied that they had Irish friends and acquaintances, while 12% (n=5) stated that they did not have any Irish friends or acquaintances. The first figure (88%) is a relatively high

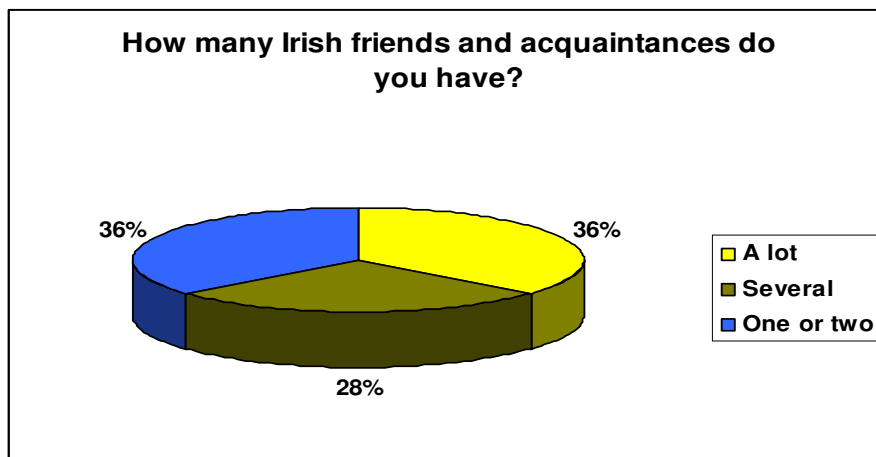
percentage, especially due to the fact that these men are living in direct provision. Collins (2002) found that in Cork only 53% of those surveyed had Irish friends and acquaintances however this figure also included people living in private rented accommodation. This should not be construed as a positive finding on the nature of direct provision and the successful integration of asylum seekers with Irish people, rather it should be taken as a positive finding on the attitude of Irish people, and in particular people from Waterford, toward immigrant communities. This finding has been mirrored in a recent study commissioned by the Steering Group of The National Action Plan Against Racism where it was reported that there has been a significant drop – nearly 20% - in those who view Ireland as racist and that the main trends across key measurable statistics have moved in a positive direction over the past three years. It was also reported that experiences of racism in Ireland have fallen and there has been a shift in understanding and awareness of non-Irish nationals and their contribution to society since 2003 (Gaffney, 2006).

Figure 2.17



Of those who did have Irish friends and acquaintances 36% (n=13) stated that they had a lot of Irish friends. Figure 2.18 below illustrates the percentages of those who stated they had various numbers of Irish friends and acquaintances.

Figure 2.18



Another interesting fact is that 58% (n=22) of respondents stated that they felt they had integrated with the Irish community, while 42% stated that they were either unsure (24%, n=9) or had not integrated (18%, n=7) with the Irish community. Again this is a relatively high number who feel they have integrated with the Irish community, especially while living in direct provision where there is a tendency to be socially isolated due to the nature of the accommodation. This is also reflected in the fact that a high number of respondents also stated that they had felt either very welcome or welcome by the Irish (69%, n=27). Twenty percent of respondents felt unsure about how welcome the Irish made them feel, while 8% (n=3) felt unwelcome and 3% (n=1) felt both welcome and unwelcome.

Many respondents stated that they went to pubs and nightclubs or discos to meet friends and acquaintances. This may be part of why respondents stated they felt welcome and why such a high percentage stated they had Irish friends and acquaintances. Some stated that they went to church to meet friends. Many of the men used the Peoples Park (Public park in Waterford) to meet friends and acquaintances. A list of areas where respondents go to meet with friends is outlined below in table 2.9.

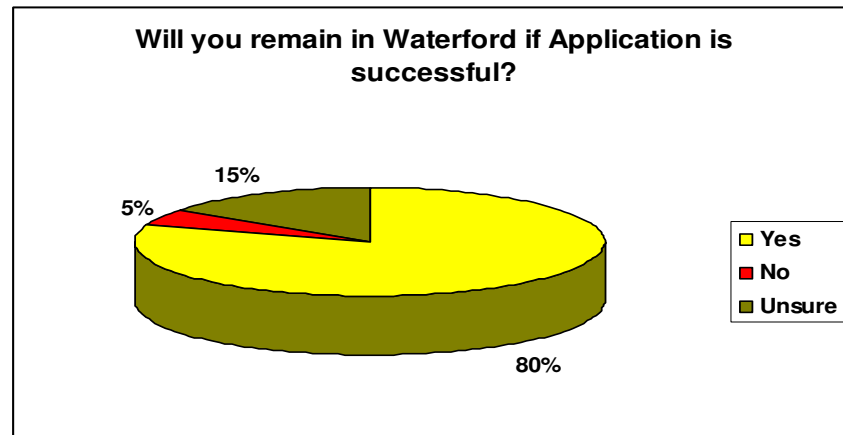
Table 2.9

Where do you go to meet friends and acquaintances?
<i>Hostel</i>
<i>Library</i>
<i>Town Centre</i>
<i>Peoples Park</i>
<i>Football fields</i>
<i>Pubs, Clubs, Nightclubs</i>
<i>Friends homes</i>
<i>On the street</i>
<i>The beach</i>

Added to this was the fact that a large number of respondents (80%, n=33) stated that they would remain in Waterford if their application for asylum was

successful, while 15% (n=6) were unsure and 5% (n=2) said no, they would not remain in Waterford.

Figure 2.19



The main reason why respondents wanted to stay in Waterford was because they had friends here and for some many of their countrymen lived in Waterford. Overall however there was a general feeling of happiness with Waterford with respondents stating that they liked the city and had got to know the place.

Asked how they keep themselves occupied during the week respondents gave a variety of answers. These included watching television, playing football and going to the library. Table 2.10 below lists these activities.

Table 2.10

How do you keep occupied during your day?
<i>Library</i>
<i>Reading</i>
<i>Internet</i>
<i>Play football</i>
<i>Jogging</i>
<i>Walk around the city and town centre</i>
<i>Go to friends homes</i>
<i>Watch Television</i>
<i>Volunteer job one day a week</i>

As was outlined earlier 81% (Figure 2.4) of respondents were dissatisfied with the activities which were available to them. Some of the previous sections have dealt with this such as the increase in the number of computers and internet facilities available to the men, the development of a list of organisations that are willing to take on volunteers and the provision of various types of training. One area however which would be of great benefit to the men in Viking House and indeed other direct provision centres in the

city would be the development of sporting activities which the men could become involved in. Many of the men play soccer and it would be beneficial if an effort was made to expand this activity in an organised way to other sports (Tennis, basketball, snooker and pool, five aside soccer, etc) and other venues. The provision of funding would be required to facilitate such activities and could be organised through groups and organisations such as Waterford Area Partnership, CDP's and other NGO's based in Waterford.

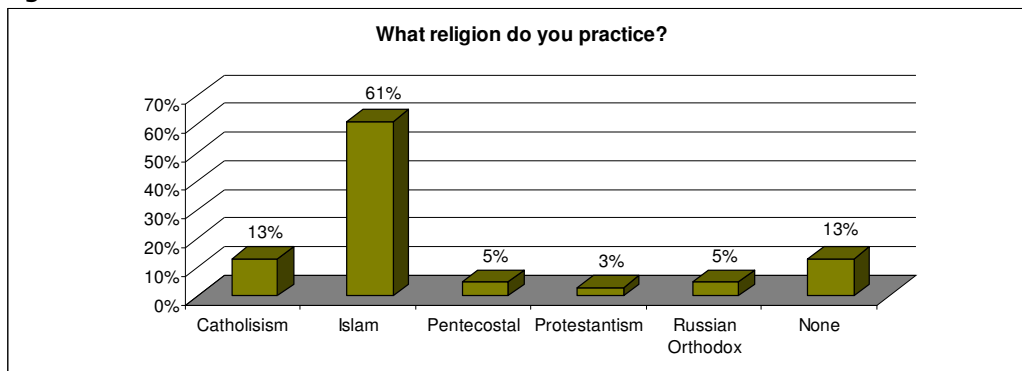
The list of activities above represents those respondents who answered the question. While the sample size of this research is low it should be noted that one of the reasons for this low number is that many of the residents expressed exasperation and despondency with their situation. Perhaps it is this somewhat larger group who would benefit most from an increase in the activities available to them and perhaps lift their despondency. An increase in the number of activities available to the men in Viking House would also have the effect of assisting those men in mixing and integrating with the Irish community. When asked what he did to keep occupied during the day this mans words reflected the boredom and despondency which is a general feeling for the majority of the men in Viking House.

“This is the question I ask myself everyday. What should I do today? I walk all day around Waterford. There is nothing to do”

Religious Needs

Respondents were asked if they practiced a religion. The majority of respondents (75%, n=30) did practice a religion, while 25% (n=10) did not. All however stated that they did have a religious background. The chart below illustrates the various religious backgrounds of the respondents.

Figure 2.20



The majority of respondents were members of the Islamic faith with Catholicism being the second highest religion practiced. Thirteen percent of respondents stated that they did not have a religion.

Ninety percent (n=26) of respondents stated that they could practice their religion locally, however 10% (n=3) could not. Those who could not practice locally were of the Russian Orthodox faith and Pentecostal. Recognition of this fact and further investigation into the possibility of providing a place where these men could practice, and indeed if there are others of their faith in Waterford, should be considered.

Section 4

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following section will report on the findings of this research along with the recommendations it makes with regard to the needs of asylum seeker men in direct provision in Viking House in Waterford City. While the number of men in Viking House was ninety four at the outset of this research, the

number of men who participated in the survey numbered forty one. The low response rate was, in the researcher's opinion, due to a high level of despondency among the men in Viking House due to the situation of direct provision, lack of privacy, social space, unfamiliar and unsuitable food and lack of educational and work opportunities. To a certain extent accessing men in Viking House was difficult and reflects the invisibility of these men in Irish society and their effective marginalisation and isolation from mainstream society.

Despite the fact that those in the survey reported having Irish friends and acquaintances and to feeling that they had integrated with Irish society, the general feeling among the men is one of desperation, boredom and frustration with the situation they have found themselves in. The other reason men did not participate in the research was that they felt nothing would be done to help improve their situation and the conditions of their stay while in the asylum seeker process. It is therefore incumbent upon those responsible for asylum seekers to act upon research findings, as not doing so will further distance this vulnerable group from their local community, mainstream society, the research community and the apparatus of the state i.e. national and local government.

Accommodation

The research found that the longest length of time an individual has spent in the asylum process was four years. The longest length of time an individual in this research has been in Viking House is three years.

Recommendation 1

This should be reviewed as a matter of urgency and acted upon by the Reception and Integration Agency and The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner. Calls for asylum seekers to be given the right to work after six months in the process, should now be introduced. Asylum seekers who have spent such protracted periods of time in direct provision, such as those found in this study, should be facilitated and supported to leave direct provision and seek private rented accommodation.

Seventy one percent of respondents were dissatisfied with the condition of their accommodation, while 97.5% of respondents stated that they would prefer to live in private rented accommodation. Some of the areas which were of concern to respondents regarding their dissatisfaction were the sleeping space, washing facilities, socialising space, activities and the food.

Recommendation 2

Some of these areas can be rectified immediately and include the improvement in washing facilities (both laundry and bathrooms) and should be initiated by the owner of the Hostel at the request of the Reception and

Integration Agency and the HSE. Local bodies such as Waterford Area Partnership could provide funding to local organisations such as Community Development Projects to improve the level of activities (sport, health and fitness, outings etc.) available to the men in Viking House.

Recommendation 3

It is also recommended that a reduction in the number of men sharing a room be introduced immediately. With an average of four men to a room, and in some cases five and six men per room, the tension, irritation, depression and lack of sleep makes for a desperate situation. At a minimum it is recommended that two men per room or at a maximum three men per room be introduced as policy forthwith at the behest of the Reception and Integration Agency and the HSE.

The objective of maximising profits at the expense of a person's mental health should be stopped. Reducing the number of men per room would have a beneficial effect both for the individual and for relations among residents and staff. Many of the men within the centre spoke about the fact that they were being prescribed anti-depressants and sleeping tablets. A reduction in the number of men per room would go some way to improving this situation. Asylum seekers are a very vulnerable group of people in our society and as such the policy of direct provision should reflect this fact.

Sixty four percent of respondents stated that they were satisfied with staff and security in the centre. However 37% stated that they were not satisfied. The reason for this was mainly due to the fact that some staff did not speak English. Those respondents who were dissatisfied with staff felt that the staff that they could not communicate with were belligerent towards them. Such situations are a cause of great tension and irritation for the asylum seekers in Viking House.

Recommendation 4

Further research into this finding would be useful to determine if such situations exist in other direct provision hostels around the country.

Recommendation 5

It is also recommended that staff of direct provision centres be given training in dealing with asylum seekers such as communications training, listening skills, anti-racist training and multi-cultural training. It is also recommended that the RIA should give consideration to the employment of staff in direct provision centres and that a minimum standard of English be introduced for staff working in such centres.

Food

Almost 53% of respondents were not satisfied with the food served in Viking House.

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that chefs working within direct provision centres be trained to cook for various nationalities (in particular Asian and African dishes). This would enable them to cook food which is culturally appropriate and cooked in the correct manner. The provision of food which is acceptable to all and of sufficient quality (particularly in relation to the use of oils) would have the effect of reducing tension between staff and residents. The conduit for change in this regard should be directed from the HSE as they have responsibility for the health of Asylum Seekers living in direct provision.

Work, Education and Training

All respondents in this research expressed the desire to work if they had the right to work. As Collins has pointed out, "The right to work is a basic human right, and a persons personal dignity, self-esteem and familial security is dependant on it. Forced unemployment has a negative effect on physical and mental health" (Collins, 2002, 66). Respondents had a large range of skills acquired before coming to Ireland. Sixty seven percent had also undertaken training before coming to Ireland, again in a range of skills.

Recommendation 7

As asylum seekers do not have the right to work while in the asylum seeker process it is suggested that the skills these men have be utilised through a labour exchange system such as that outlined by Brady (2003).

Recommendation 8

The capacity of the voluntary sector to offer meaningful voluntary work to the men of Viking House, and indeed other asylum seekers in Waterford, who wish to work, should be enhanced. The further development of Waterford Area Partnerships volunteering section is recommended with emphasis on work for asylum seekers and the utilisation and enhancement of their skills. Engagement with asylum seekers in this manner will strengthen the understanding of community and voluntary bodies to the needs of intercultural minority communities (Faughan & O'Donovan, 2002).

Recommendation 9

Organisations such as Community Development Programmes and Area Partnerships should also involve asylum seekers in volunteering to actively campaign for the improvement of their own living and quality of life conditions.

"The State Parties..... recognize the right of **everyone** to an adequate standards of living for himself and his family including adequate food,

clothing, and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions”

(Article II of the International Covenant on Economic and Cultural Rights 1966)

There was a high level of education among the respondents with almost 63% having a level of education at either certificate level or higher.

Recommendation 10

It is recommended that residents of Viking House be offered training to improve or upgrade their own skills or to acquire new skills. While asylum seekers do not have the right to engage in mainstream education, organisations such as NGO's, local authorities, voluntary groups and other local organisations could provide training courses of benefit to the men in Viking House and other direct provision centres. It is suggested that a plan to target this particular group for training be designed as they are the only adult group in Irish society denied access to full time education.

The Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre will provide training and educational opportunities to asylum seekers and refugees in Waterford. This should be enhanced with funding targeted at the areas of interest expressed by the men in this research.

Many men also expressed a desire to take extra English classes and stated that those available at present were insufficient.

Recommendation 11

The Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre will be running English Language Classes five days a week, which will go a long way towards meeting this need. However it is suggested that this be reviewed on a regular basis (six monthly) to see if the classes are sufficient to meet the needs of all those who wish to participate in the classes.

Health and Welfare

Ninety percent of respondents attended the G.P. as the primary source of medical services. The majority of respondents were also either very satisfied or satisfied with the medical services provided.

Recommendation 12

Some residents also expressed a desire to have groups where men could meet and discuss their situation, daily lives and any other concerns or issues which they may have. This could be provided by the Men's Development Network subject to the provision of funding to run such a group and would have great benefit in relation to the men's mental and physical health and would have the effect of reducing tension in the men's lives.

Invariably respondents stated that the allowance of €19.10 a week was not sufficient to meet their needs. As with other calls in the past (Collins, 2002, O'Mahony, 2003, Irish Refugee Council, 2004c) it is recommended that the allowance be increased substantially. This allowance has remained almost static since its introduction in 1999, despite increases in similar payments such as unemployment benefit and assistance.

Recommendation 13

As asylum seekers are not given the right to engage in paid employment an increase in the allowance would go some way towards meeting personal needs such as purchasing newspapers, books, cigarettes, food stuffs and entertainment.

Recommendation 14

It is also recommended that asylum seekers who have been in the process for protracted periods be given the right to leave direct provision and seek private rented accommodation and that in order to facilitate this they also be given the right to work and support themselves forthwith.

Information

Many respondents stated that they did not, or were unsure if they had enough information in relation to being an asylum seeker. This finding indicates that there is a need for an information point where asylum seekers can go and find accurate information regarding their rights and entitlements as asylum seekers. Despite being given information regarding the asylum process at the time of application, asylum seekers are still not fully informed about the process and time it will take to go through the system.

On the 16th of November an Information Support Unit was opened in the Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre which incorporates information for asylum seekers. This will also include a clinic one day a week run by the Refugee Legal Service (to be discussed below).

Recommendation 15

It would also be useful to design a step by step guide for asylum seekers about the length of the process and the rights held at each stage of the process, from application, to receiving status, leave to remain, or being refused status, to appeals and changing the grounds of ones application. One of the problems the men had was the length of time they found themselves in the asylum application process. This guide should detail the minimum and maximum times a person is expected to spend at each stage. There is also a need for an outreach worker from this Information Support Unit to go into Viking House to deliver the Information the men require and to inform them of the supports the services can offer.

Recommendation 16

It is also recommended that other means to improve the men's access to information be implemented such as funding for extra computers and internet access in Viking House, talks (or question and answer sessions) from the RIA and ORAC, and more English language classes (as discussed above).

Legal needs

A significant difference was found between this research and the Cork needs analysis (Collins, 2002) in relation to asylum seekers registering with the Refugee legal Service. In Cork only 50% of respondents were found to have registered with the service, whereas here 98% of respondents had registered in this research.

However of concern is the fact that five respondents (13%) stated that they had not spoken to a lawyer regarding their case. The length of time these men had spent in the process was three, four, seven, seventeen and forty eight months respectively. This is a worrying finding as it indicates that some asylum seekers may not have an equal opportunity to gain refugee status if they do not have a lawyer.

Recommendation 17

The above finding should be considered by the Refugee Legal Service when it introduces its clinic in Waterford and an effort to seek out other asylum seekers who have not discussed their application with a lawyer should be made.

Asked if they felt the asylum process was fair and impartial 44% said no and 29% said they were unsure. Some of the reasons for this was the time spent in the system and the inconsistency they saw in the deliberation of cases and the time taken to go through the process, with some getting status relatively quickly while others took years. Others felt that religion played a part and that if one was a Muslim they had less chance of gaining status.

Recommendation 18

Regardless of the reasons, the need for dialogue with asylum seekers and those deliberating on their fate is required. Asylum seekers need to be able to ask the questions they believe are important in a safe way, so they can be better informed of the process they are going through.

Interpreter Services

Sixty five percent of men in this research had required an interpreter at some point. Sixty one percent of those were satisfied or very satisfied. Suggestions as to how to improve Interpreter services ranged from the provision of extra English language classes (in process as discussed above) and using men within the hostel who already spoke good English and another language.

The need for interpreter services within Waterford City and County exists and will perhaps increase, not just for asylum seeker groups but also from other immigrant groups also.

Recommendation 19

It is recommended that an Interpreter service be set up on an interagency basis which will be available to all groups, asylum seekers, minority ethnic communities, NGO's, local authorities, voluntary groups and other local organisations.

Social and Cultural needs

A large number of respondents (88%) replied that they had Irish friends and acquaintances; while 58% stated they felt they had integrated with the Irish community. In Cork it was found that only 53% of respondents stated they had Irish friends and acquaintances (Collins, 2002). This finding is interesting and warrants further research, especially in the light of a recent report commissioned by the steering group of The National Action Plan Against Racism. This report found that there has been a significant drop – nearly 20% - in those who view Ireland as racist and that the main trends across key measurable statistics have moved in a positive direction over the past three years. It was also reported that experiences of racism in Ireland have fallen and there has been a shift in understanding and awareness of non-Irish nationals and their contribution to society since 2003 (Gaffney, 2006).

Such findings may be a reflection of the findings in this research, that 88% of respondents had Irish friends and acquaintances and that 58% felt they had integrated with Irish society. It may also indicate why many of the respondents stated that they would remain in Waterford if they were successful in their application for asylum.

Recommendation 20

Further qualitative research would ascertain why the men feel well disposed towards Irish people, and indeed Waterford, and would inform us about how best to integrate with new minority communities.

Eighty one percent of respondents were dissatisfied with the activities which were available to them.

Recommendation 21

One area which would be of great benefit to the men in Viking House and other centres in Waterford would be the development of other activities, such as sports and health and fitness activities (swimming, soccer, tennis, basketball, snooker and pool, etc.). A drop in centre being set up by the Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre could act as a base where such activities could be organised, with the provision of sufficient funding. An outreach worker would be of benefit to inform and encourage asylum seekers

in Viking House and other direct provision centres in the city of activities on offer.

Religious

It seems that the majority of respondents could practice their religion locally, however some men stated they could not. Those who could not were of Russian Orthodox and Pentecostal faiths.

Recommendation 22

This should be examined to see if there are others in Waterford city or county who are of similar faiths and provisions made to allow them to practice.

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