BETWEEN HOPE AND A HOME

Peer research examining the experiences faced by lone parents leaving Direct Provision in search of housing

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actionaid

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GLOSSARY

Direct Provision: Introduced in 2000, this is the accommodation system used in Ireland for people seeking international protection. It provides meals, shared accommodation, and a small allowance while people wait for a decision on their international protection case. Over the years, it has been widely criticised for keeping people in institutional settings for long periods and for limiting their independence and dignity.

Eviction letter: From late 2023, the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) began sending letters to people who had already been granted protection status but were still living in Direct Provision centres. These letters told people – including parents with young children – to leave their accommodation or risk being moved into emergency centres.

Gender mainstreaming: A way of making sure that policies and decisions take account of how women and men experience things differently. It means looking at the additional barriers faced by women – for example, childcare responsibilities, income inequality, or gender-based discrimination – and ensuring that these are recognised and addressed.

Housing Assistance Payment (HAP): A payment made by local authorities to help low-income households rent in the private market. The council pays part of the rent directly to the landlord, and the tenant pays the rest based on their income.

International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS): The State body that manages accommodation for people seeking asylum in Ireland. It oversees the Direct Provision system and other forms of temporary and emergency accommodation.

Intersectionality: The idea that different parts of a person's identity – such as gender, race, family status or migration background – overlap and shape their experience. For example, a black woman raising children alone while trying to find housing may face discrimination on several fronts at once. Understanding these layers helps explain why some groups face deeper barriers than others.

Irelands housing crisis: Refers to the severe shortage of affordable housing in Ireland. Rising rents, limited social housing, and a lack of new affordable homes have pushed record numbers of people into housing insecurity and homelessness.

Local Authority Integration Teams (LAITs): Each of the 31 local authorities in Ireland now has a team tasked with supporting the integration of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in their area.

Lone parent: Someone who is bringing up one or more children without a partner in the home. Most lone parents in Ireland are women and are statistically more likely to experience poverty and discrimination than other families.

Peer research: A participatory approach where people with direct experience of the issue are trained and supported to inform or lead the research themselves.

People with International Protection: Refers to people who have been recognised by the Irish State as refugees or granted subsidiary protection under EU and Irish law. They have the right to live, work and study in Ireland and to access public services, on the same basis as citizens.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the housing experiences of lone parents with international protection in Ireland – most of whom are women. Using a peer-led approach, women who had or are attempting to move out of Direct Provision into independent housing helped design and carry out the research. Their insight shaped how the questions were asked, how the stories were heard, and how the findings were understood.

The research set out to examine what really happens when people try and leave the State's international protection accommodation system and secure housing on their own. It focuses on those who face several layers of disadvantage – as migrants, as women, and as lone parents – within a housing system already under extreme pressure.

From late 2023, families who had already been granted protection were told to leave Direct Provision. They had two options, be sent to emergency centres in another part of the country or find housing on their own. The change caused deep uncertainty for parents already struggling to build stability for their children and drew strong concern from civil society and the Ombudsman for Children. This research takes place in that context, looking at how families try to find housing, what support is available, and where the system is falling short.

The report found that people experience the following when trying to leave International Protection:

- **Discrimination** in the private rental market, often linked to race and family status.
- **Eviction letters** and the distress caused by being told to leave IPAS centres.
- **Inadequate supports** to assist leaving Direct Provision.
- **Issues with Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)**, especially identifying properties that would be suitable for rental under the scheme.
- **Administrative burdens**, including the inappropriate use of the Local Connection Test.

The findings echo earlier studies on migrant women and housing but add a new layer of understanding through lived experience. The peer researchers' role helped ground the evidence in everyday reality, making clear how policy failures affect families' lives.

The report outlines several key actions. Immediate steps should include ending forced transfers of families with children away from their schools and communities, Local Authorities to stop applying the Local Connection Test to people leaving international protection, and reviewing current integration supports to ensure they are properly funded and coordinated.

At local level, **housing authorities** should resource Local Authority Integration Teams to support families leaving IPAS and strengthen enforcement against discrimination in the rental market.

Longer-term reforms include raising HAP rates to match real rents, delivering the transition supports promised in the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision, embedding gender and equality analysis in housing and integration policy, and recognising housing as a basic human right.

Ireland's wider housing crisis runs through every story in this report. Lone parents are among those hit hardest, carrying the strain of a system in chaos. Some crises do not fall evenly, and this is one of them. How a country responds to the needs of those most marginalised – families trying to move on with their lives after years in Direct Provision – is a real test of who we are and what kind of society we want to be.

INTRODUCTION

This peer research examines the experiences of lone parents as they transition out of international protection accommodation and into independent housing. It was shaped and led by women who have received international protection. They conducted the research and validated the results and recommendations.

The research was inspired by an ActionAid Ireland project that is funded through the St. Stephens Green Trust called *Paving the Way*, which aims to support newly arrived lone parents in Direct Provision and provide them with information about their rights and entitlements. One of the aims of this programme was to support women to engage in advocacy to improve their living conditions and general wellbeing.

The focus of this study was born out of the frustrations related to accommodation expressed by project participants after being granted international protection. The issue of housing was considered by them to be the most significant challenge they faced. This reflects the wider housing crisis in Ireland that is causing stress for families across the country. However, as black, migrant women who are lone parents within the system of international protection, they faced unique barriers.

Their experience was that every effort at integration and self-development they made, whether through employment or education, was met with the immovable, and stubborn fact that a stable home was a prerequisite to moving on in life, and the difficulties in achieving this sometimes seemed insurmountable.

Many thousands of people in Ireland are severely affected by the housing crisis, including migrants and people with international protection, a cohort which is likely to grow, as globally, displacement of populations is on the rise due to weakening global solidarity, conflict and the climate crisis.

People with international protection are a particularly vulnerable population, having additional issues relating to loss, trauma, language barriers and precarity. For lone parent people with international protection the dangers to health and wellbeing posed by homelessness are even greater. Without stable accommodation the opportunity to restart their lives and flourish is denied.

Successful integration of migrants pays dividends for all in terms of increased sustainability, peace and prosperity in society. Adequate housing is a prerequisite for human dignity, family life and the social contract that binds us all in successful, functioning communities.

This report examines the difficulties and barriers faced by a specific cohort of people. These are lone parents who have received international protection and are attempting to transition from Direct Provision to autonomous accommodation. The inclusion criteria for participation in the research were that the participants were or had been in Direct Provision, had achieved international protection status, were parenting alone and that they were at some point on a journey towards autonomous housing that started within the preceding two years. The report highlights some models of good practice as well as recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

A peer-led, participatory approach was adopted for this research. Women with lived experience of transitioning from Direct Provision to independent housing played a central role in shaping the process, bringing their own perspectives and expertise to ensure the findings were grounded in their reality.

Six women from ActionAid Ireland's *Paving the Way* advisory group were trained and supported to act as peer researchers. Together, through the guidance of an experienced researcher, they explored existing studies[i,ii] on housing access for people with international protection and reflected on how well those studies captured their lived experience – particularly as women and lone parents. This focus group discussion helped to shape the focus of the research and the questions they wanted to ask.

Each of the peer researchers then carried out interviews with other lone parents who had recently left or were in the process of transitioning from Direct Provision. In total, 23 people[1] took part in in-depth interviews. The interviews explored the barriers they faced in finding and keeping housing, the impact on their wellbeing, and what supports made a difference.

A lead consultant was appointed to bring together and analyse the interview findings. However, the interpretation of the results remained a collaborative process. The peer researchers met again to review the analysis, discuss whether it reflected their experiences accurately, and make changes where needed. Their validation of the final findings was essential to ensuring the integrity and authenticity of the report.

LIMITATIONS

Participatory research has disadvantages and limitations, some of which are within this work. The training provided to peer researchers was necessarily brief given the researchers care responsibilities as lone parents and the resources available for the project. Furthermore, there may have been some lack of clarity about the criteria for participant inclusion in the study; two participants interviewed did not strictly meet all criteria but were judged appropriate for inclusion nonetheless given the nature of their experience (being lone parents and having transitioned out of IPAS accommodation). Despite these limitations, this approach was invaluable in placing power and expertise in the hands of rights holders who are too often excluded from research and policy analysis.

[1] In total, twenty-nine people took part in this research. Six people engaged in an interpretative focus group and twenty-three people engaged in qualitative interviews. A full breakdown of the participants can be found in Appendix A which covers their gender, country of origin, length of time in Ireland, province they live in and their current housing situation.

CONTEXT

LONE PARENTS IN DIRECT PROVISION

Most lone-parent families within the Direct Provision system are headed by women; this reflects the wider trend in Ireland where 85 per cent of lone parent households are women.[iii] While information is scarce generally on their experience, a 2010 report by *AkiDwA* captures the voices of women seeking asylum and living in Direct Provision in Ireland.[iv] A more recent report, from AkiDwA, shows how little has changed in the intervening 14 years.[v] The challenges listed by female international protection applicants in both reports include experiences of racial discrimination and insecure accommodation.

Families in Direct Provision, including those headed by lone parents, may enter this system already embodying significant levels of trauma and mental health difficulties. Many have lived for extended periods within the Direct Provision system and are likely to experience significant levels of stress and trauma while there, given the often inadequate, unsafe, cramped and overcrowded conditions.[vi]

The pathway from Direct Provision to autonomous housing is lengthy and complex. Ireland's housing crisis has left many people with international protection in Direct Provision long after receiving status (approx. 16% as of July 2025[vii]). Barriers such as housing shortages, discrimination, and language difficulties continue to prevent many from accessing accommodation.[viii]

Policy changes for people with international protection in Direct Provision

From late 2023, as the number of international protection applicants rose, the government began moving people with long-term status out of Direct Provision into emergency accommodation or telling people to attempt to secure housing in the private market. This policy shift has drawn strong criticism from civil society. Crosscare and DePaul have warned[ix] that this move risks pushing families into homelessness, since many have almost no realistic possibility of securing their own housing. The Ombudsman for Children[x] has also expressed concern about the policy, citing the devastating impact on children's rights and the failures of government departments to act jointly and coherently on integration policy.

LONE PARENTS AND HOMELESSNESS

In Ireland as in Europe and in North America, family homelessness is gendered, being disproportionately experienced by households headed by a single female parent and far more likely to be experienced by lone parents than by households containing two parents or a lone male parent. The *National Women's Council* has described this as a 'feminisation of homelessness'.[xi] As of February 2025 there were a total of 2,185 families in homelessness, of which 58 per cent – or 1,262 – were lone-parent families.[xii] Despite making up just a quarter of all families with children in Ireland, lone-parent-headed households accounted for more than half of all families in emergency accommodation.[xiii] It should be noted here that the emergency accommodation statistics referenced do not include refuges for victims/survivors of domestic violence nor do they include those in international protection emergency accommodation.

A 2021 report from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission[xiv] showed that lone parents are among the most disadvantaged in Ireland's housing system and that they are significantly less likely to be owner/occupiers of housing (25%) than the general population (70%). Lone parents also reported some of the highest rates of tenancy in private rented accommodation and Local Authority housing. They were the cohort that had the highest levels of housing deprivation with 32% experiencing issues such as dampness, lack of central heating, or inadequate light. Additionally, 11% of lone parents are unable to keep their homes adequately warm. Taking all these issues together, it's clear that 'mainstream' lone parents face significant barriers in accessing secure, affordable, and quality housing in Ireland, making them one of the most vulnerable groups in the housing system.

Recent research[xv] by Focus Ireland underlines just how significant the structural barriers to secure housing is for lone parents. Their study shows that lone parents are dramatically overrepresented in homelessness services. As of mid-2025 they account for 57% of all families in emergency accommodation despite representing just 17% of family households nationally. The report makes clear that we have a housing system that routinely leaves lone parents at the back of the queue for secure housing. It also recognises that these barriers are not borne equally: lone parents are not a homogenous group, and factors such as gender, ethnicity, migration status, disability and socio-economic background shape exposure to the risks of housing precarity.


Owodunni Mustapha

PEOPLE WITH INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION AND HOMELESSNESS

Ireland's official homelessness data does not identify families or individuals exiting Direct Provision, but evidence indicates they represent a significant and growing proportion of those experiencing homelessness.[xvi] Murphy and Stapleton's (2024) research[xvii] shows increasing rates of homelessness among people with international protection, resulting from a heavy reliance on HAP as a mechanism to achieve adequate accommodation in a very constrained private rental market. This is combined with a change in the approach to transition management of Direct Provision centres which sees people with international protection being dispersed into emergency accommodation around the country and away from their social networks, often established over years, regardless of the stress and trauma this causes for the families, and children in particular.

Research shows that racism and discrimination are issues in Ireland's rental market for non-EU migrants and black people, with these groups less likely to be offered viewings than Irish renters for example.[xviii] As research in the UCD School of Social Policy found *'migrants are particularly vulnerable to housing problems because of (…) labour-market inequalities, lack of knowledge of rights or fear of exercising them, and language difficulties occur(ing) in combination among this group'.*[xix] The same report *'indicates that women, families with children, particularly lone parents (…) especially if they are citizens of non-EU countries, are the most vulnerable sections of the migrant population in the housing system and therefore at greatest risk of homelessness'.*[xx]

People with international protection are among the most vulnerable migrants, particularly during the period when they are transitioning from Direct Provision accommodation to independent housing. Many have spent a long period in the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) system and, given their ineligibility for full benefit payments until granted international protection, they may have insufficient financial resources to meet the high rental costs and deposit required to make the move.[xxi] In terms of employment, while most international protection applicants have had the right to work in Ireland since June 2018, research indicates that when they do manage to secure employment, the jobs are often characterised by lower-quality work, such as less favourable wages and poorer working conditions.[xxii] Inadequate income has a significant impact on individual and families access to secure housing with ESRI research showing they are more likely to face housing affordability problems.

INTERSECTIONALITY: LONE PARENT MIGRANT WOMEN

While the situation of transitioning from international protection is challenging generally, it is even more so for women and particularly women who are non-European, who are reported as having higher rates of unemployment and lower activity rates than both Irish women and men, as well as migrant men.[xxiii] Research from EMN Ireland and the ESRI[xxiv] highlights the double disadvantage experienced by non-EU migrant women in relation to labour market barriers, exploitation and low pay, and in the areas of housing and accommodation. This group of women are more likely to live in overcrowded conditions, are at increased risk of homelessness, and vulnerable to the shortcomings of the Direct Provision system.

AkiDwA[xxv] has further emphasised this cohort's lack of access to childcare as a barrier to gainful employment, particularly for lone parents with their consequent precarity, making them an exceptionally at-risk demographic with specific difficulties in finding adequate housing.[xxvi] Norris et al, also highlighted the vulnerabilities of lone parents, especially if they are citizens of non-EU countries, and listed them as among the most marginalised sections of the migrant population in the housing system and therefore at greatest risk of homelessness.[xxvii]

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO HOUSING FOR PEOPLE WITH INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

While the primary barriers to housing for people with international protection is the lack of supply of social housing and affordable private rental housing, migrants and people with international protection in particular are also hampered in their efforts to find housing in Ireland by societal and systemic barriers.

Housing Assistance Payment

Research[xxviii] has cited the inadequacy of HAP as a significant barrier for people with international protection and others in accessing adequate housing.[xxix] Delays in social housing assessments are a key obstacle - as many local authorities will not accept an application prior to an Irish Residence Permit being granted.'[xxx] This inconsistency across local authorities and resulting delays can cause problems in accessing emergency accommodation and HAP tenancies.

This situation is compounded by HAP rates which have not kept pace with soaring private rental prices, meaning that many advertised properties fall well above the HAP ceiling. Studies by the Simon Communities of Ireland and others have found very few rental properties available within HAP limits, which disproportionately affects groups already at higher risk of poverty and housing precarity, including migrants.[xxxi] The recent investigation[xxxii] into the HAP scheme by the Ombudsman's supports these findings, pointing to both the inadequacy of current HAP limits and the inconsistency in how the scheme is applied by local authorities. The investigation found that HAP payments no longer reflect real rental costs.

Research[xxxiii] has found discrimination against HAP recipients remains a significant issue in the housing market. IHREC[xxxiv] identified single parents and people living in Direct Provision as subgroups particularly affected by housing assistance discrimination. The Commission also noted that the percentage of public queries specifically on Housing Assistance-related discrimination was consistently between 70 and 79% of all private rental queries.[xxxv]

The Local Connection Test

Where individuals are seeking social housing support, generally speaking, they may only apply to one local authority, in which the household normally resides, or with which the individual or family has a local connection. For people with international protection this is not always straightforward. Many, having been placed in Direct Provision in rural, isolated areas, seek to move to cities where they have contacts or where there are greater opportunities for employment. It can be particularly complex in the case of lone parents with international protection who may have been forced to move through several Direct Provision centres in the course of their journey to achieving status. It is often the case that a family will have built a connection in an area where the children attend school, for example, and the parent may have found employment, but they are required to move to a new county or lose their place in the IPAS system. If they fail to prove links to the area, it is at the discretion of the local authority to grant support or to conduct a social housing assessment.

The application of the Local Connection Test was found by several research studies to be a barrier to people with international protection accessing supports and it was also identified as a significant obstacle in their being assessed as eligible for social housing in places they want to live.[xxxvi] Concerningly, a circular entitled 'information paper on supporting people with status/leave to remain' was shared by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government in 2019 to local authorities advising them that people with international protection are not required to prove this. Nonetheless it is still widely applied.[xxxvii] In late 2025 a new circular entitled "Information Note on Social Housing Applications from Households Exiting International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) Centres" was issue by the Housing Agency. This was for local authority staff assessing applications for social housing from people who have been granted status under the International Protection Act 2015 or Permission to Remain. This note further stipulated that *"Regulation 5(c) allows local authorities discretion to accept applications from any person or household not resident in the authority's functional area and who can't establish a local connection with that area."*

Murphy and Stapleton (2024) found that people with international protection may therefore be 'delayed in or prevented from accessing social housing lists, supports and/or tenancies, especially when lacking familiarity with the system and available resources, such as inter-county HAP'.[xxxviii] Worryingly, the report surmised that local authorities whose housing systems are under pressure are more likely to apply the local connection test, thus using discretionary powers in a discriminatory way to deny the rights of people with international protection to housing on the same footing as Irish citizens. This is particularly concerning for families, including lone parents, who are trying to secure housing close to their children's schools as well as to essential community and social networks and supports.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION IN IRELAND

Support from NGOs

The homelessness NGOs *Peter McVerry Trust* and *DePaul* have been commissioned by the State since 2019 to provide support to people with international protection in Direct Provision to secure accommodation in the private rental sector. Starting originally as a pilot programme from the *Peter McVerry Trust*, the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration now fund the NGO to provide these services in 86 IPAS centres across the country. The work of both NGOs in this context primarily involves supporting families to source private rented accommodation. The organisations work with people who have status to 'apply for HAP through their relevant local authority, engage with landlords, source suitable properties online, provide support to viewings and assist with the completion of necessary paperwork in order for them to progress seamlessly into private rented accommodation'.[xxxix]

Local Authority Integration Teams (LAITs)

Each of the 31 Local Authorities in the country has initiated a four-person Local Authority Integration Team (LAIT). These were originally proposed as part of the implementation of the revised White Paper to End Direct Provision. Describing their mission as 'Supporting Integration from Day One'[xi] LAITs function primarily by signposting and linking migrants with a wide range of services, including education, language support, help to access social protection, healthcare, childcare and legal support as well as help in connecting migrants with their new communities. Housing support is not within their remit.

BOX 1 **EXAMPLES OF TARGETED HOUSING SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION**

There are some examples of targeted and practical support measures offered to people with international protection in finding housing. Some 12 EU member states provide targeted financial support to people with international protection to facilitate their access to autonomous housing.[xli] The examples below illustrate different types of responses – state-led, NGO-driven, and community-based.

CZECH REPUBLIC – State Support:

Under the State Integration Programme[xlii] people with international protection can access up to 18 months of accommodation in one of four Integration Asylum Centres, along with social work support. They can then avail of support to start living on their own in a rental apartment. This involves an individual integration plan and individual budget covering the first two months' rent and deposit including two months costs for electricity gas and other related items.

SWEDEN – Community Integration:

Sällbo – promotes multigenerational housing[xliii] tackling loneliness amongst older residents and housing issues experienced by migrants. These problems are addressed by housing these cohorts together with younger Swedish people acting 'as a bridge' to promote cohesion and integration of new migrants.

IRELAND – Civil Society Response:

The Irish Refugee Council's *A Place to Call Home* programme[xliv] provides secure and affordable housing through properties donated by religious orders, civil society, and private donors. Tenants benefit from wraparound supports such as English language training, education, and employment guidance – enabling them to transition confidently into the private rental market.

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE LANDSCAPE

IRELAND

While some national policy acknowledges the inclusion and integration of migrants in the area of housing, there is no clear, robust, legislative or policy framework to support people transitioning from Direct Provision to independent living, nor to address the specific housing needs of lone parents in the system.

One of the core aims of the social inclusion elements of **Housing for All, Ireland's national housing policy** is to: *'provide accommodation for and integration into the community of Programme Refugees and those granted status under the International Protection Process'*. However, the policy is limited in referring to the integration of refugees under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme 2020-2023.[xlv] There is nothing specifically in the policy in relation to the transitions of people with international protection from the IPAS system to autonomous housing other than to note that 'Applicants for International Protection who are granted status may become eligible for social housing and will be assisted by Local Authorities in this regard'.[xlvi]

The National Action Plan against Racism (2023)[xlvii] acknowledges and seeks to combat the fact that certain groups experiencing racism are at higher risk of homelessness or living in substandard or overcrowded housing.[xlviii] Action 2.8 of the strategy seeks to tackle barriers faced by minority ethnic groups in accessing appropriate housing, including discrimination in the private rental sector and challenges with the HAP.[xlix] The plan acknowledges the intersection of discrimination based on gender and race, noting that the experience of racism is different for women and men. While it unfortunately stops short of proposing specific actions aimed specifically at protecting women, it stresses that all actions should be implemented with an understanding of the differential impact of racism on women and men.

The most recent **Migrant Integration Strategy**[l] has been widely criticised for failing to address issues of housing and accommodation. ESRI research, along with calls from many civil society groups, underscores the importance of including housing in the next Migrant Integration Strategy. The new strategy is now five years overdue with no clear timeline for publication.

In addition to this policy framework, legislation has a direct impact on the housing situation of migrants. The **Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty** place a statutory obligation on Local Authorities to act towards eliminating discrimination, promoting equality, and protecting human rights.

BOX 2 WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATION IN THE PRIVATE RENTAL MARKET?

The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) is the body responsible for regulating the private rental sector. It does not, however, have the power to investigate or decide on cases of discrimination. Where discrimination arises, **complaints are made under the Equal Status Acts to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC)**. The WRC deals with discrimination in access to housing on several protected grounds, including race, family status, gender and receipt of HAP. The RTB can refer people to the WRC where discrimination has arisen in tenancy disputes.

Research[li] by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in 2022 recommended stronger cooperation between the RTB and WRC. This included establishing an institutional agreement and a cross-referral system, as well as appropriate resourcing for them to carry out their duties.

The **Equal Status Acts 2000-2018** also have a direct impact on housing in the private rental system in that the legislation prohibits discrimination in the provision of goods and services, including housing, on various grounds such as race, gender, nationality, and ethnic origin. Tenants and prospective tenants also have protections under **the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015** which makes it an offence for a landlord to discriminate against recipients of HAP.

Although research[lii] has found discrimination against HAP recipients remains a significant issue in the housing market. IHREC[liii] identified single parents and people living in Direct Provision as subgroups particularly affected by housing assistance discrimination. Under the **International Protection Act 2015**, beneficiaries of international protection have the same rights to social protection as Irish citizens. This includes equal access to social housing and housing supports, under the same conditions that apply to citizens.

Ireland is party to, and has ratified a number of international legal instruments which protect the right to housing, including the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and**

Cultural Rights[liv] **(ICESCR), Article 11.1** of which states that everyone has the right to an 'adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions'. It further states that 'the States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realisation of this right'.

However, as Lima (2025) points out, ensuring that policy and legislation 'in fact protect migrants from discrimination in housing faces significant challenges, especially within the context of Ireland's housing crisis (….) where landlords may prioritise tenants perceived as less risky or more financially stable, often to the detriment of migrants who might face implicit stereotypes. This scarcity makes it difficult to enforce anti-discrimination laws effectively, as landlords can choose tenants based on subjective criteria, a practice that is often hard to identify, regulate and monitor'.[lv] This situation is compounded by the lack of housing provision, in particular state led housing that is focussed on public and affordable provision.

EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

The current **European Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion**[lvi] emphasises the importance of ensuring effective integration of migrants, stating that it is a 'social and economic investment that makes European societies more cohesive, resilient and prosperous'. Gender mainstreaming is outlined as one of the key principles and values of this plan because migrant women and girls face distinct structural barriers, often as a result of traditional views of women's role in the home and in relation to care activities. The plan sets out a series of actions in key sectoral areas, with housing being one, on the basis that access to adequate and affordable housing is a central determinant of successful integration.

The transition to housing and support services varies considerably across Member States.[lvii] In some countries, housing is arranged or allocated regionally, while in others, including Ireland, a greater degree of independence is needed to secure housing. The **Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU)** obliges Member States to ensure people with international protection have access to accommodation on the same basis as other legally resident non-Europeans and to prevent discrimination. However, there are no specific provisions relating to the transition from reception centres, and many people with international protection face homelessness once maximum stays expire, without alternative housing.

Under EU law, **the Race Equality Directive**[lviii] ensures equality of treatment from public or private landlords and estate agents in deciding whether to let or sell properties to particular individuals but remains difficult to enforce. The European Council on Refugees and Exiles report[lix] gives several instances of countries where bureaucratic protocols hamper the process of securing independent accommodation because people with international protection are confronted with 'catch-22' situations and administrative requirements they cannot possibly fulfil.

Under the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**[lx] while there is no specific right to housing conferred by the charter, article 34.3 stipulates that it is the responsibility of each State to combat social exclusion and poverty, and it recognises the right to social and housing assistance to ensure a decent life for those without resources to provide this for themselves.

While not legally binding, the **European Pillar of Social Rights**[lxi] is a set of principles intended to guide social policy in the EU and it stresses the importance of access to social housing and housing assistance of good quality for those in need. However, it sees the provision of affordable and adequate housing and housing policy in general as the responsibility of the Member States.

FINDINGS

The focus group and interviews generated a wide range of insights into the realities faced by lone parents with international protection as they tried to secure housing. Many overlapping challenges were described – from racism experienced at rental viewings to the administrative complexity of social protection systems to the emotional toll of repeated moves across the country.

The research data was reviewed and coded by the lead consultant, working closely with the peer researchers, to identify the strongest recurring patterns. Five themes stood out clearly across the focus group and interviews with the participants, they are:

1. **DISCRIMINATION:** Experiences of discrimination were described as layered and centred on race/ethnicity, family formation, and receipt of HAP.
2. **STRESS OF RECEIVING THE EVICTION LETTER:** Stress experienced by lone parents who had received a letter telling them they were required to leave Direct Provision imminently, with no information about where to go or what to do.
3. **INADEQUATE SUPPORTS:** The experience of people with international protection that the supports made available to them are simply not working, coupled with the sense that many are unaware of some existing sources of help.
4. **ISSUES WITH HAP:** Widespread issues in accessing HAP and subsequent difficulties in identifying properties that would be suitable for rental under this scheme.
5. **ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS:** Administrative obstacles and burdens, including the inappropriate use of the Local Connection Test.

The following section discusses these findings and how participants describe the experiences. In some places, the names of some places and local authorities are redacted to protect the identity of participants where it is felt they might be identifiable. Pseudonyms are also used throughout.

1. DISCRIMINATION

Finding 1: Lone parents leaving international protection accommodation experience multiple levels of discrimination from landlords which further reduces an already limited supply of accommodation given Irelands housing crises.

A vast majority of participants shared examples of experiences of discrimination based on their race/ethnicity, family status, and being in receipt of HAP. Often discrimination was intersectional or based on a combination of personal characteristics. Participants reported in some instances of being clearly told the landlord would not rent to HAP recipients or certain family types. In other instances the discrimination was more indirect with landlords or realtors changing their tone, hanging up, or quickly stating a property was no longer available after hearing their accent, learning of their race or ethnicity, or learning that they have HAP. Therefore, the known limited supply of rental housing in Ireland is even smaller and more challenging to access for lone parents leaving IPAS centres.

DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RACE/ETHNICITY

"I feel like they look at colour or other times they just read your surname and never get back to you".

Angela, mother of two children

The overwhelming majority of participants described situations they had encountered in attempting to source accommodation, which indicated discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity. Most participants were Black, African nationals, and their experience was that being Black made it more difficult to find a tenancy.

This was the most reported experience among the participants indicating that this kind of discrimination is pervasive among those renting properties. It very much aligns with Ní Raghallaigh et al (2016)[lxii], Murphy and Stapleton (2024)[lxiii], Lima (2025)[lxiv] Gusciute et al (2022)[lxv], and Grotti et (2018)[lxvi] who found that migrants (particularly Black and Brown people) face discrimination and racism in the housing market in Ireland.

"There's this other thing that we suffer a lot as Blacks in the society; if one person does something wrong we'll all have to face consequences. So, if the person has rented the accommodation to one Black family and they did something wrong, they're not going to rent the accommodation to any other Black person, so we actually suffer the consequences of one another. We're being judged by the actions of one person?"

Nadia, mother of four children

This kind of negative stereotyping is not unique to Ireland and has been cited as a barrier across Europe, along with a reluctance on the part of landlords to rent their property to beneficiaries of international protection in the private housing market.[lxvii] In 2023 the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights reported that discrimination against people of African descent and Muslims in the EU has not improved since 2016,[lxviii] and it found that it was very commonly reported when searching for accommodation. In Europe as in Ireland, the situation seems worse for Black migrants who experience more severe and frequent harassment.

DISCRIMINATION BASED ON FAMILY STATUS AND GENDER

"And then maybe, because I'm a single mother, because I went to check a house in Wicklow, and they told me bluntly that the landlord would want to have a family there".

Elena, mother of one child

Lone parents experience high levels of discrimination in accessing housing and live in poorer quality housing, including disadvantaged neighbourhood environments. The participants sampled in this study mirror the demographics of the lone parent population in Ireland in that the majority are headed by women.

Interestingly, one of the two male participants in the research felt gender discrimination was at play in his lack of success in finding accommodation. In his case he suspected that his family status and the fact that all family members were male worked against him and that landlords made their decisions based on male stereotypes.

"When you interact with people or potential landlords, you know, and you're a single dad with three kids, it's sometimes maybe not appealing for them. Maybe because it's ...they think three boys. Maybe they think it would be too loud in the house. Maybe they think there'll be no order".

Michael, father of three children

DISCRIMINATION BASED ON BEING IN RECEIPT OF HAP

"When I see a house they tell me they don't want HAP. Man, the landlord would tell me they don't want HAP, the ones I see are expensive, and I can't afford".

Nisha, mother of three children

The participants also refer to how frustrating and difficult it is to prove this kind of discrimination, because like the other issues discussed, these conversations usually happen over the phone, so they have no evidence and feel they cannot make a complaint.

"Not all landlords accept HAP, you know, so I think they're not coming out straight to say it – but it's what it is because some of them, they will call and ask if I have HAP. Once I say yes, they drop the call. It's not being documented. It's not being said in an email where you can see. I can take it up and say, "can you see that I have evidence that they don't take HAP", you know? It's just basically on phone calls".

Aisha, mother of one child

INTERSECTIONALITY OF DISCRIMINATION

"So basically, I know I'm not going to get it because I'm the only black person between them, so they prefer giving it to them or someone who's going to pay cash and I'm paying with HAP so there's difference. So they might just tell me 'send your details and your reference' which I'm going to send but 100% I know he's not going to get to me".

Mary, mother of one child

The participants describe experiencing multiple levels of discrimination, sometimes on the basis of being a HAP prospective tenant and a person of colour and/or a lone parent. This kind of intersectional discrimination, when two or more grounds operate simultaneously and interact in a specific way, produces distinct and specific forms of discrimination.

Intersectional discrimination carries a heavy burden, not simply in terms of rights delayed and denied and access to services blocked, but equally in terms of the mental health of the person victimised.

One interviewee wanted people to know that she did not want special treatment because she is Black, or a lone parent or a HAP recipient, but rather a greater understanding of the heavier burden migrants carry in sourcing accommodation.

"Just to say it is not that we want some special treatment or anything like that, but it seems like service providers, Direct Provision managers, IPAS, the local council office, potential landlords need at least to be kind of mindful of the challenges migrants face. It seems to me that they're not aware, if it is hard for the local people, it is three, four times harder for us. So, their approach should be a little bit more human. Not that we are special but a less downgrading treatment. Like typically, an Irish person, they have families, they have friends, they have, you know, local connections".

Eve, mother of three children

2. STRESS OF RECEIVING THE EVICTION LETTER

Finding 2: Having to relocate due to eviction from IPAS or transfer to emergency accommodation, disrupts the sense of stability and security, inhibits integration, increases reliance on social protection and amplifies stress and anxiety.

Almost all eligible participants in the study had experienced receiving an eviction letter signalling a change in policy towards the accommodation of families within IPAS centres, which caused huge upset, stress and fear among families and saw them being evicted into homelessness. The participants were unanimous in describing the experience as frightening, stressful, destabilising and regressive for them and their children.

EVICTION LETTERS IMPACT ON BEING ABLE TO CARE FOR YOUR CHILDREN

"And for me it would be the lack of consideration for children with a disability. So it doesn't matter if the child is getting all that support from the current school, as soon as you get that eviction letter you just have to move. My son had all kinds of (...) He had an SNA that worked with him in the school, he had a social worker that goes to school to check up on him and during the eviction thing I wrote to IPAS I wrote to the Department of Justice to say the school this child will be attending in (XXX) they don't (...) we even had parents threatening if these children start attending this school we are going to remove our kids".

Elaine, mother of three children

The above reflection indicates the stress of a mother with a child with additional needs who fears the loss of supports that have built up over time through her advocacy for her child, and starting again from scratch in a new place without these supports. In addition, the child would be enrolling in a school where it has been made clear by some of the parents that the children of the IPAS residence would not be welcome.

Another woman described how her efforts to integrate into Irish society through graduate education and development as well as her efforts to provide a stable and well-furnished home for her children were threatened by the eviction letter.

"And for me when I got my residence status (permission to stay in the country) I started buying things with the intention to leave, so I bought beds, (...) a dining table, a deep freezer because I have kids and I have to cook for the week. (...) And when I was having those meetings about being forced to move and I said look, I bought stuff for my house and we're going to be moved to a one bedroom, (...) and they said we just don't care, you just have to move. Get some storage and do that. And I'm doing my masters in UCC so I was telling them that and saying but I have college. I don't know where you're taking me to, my kids are in school in XXX and I'm paying from my pocket to go to the university. And he was very brutal and said this is not school accommodation".

Alison, mother of four children

The stress of the eviction letter is felt very particularly by lone parents, who shoulder the burden of family care alone.

"If I am moved to God know where, what happens to my job, how do I start looking for a job, how do I support my children alone, being a lone parent is not easy".

Kate, mother of three children

EVICTIONS LETTERS ARE STALLING OR REVERSING INTEGRATION

Another participant describes her absolute despair and feeling of being 'back to zero' because the eviction is not simply the loss of her home, it's also the loss of her job and income, her stability and that of her children.

"Like I wake up in the middle of the night alone, not knowing. I have the money, I work full time, still it's hard. I am deep down because I'm in the middle of nowhere at the moment. I am feeling lost in the same place as I was when I just arrived, like everything that I have done so far was nothing, like I have not made any progress at all. I feel lost in this whole process, this eviction. It's been a few weeks now, and in July I don't know where they are taking us to, where we will call home. It's affecting my mental health".

Grace, mother of three children

EVICTION LETTERS IMPACT ON PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH

For those parents who have already been evicted and moved to a new county to emergency homeless accommodation, the move is traumatising for them and their children.

"You know, when someone is in another world, like you just want to sleep and don't wake up. To be honest, it's so heartbreaking. It's sort of traumatising, and my brain can't even take it. You know, I've been broken to pieces because of this decision and seeing my children, sometimes my first one will be crying like "mom, I don't want this place, it's too small", you know, but what can I do and to just be pushing it? Yeah, this place is not really good".

Caroline, mother of two children

"I'm a mother, a single mother, waking up at night, looking at my children sleeping. He was not listening, I felt invisible they don't care".

Grace, mother of three children

Issues with stress and mental health were a recurring theme for the participants in the discussion of this issue.

"I remember the shock, of oh God where do I start from, where am I going to, how will I do this, so it's so stressful".

Miriam, mother of two children

A feeling of being completely at a loss in terms of where to turn or what to do next was also common among the interviewees:

"There is so much misinformation. Imagine trying to do childcare, looking for the right information, looking for a house. No response for viewing, and then there's government on your neck, asking you to leave, and you don't know where they're taking you to, you have your job, with zero support from social welfare and doing all this alone, that's how I live everyday".

Kate, mother of three children

This chimes very much with Ní Raghallaigh et al[lxix] who found that individuals having achieved status followed by receipt of an eviction letter did not know what to do and felt overwhelmed, given their often scant social networks, and lack of understanding of complex social protection and housing systems. This caused anxiety and confusion for many people with international protection at a time that should have been spent transitioning to the next step in their lives.

3. INADEQUATE SUPPORTS

Finding 3: The supports available to people as they transition from international protection to private accommodation is often ineffective, inconsistent, or demoralising.

Practically all the participants in the research felt that the supports that are supposed to help people move on from Direct Provision once they receive their status were deeply inadequate. While these supports are often referenced by the government departments when, for example, people received the evictions letter, the experiences shared in this study show that they rarely work as intended. Many participants described feeling on their own when trying to find housing – unsure where to turn and unconvinced that the services that were available could help.

THE LOW VISIBILITY AND LIMITED REMIT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY INTEGRATION TEAMS

A significant majority of the eligible participants in this study were unaware of the existence of Local Authority Integration Teams, and none had benefited directly from their help. This is disappointing given the centrality of the LAIT mechanism in Ireland's approach to integration at a local level. It is doubly disappointing given that LAITs have 4 key target groupings, and people with international protection is one of them. However, LAITs are very new. A briefing document[lxx] from the Department of the Taoiseach, in October 2024, stated that each local authority now had a LAIT, so they are only in the process of developing their model of work. Furthermore, they have no brief in relation to aiding the accommodation search process, particularly as NGOs (De Paul and Peter McVerry Trust) are contracted by the State specifically to provide housing support services.

Nonetheless, it is hoped that they might in future provide a point of contact and signposting for people with international protection as they seek to navigate the considerable bureaucracy associated with applying for accommodation after achieving status.

THE SUPPORTS BY HOUSING NGOS NOT SUITABLE OR HELPFUL

Also worrying is that people with international protection participating in this study saw no advantage or gain for themselves in interacting with the housing support services contracted by the State. Given the extent of the housing crisis, it must be recognised that the capacity of these organisations to find adequate accommodation for the number of families with international protection currently experiencing homelessness or housing precarity is seriously compromised.


Thandiwe Moyo

"We have people from XXX who are supposed to be helpful – they are just the same, they call and ask us have you found a house? They open their laptop and go to Daft and ask have you seen this? Did you apply for this?"

Julia, mother of one child

Nonetheless, the participants, while acknowledging the kindness of some individuals providing the services, seem to disregard their usefulness and capacity to help. A repeated comment was that the services' approach was to refer people with international protection to accommodation websites like Daft, who in the case of the participants in this study, had already thoroughly scanned these sites.

"We were introduced to one organisation whom I don't want to mention by name, that was supposed to assist us find homes, but to be honest, they come asking us what it is we have done. Sometimes meeting them is not even worth it but stressful".

Elena, mother of one child

While there is no doubt that some people with international protection may need support in accessing housing websites or may have low digital literacy, this was not the case among the participants in this study. Their need for help was primarily around taking practical steps to address the discrimination they faced. As one interviewee suggested they would have appreciated someone making the initial phone call regarding a property for them, so they would not be discounted at the first step based on their accent. The second stage at which they expressed the need for help and support is throughout the HAP application and processing cycle, and in relation to bureaucracy with the local authority, generally. As one interviewee put it:

(They should) "come to us and say since you get your status, this is now how much you will be paying for rent and also practically assist us with private rentals, not the way it is now where somebody bring a laptop and do the same thing I am already doing, applying for the same house I already applied for in Daft.ie – that is not real support".

Grace, mother of three children

4. ISSUES WITH HOUSING ASSISTANCE PAYMENT

Finding 4: The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme fails to meet families' real housing needs, leaving many unable to use it in practice.

The experiences shared in this study show that for many people leaving Direct Provision, HAP simply doesn't work as intended. Families described being approved for the scheme but unable to find any properties within the set limits, facing confusion over eligibility, or being penalised for trying to pay extra to secure a home. What is supposed to be a bridge into stable housing is not working as intended, as demonstrated below.

HAP RATES ARE NOT ALIGNED WITH THE REALITY OF RENTAL COSTS

Participants recounted being turned down for specific properties on the basis that they would be putting their children at risk of poverty if the household has to pay a larger proportion of the rent than the allowed 15%-20% under the HAP scheme. However, the number of HAP eligible properties available for rent is so low that the families end up renting properties without the aid of HAP and therefore experiencing a much higher level of housing cost overburden.

"Now I'm with XXX Co Council my allowance there is €1460, the least you will see for a 3 bed house in XXX is €2000. And I'm getting €1460. And I'm presenting it to the County Council and they say no, you are putting your child at risk of child poverty. You cannot. But at the moment I'm paying €1200 by myself to rent a 2 bedroom house so if I can afford that why are you saying that. He said it is because you are dealing with that person privately, the consequences would be between you and the landlord. The council can't take the same kind of risk or responsibility".

Elaine, mother of three children

The amount of top-ups that tenants are required to pay is getting ever higher and there is an urgent need to review HAP rates to allow for full transparency in relation to the scheme. When tenants are increasingly required to pay make additional payments without the explicit knowledge of the local authority it has a negative impact on the integrity of the entire HAP system.

"The fact that I'm paying my full rent while I am an approved HAP applicant really is breaking my heart".

Pauline, mother of one child

This situation may be particularly difficult for lone parents with international protection in Direct Provision. This is as a result of childcare responsibilities and a history of lower social protection benefits while in IPAS accommodation. People are generally reliant on the Daily Expenses Allowance as opposed to the One Parent Family Payment for example so they will often lack the financial resources to be able to pay top-ups. So those most in need are locked out of this social housing support.

"I think the financial barrier is one of the main issues. Yeah, because actually, I was just doing part-time and then I'm looking for accommodation, and most of the houses that I was seeing were very expensive and the money that I was allocated by HAP was small. The houses I was seeing were on the average €1500 and my HAP was €650 how would I afford the top-up when I was working part-time?"

Laura, mother of two children

5. ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS

Finding 5: Existing policies and programmes are ineffective or worse, a barrier to attaining housing and integration due to complexity, lack of clear communication, and lack of flexibility.

Many of the participants described spending months caught in layers of forms, waiting lists and conflicting information. What should be straightforward processes were often becoming mazes of bureaucracy that they found really challenging to navigate alone. This results in not just delays with getting themselves and their children houses, but complete emotional burnout.

THE CHALLENGE OF NAVIGATING THE SOCIAL HOUSING SYSTEM

Most participants spoke of the stress and frustration they experienced while they tried to navigate a seemingly impenetrable, inconsistent and opaque system of social housing supports.

"It's just hard, today they say fill this form, next is another form, you meet a different person every time. You end up being in the middle. You don't know who to talk to, it's like you are just floating inside the sea".

Kate, mother of three children

THE LACK OF FLEXIBLE SUPPORT

There are additional hurdles for lone parents who have children with additional needs. These obstacles must be surmounted while also working, supporting the children and looking for suitable accommodation. The additional burden is heavy and exhausting.

"If you are applying for social housing and you have a child with additional needs, they give you a special form (to) fill out stating your child's needs and one part will be filled by you and the other part is to be filled by your GP and the third part either by a public health nurse or an OT or psychologist or whoever it is that is dealing with your child. And unfortunately in my case I filled the form to the best of my knowledge and I submitted it last September (...) I went back to (X) County Council to ask them what the issue is with the application and the lady (...) said oh you made a mistake on your form and since September the previous year nobody had notified me. She told me that the form was filled by 2 GPs instead of one GP and one OT so they gave me a fresh form and I had to start again".

Elaine, mother of three children

THE MENTAL HEALTH TOLL THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS TAKES

Many international protection applicants and people with international protection embody significant trauma because of their experiences that causes them to seek international protection. This is compounded by the mental health challenges involved in years spent within the Direct Provision system. Receiving permission to stay in the country is a cause for celebration, but the process of achieving adequate accommodation is instead yet another mountain to climb.

"My stress doubled after I got my documents, because when the document comes, it comes with too much stress. Support is needed, someone to go to".

Kate, mother of three children

Similarly, Stapleton and Murphy[lxxi] also highlight that administrative barriers can negatively impact mental health. The burden of navigating housing and welfare systems, which can be particularly difficult for individuals with limited language skills or understanding of the system exacerbates mental health difficulties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

1	**STOP THE TRANSFERS OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN FROM IPAS CENTRES.** The Department of Justice must stop moving families away from their communities and schools; instead, support and improve their ability to transition locally.	**RATIONALE:** While this is a deeply distressing policy for families and children which has a severe impact on their mental health, it is also a short-sighted one. Many have already built links through schools, community networks and work. Forcing them to start again elsewhere breaks that progress in integration and often pushes families into dependence on state support. It is in the State's own interest to support integration where people have already begun to put down roots.
2	**LOCAL AUTHORITIES MUST STOP THE INNAPPROPRIATE USE OF THE LOCAL CONNECTION TEST.** The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage stated clearly that people leaving the international protection system are not required to prove a local connection, and that local authorities can use their discretion under Regulation 5(c) of the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 to accept applications where there are exceptional circumstances.	**RATIONALE:** Both the research and consultations with migrant rights and legal experts show that the Local Connection Test continues to be applied unevenly across the country. Families leaving IPAS are often still being asked to prove a local link even though Government guidance says this should not happen. Local authorities already have the power to show flexibility under Regulation 5(c), yet many don't. If local authorities were to exercise this flexibility, this could support families who are attempting to transition from international protection.
3	**REVIEW AND RESOURCE EXISTING SUPPORTS.** An independent review should be conducted of the supports currently available to people exiting IPAS accommodation to assess their effectiveness and whether they are adequately resourced to appropriately tailor support for people.	**RATIONALE:** Both the literature and the interviews make clear that the "supports" the State refers to are not working in practice and that most people leaving IPAS do not benefit from them. The gap between what is said to exist on paper with regards to support and what people experience on the ground is wide, and until that is addressed, these supports will continue to fall short of their purpose.

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND LOCAL AUTHORITY RESPONSIBILITIES

4	**RAISE HOUSING ASSISTANCE PAYMENT (HAP) LIMITS.** Current HAP rates fall below market rents, leaving thousands of people unable to secure housing. The base rates and maximum thresholds should be increased to reflect real rental costs.	**RATIONALE:** HAP came up across nearly every interview as a key barrier and a recent investigation by the Ombudsman echoes our findings. The inadequacy of HAP rates effectively locks people out of the rental market and requires urgent attention.
5	**STRENGTHEN AND PROMOTE THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITY INTEGRATION TEAMS (LAITS).** They should be supported to help families leaving IPAS find housing locally and to link more effectively with local housing services. Additionally, they should be made more visible at local level, with clear information for migrants and other service providers on the support they offer.	**RATIONALE:** LAITs were established to coordinate integration supports but most participants had never heard of them. The literature also shows that integration supports remain fragmented. LAITs could play a stronger role if adequately resourced and clearly mandated to support housing transitions.

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND LOCAL AUTHORITY RESPONSIBILITIES

6	**ADDRESS DISCRIMINATION IN THE PRIVATE RENTAL MARKET.** Increase enforcement of equality legislation and run awareness campaigns with landlords, letting agents and tenants to reduce bias and ensure people know their rights. This should be accompanied by adequate resourcing of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) and the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) so they can carry out their respective duties effectively.	**RATIONALE:** Discrimination was the single most consistent theme across this research and unless appropriately responded to by the government, will persist for families and individuals across Ireland.

STRUCTURAL REFORMS

7	**DEVELOP A NEW NATIONAL MIGRANT INTEGRATION STRATEGY WITH HOUSING AT ITS CORE.** A new strategy should be informed by the commitment in the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision and principle of "integration from day one" which includes practical housing supports.	**RATIONALE:** Ireland has been without an updated integration strategy for several years, leaving no clear policy framework for people moving from international protection to independent living and while the White Paper for Ending Direct Provision has fallen off the political agenda, it retains practical and strong suggestions which should be built on and not lost.
8	**MAKE POLICY WORK FOR WOMEN AND LONE PARENTS.** Recognise the compounded challenges and barriers faced by migrant women and lone parents by integrating gendered analysis into all housing and migration policy.	**RATIONALE:** The findings clearly show how gender, race and family status intersect to create compounding challenges for people – yet often policy tends to treat everyone the same. Committing to a gender mainstreaming approach is essential if strategies are to respond to those most at the sharpest edge of discrimination.
9	**RECOGNISE ACCESS TO ADEQUATE HOUSING AS A RIGHT IN THE IRISH CONSTITUTION.** In tandem with increasing housing stock, this is needed to improve equitable access for all to this fundamental human need.	**RATIONALE:** The evidence complied in this report all point to the same truth – housing should be a basic right. Without a stable home, everything else suffers, from education, to work, or simply to a sense of belonging. Recognising the right to housing in our Constitution would be a transformational act for future generations.

PEER RESEARCH

10	**ENSURE FUTURE RESEARCH MEANINGFULLY INVOLVES THOSE MOST AFFECTED.** Future research on issues raised in this report and beyond should include people with lived experience in every stage of the process. Future research projects should plan for proper training, support, and recognition of peer researchers from the start.	**RATIONALE:** This research showed the value of peer research: when people with lived experience genuinely lead the process, the analysis is stronger, more grounded, and reflect the realities rights holders are living every day.

CONCLUSION

This paper describes the challenges encountered by lone parents with international protection, the vast majority of whom are women. It records their attempts to achieve access to independent housing within a context of a market that is increasingly constrained, and in a time where previous protections against evicting families from Direct Provision into emergency accommodation did not exist.

It makes clear the urgent importance of an integration strategy which explicitly considers the role of housing access in facilitating integration, particularly for families and particularly given what we now know about homelessness and its uniquely destructive effects on children. As put by Mercy Law, *'these experiences of ontological insecurity and exclusion intersect with the inadequate living conditions for family life and impact children's physical, mental and emotional health and development (…) in a way that constitutes an adverse childhood experience'*.[lxxii]

The findings of this research largely echo other analyses about migrant women and housing, but this study has added another layer to that evidence. By bringing the voices of women who have lived through the system themselves, it speaks to the reality behind policy briefs and statistics. The peer-led approach has given depth and context and should stand as a testament to their agency.

Meeting the challenges raised in this research demands more than policy tweaks – it calls for a deeper change in thinking and practice. Gender must be recognised as a central factor shaping access to housing and integration outcomes. A gender mainstreaming approach – informed by an understanding of intersectionality – is essential if housing and integration strategies are to respond to the lived realities of migrant women, lone parents and others at the sharpest edge of exclusion.

This research also sits within a much broader national reality. Ireland's housing crisis continues to deepen, and lone parents are among those most affected – facing the highest rates of housing need, poverty and discrimination in the system. This paper could not explore in full the question of housing supply, but that shortage forms the backdrop to everything described here. Without a major increase in affordable and social housing, policy reforms alone will not remove the barriers faced by people with international protection or by lone parents more broadly.

It therefore remains essential that housing policies understand adequate accommodation as a right – not a privilege – and that equality, gender and migration are treated as interlinked issues rather than separate strands of policy. Only then can Ireland meet its own commitments to integration, equality, and the right to housing for all.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this research focused on the specific issue of accessing private accommodation, several related issues emerged that warrant further exploration. Consultation with other organisations working with this group pointed to barriers specifically in relation to accessing emergency homeless accommodation at the point of exit from IPAS.

During the validation phase with the peer researchers, another concern also surfaced – one that did not arise organically in the interviews but is known within their own networks. Many people moving out of Direct Provision have encountered scams when trying to rent privately, often losing deposits or payments to fraudulent landlords. This appears to be happening at a worrying scale, yet remains largely undocumented. Further research could help to understand the extent of this problem and identify measures to better protect this group of people.

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT LIST

GENDER	COUNTRY	YEARS IN IRELAND	PROVINCE	HOUSING SITUATION
Female	Zimbabwe	3	Munster	Direct Provision
Female	Congo	9	Munster	Private Rental
Female	Nigeria	3	Munster	Private Rental
Female	Nigeria	2	Munster	Direct Provision
Female	Nigeria	5	Leinster	Direct Provision
Female	Zimbabwe	6	Leinster	Private Rental
Female	Zimbabwe	6	Leinster	Private Rental
Female	Angola	3	Leinster	Direct Provision
Female	Nigeria	6	Leinster	Direct Provision
Female	Nigeria	5	Leinster	Direct Provision
Female	Nigeria	5	Leinster	Direct Provision
Female	Zimbabwe	9	Leinster	Private Rental
Female	Somalia	6	Leinster	Homeless Accommodation
Female	Malawi	11	Unclear	Private Rental
Female	Cameroon	9	Leinster	Private Rental
Female	Tanzania	5	Connacht	Homeless Accommodation
Male	Pakistan	12	Connacht	Direct Provision
Female	Nigeria	7	Connacht	Direct Provision
Female	Zimbabwe	8	Connacht	Private Rental
Female	Malawi	3	Munster	Direct Provision
Female	Botswana	3	Leinster	Direct Provision
Male	South Africa	3	Ulster	Direct Provision
Female	South Africa	6	Connacht	Homeless Accommodation
Female	Nigeria	11	Leinster	Private Rental
Female	Zimbabwe	7	Leinster	Private Rental
Female	Kenya	8	Connacht	Homeless Accommodation
Female	South Africa	5	Leinster	Private Rental
Female	Nigeria	8	Munster	Private Rental
Female	Nigeria	6	Leinster	Private Rental

ENDNOTES

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"It is not that we want some special treatment or anything like that, but it seems like service providers, Direct Provision managers, IPAS, the local council office, potential landlords need at least to be kind of mindful of the challenges migrants face. It seems to me that they're not aware, if it is hard for the local people, it is three, four times harder for us. So, their approach should be a little bit more human. Not that we are special but a less downgrading treatment. Like typically, an Irish person, they have families, they have friends, they have, you know, local connections."

Eve, mother of three children

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