

# FRONTLINE

The Social Work Action Network (Ireland) Bulletin



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## EDITORIAL: Why we are against Neoliberal Social Work Conferencing!

SWAN welcomes the global social work conference **IFSW/IASSW/ICSW BI-ANNUAL WORLD SOCIAL WORK CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN DUBLIN 4-7 JULY 2018**. It is a very important conference and it is great that it is hosted in Dublin, giving us an opportunity to discuss, learn and network.

However, we are deeply concerned about the



registration fee being imposed. A top fee of between €575 (up to 6 April) and €775 (from 7 April) is far too high and does not even include the cost of accommodation. In Dublin, this is presently on average in excess of €130 each night. Travel costs are also excluded.

The fee structure (see p 2) reflects neoliberal values and not the more progressive values of social work. Service users, students, retired practitioners and current practitioners simply cannot afford these costs. Neither can many academics, including those retired. The event risks becoming an elitist showcase gathering for the privileged.

We are also concerned about the way the inflated costs exclude those based in 'austerity' hit countries such as Greece, and further afield, in the Global South. Colleagues from low income countries with rising levels of inequality and budget cuts will be entirely excluded because of the fees, accommodation and travel costs.

## RIP-OFF IRELAND, HOMELESS IRELAND

Many in Ireland are still suffering from hardships because of the bail out of the banks and continuing 'austerity'. The homeless numbers are also rising daily. As social workers we constantly deal with the consequences of social inequalities. The conference, its costs, values and politics must reflect all of these issues.

We are, therefore, calling on the Scientific Committee and associated conference organisers to immediately and substantially reduce the registration fee in order to make the event more inclusive.

The SWAN statement (on p 1) was signed by over 150 social work academics, practitioners,

#### The conference fee structure until 6 April 2018

Member of IASSW, ICSW, IFSW or husITa	€575.00
Non – Member	€650.00
Developing Country Member of IASSW, ICSW or IFSW *	€375.00
Developing Country Participants – Non – Member *	€495.00
IFSW Friends Member	€525.00
Member Student	€295.00
Non Member Student	€345.00
Accompanying Person	€250.00

students and statements located across the globe.

**This is was the very brief response from the chair of the conference organising committee to the reasonable concerns expressed about the conference fee structure...**

*‘Thank you for your correspondence regarding the SWSD2018 Conference fees.*

*The Conference Local Organising Committee is committed to having a conference that is as affordable as possible. Keeping fees to the minimum was a consideration from the outset.*

*As you will appreciate, organising a global conference of this size incurs significant costs. With this in mind, the Local Organising Committee set out to provide as inclusive an event as possible. We have prioritised making fees more affordable for developing countries and maximising the number of scholarships to colleagues from these countries’.*

**John Brennan, On behalf of the Local Organising Committee, Social Work and Social Development Conference 2018**

## **An open letter to the IFSW Secretary-General Rory Truell & Global President Ruth Stark, Annamaria Campanini, the president of the IASSW & Eva Holmberg-Herrström, President of the ICSW**

Let us be clear. We regard the 2018 conference as an important and exciting opportunity to bring together social work academics, practitioners, policy-makers and service users from all corners of the globe to discuss and debate the key issues facing social work. These include obscene levels of poverty and inequality, the impact of climate change, the rise of racism and xenophobia, the refugee crisis, gender-based violence, and the crisis in mental health. The conference can provide a forum to discuss how we as a profession can respond to these issues in a way that promotes our core value of social justice. Our concern, however, is that the proposed conference registration fees will make it impossible for many of those who would wish to participate in these debates to do so. Challenging social exclusion is something which all of us would see as central to our day-to-day practice, whether as front-line workers or social work educators. We should not, therefore, be mirroring such exclusion in our global conferences.

Precisely because we see the conference in this way, we do not support the call from several of the respondents to our Global Letter of Protest for a conference boycott. We are sympathetic, however, to this call as an understandable response to these exorbitant fees and, in practice, many people will ‘boycott’ the conference simply because they cannot afford to go. Instead we urge the Local Organising Committee to immediately review conference fee structure with a view to placing a much higher priority on making it possible for all those who wish to attend to do so.

For a start, this should include offering a substantial number of free places to service user

organisations, as well as to asylum seekers and refugees. Secondly, there should be reduced rates for practitioners, early career academics and retired colleagues who will normally be unable to secure external funding. Such measures will undoubtedly mean cutting costs in some areas while also exploring alternative funding sources, including, for example, the Irish Government. While this will obviously involve more administrative work, this is a price worth paying if it results in a conference which is much more socially inclusive than the proposed one can be likely to be.

Based on the views of the global signatories, we would also request that you give serious consideration to introducing reasonably priced 'day-rate' registration fees in order to widen participation. In terms of accommodation issue, perhaps assistance could be provided by the Dublin-located Universities and then there would not need to be so much reliance of expensive private hotel provision.

We also suggest that, following the Dublin event, the three international organisations involved set up a working party to ensure that, as a global profession, we do not find ourselves in this embarrassing position ever again. While clearly the organization of such conferences presents particular logistical and financial challenges, if social inclusion is the over-riding principle then it should not be beyond the wit of those involved to ensure that those who are passionate about social work, whether as practitioners, social work educators or service users, and who wish to be engaged in discussions and debates about its future should not be prevented from doing so due to lack of money. More than any other profession, social work, to paraphrase Gandhi, should aim to be the change it wishes to see.

In solidarity

**Professor Iain Ferguson, Social Work Action Network, Scotland**

**Paul Michael Garrett, PhD, Social Work Action Network, Republic of Ireland**

**Professor Michael Lavalette, Social Work Action Network, England**

**Professor Walter A Lorenz, Free University of Bozen/Bolzano, Italy & Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic**

**Dr Zoleka Soji, Head of Social Work, Nelson Mandela University in Port Elizabeth & Deputy president of the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI), South Africa**

**Dimitra - Dora Teloni, Assistant Professor Social Work Department TEI of Athens, Greece**

**End Direct Provision Now!!  
Support the Public  
Demonstration in Galway,  
by Caroline Forde Galway  
Anti-Racism Network  
[GARN]**

*Never again! How could people have stood idly by and let this happen?!*

Such are the outcries oft heard following the acknowledgement of state sanctioned abuse. We are horrified and baffled, all from the safety of distance, be it geographical or temporal. And so, the pattern repeats itself. The institutions assume a new guise, but the abuse continues, largely unchallenged. One of the most pressing social issues of our time is the Direct Provision (DP) system established to accommodate asylum seekers. For far too long, the voices of those seeking asylum in Ireland have been silenced. Recent articles in the Irish Examiner (Dec 7th) and Irish Times (Dec 13th) provide an invaluable



insight into the cruel reality they face.

Vulnerable and often traumatised, they flee their homes in search of sanctuary, only to find that hope is a dangerous thing in a neoliberal world that recasts asylum seekers as a problem. And the answer – the industrial schools of old are effectively reincarnated as DP Centres – places of exclusion, stigma and institutional abuse. Meanwhile, the average Irish citizen, either unaware or unwilling to know the truth, believes the country is being ‘over-run by foreigners’ receiving preferential treatment.

As the movement demanding an end to the DP system increasingly gains momentum, the bitter truth becomes more difficult to ignore. Introduced in 1999, the same year then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern issued a public apology to survivors of the industrial schools, this system was established to provide temporary shelter. Eighteen years later and little has changed. Currently, more than 4,300 people, including 1,000 children, live in 34 accommodation centres around the country. Accommodation is provided on a full-board basis and the cost of meals, heat, laundry etc. is paid directly by the State. What more could one ask for, you may ask. However, as highlighted by MASI (Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland) and the personal stories shared by

individual residents, these bare facts are devoid of context belie the abysmal conditions asylum seekers forced to live in. They hide the fact that this is a system that denies their basic human rights.

Though figures have been rising recently, between 2005 and 2012, Ireland had one of the lowest acceptance rates for asylum seekers. Instead of the original six month waiting period, individuals spend an average of three years and eight months not knowing if they will be granted refugee status. In the meantime, they are prohibited from working, and are not entitled to social welfare, social housing or free third-level education. They receive a paltry allowance (€21.60 per week), are given inadequate food, and are subject to the dictates of those running the centres. Isolated from the community, they are shorn of dignity and autonomy, not to mention psychological and physical well-being. Meanwhile, the private contractors providing DP accommodation and food have received in excess of €850 million from the Irish State to date. Not unlike the religious orders before them, these people are literally profiting from the suffering of vulnerable individuals. Therefore, in addition to the moral and social imperatives, putting an end to Direct Provision makes sound economic sense.

Unsurprisingly, the DP system has received strong criticism from the UN, international human rights groups and the Irish State’s Special Rapporteur on Child Protection, among others. On 18 November, United Against Racism organised a national demonstration in Dublin as part of a campaign to end this inhumane system, stop deportations and grant asylum seekers the right to work. Thousands of people from all over the country marched in solidarity, demanding change. GARN (Galway Anti-Racism Network) was among the 30 groups present, making an important contribution

by raising funds to transport asylum seekers and their allies to the demonstration. There are two DP Centres in Galway, the Eglinton Hotel in Salthill (women and children), and the Great Western, off Eyre Square (men). Building on the momentum generated by such instrumental groups as United Against Racism and MASI.

Building on the momentum generated by such instrumental groups as United Against Racism and MASI,

**GARN invites you to march with us in Galway on Jan 20th at 1pm. We will assemble at the Eglinton Centre and march to the Great Western. We will also hold a public meeting on Jan 15th at 7pm in the Harbour Hotel.**

Further details available closer to the dates: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1513432315361414/>, <https://www.facebook.com/GalwayARN/>

Alternatively contact us at [galwayunitesagainstracism@gmail.com](mailto:galwayunitesagainstracism@gmail.com).

*We are laying our pride aside and asking you not to deny us the hope for a better tomorrow, because right now, hope is the only thing we have left* (Woman in Galway Direct Provision Centre).



## **Refugees & Integration – Lessons for Social work by Maeve Foreman (TCD) Dr Muireann Ní Raghallaigh (UCD)**

### **Introduction**

This article is based on a presentation made at the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW) Conference (*Social Work Education in Europe: Challenging Boundaries, Promoting a Sustainable Future*) in Paris in June 2017 (Foreman & Ní Raghallaigh, 2017). The presentation drew on a recent study (Ní Raghallaigh, Foreman et al., 2016) that looked at the challenges faced by refugees in Ireland making the transition from the asylum system to local communities. It also referred to an earlier study which looked at social workers' experience of referrals from 'Direct Provision' (Foreman & Ní Raghallaigh, 2015).

## Direct Provision - Living in Limbo

In Ireland the majority of asylum seekers live in institutional settings known as 'Direct provision' (DP) and are not allowed to work, although this is slowly changing, and have very limited access to study at third level (1). The Irish approval rate for asylum is one of the lowest in Europe (8.6% compared to EU average of 25%). As a result, many asylum seekers spend years in DP while they go through the appeal process. The average length of stay is four years although 700+ have been there for more than seven years (RIA, 2015) and over a third of the total number of asylum seekers in DP are children. The EU resettlement agreement means that the numbers coming into this system are increasing. While the International Protection Act 2015 (enforced in December 2016) should speed up the process, it reduces certain rights e.g. in family reunification.

Foreman & Ní Raghallaigh (2015) highlighted the complexity of social work in this area and some of the challenges facing asylum seekers accessing services while living in DP. The main reasons for referral to social workers were mental health difficulties, followed by child welfare and child protection.

The main concerns of social workers were

- The long and short term impact of DP on child development and

(1) In May 2017 the Supreme Court ruled that the working ban was unconstitutional and the government has agreed to lift it in line with a European directive. School leavers who have been in the protection system for five years and meet certain criteria can apply for student supports to attend third level, and some Universities of Sanctuary do provide scholarships.

child welfare, its impact on family life and on the capacity of asylum seekers to parent to full potential.

- The added difficulties faced by families coping with mental or physical health difficulties, or intellectual disabilities
- The difficulties experienced by asylum seekers in accessing services
- The difficulties for social workers in delivering equitable service to asylum seekers, even when services are available.

Ultimately what helped was good multidisciplinary and inter-agency working relationships, social workers with an in-depth understanding of the issues, and sufficient resources, including access to interpreters.



### Transition: From Direct Provision to Life in the Community

The Transition study (Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2016) was funded by the Irish Research Council under its New Foundations, (Engaging Civic Society), funding stream. We partnered with the Irish Refugee Council who identified the need for such research, and conducted the study with asylum seekers/peer researchers. The asylum seekers informed the process, assisted in conducting the research and ultimately helped to promote the findings. 22 people with experience of transition, and six stakeholders/NGO staff were interviewed.

6 The involvement of asylum seekers, and an

NGO directly working with refugees, ensured optimum media coverage of the report launch and helped increase awareness of the issues.

Arguably adopting a more community based participatory research approach contributed to the study's relevance in informing policy and practice.

Findings indicated failings on the part of the state to facilitate integration both before and after people received refugee status. Although the Reception and Integration Agency is no longer responsible for 'integration', responsibility having passed to the Office for the Promotion of Migration Integration ([www.integration.ie](http://www.integration.ie)), the OPMI is primarily involved in supporting *programme refugees* who generally do not enter the DP system. It was clear from our study that those exiting DP with legal status should be given access to supports, as needed, similar to those given to programme refugees. Instead, everything about DP militates against integration, from the €21.60 per week asylum seekers receive, to the geographical location and facilities of many of the centres.

Once people get permission to remain, be it refugee status, leave to remain or subsidiary protection, they face innumerable hurdles in moving on.

While our research echoed several other studies in calling for an end to Direct Provision, it also highlighted what might help with preparation and support prior to transition, and with transitioning and settling into communities. As a result, the Transition study generated useful research data sought by policy makers.

Our task now is to try and ensure the recommendations of our study (Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2016) are implemented. To this end, the research team has met with the Minister for State with responsibility for equality, immigration and integration on three occasions.

We have also met with the Citizens Information Board's DP working group, who were given the remit by the Dept of Justice to coordinate information sessions for those in DP, one of the key recommendations of the Taskforce, and of our study.

### **Implications for Social Work Education and Practice with refugees and asylum seekers**

The presentation at the EASSW conference ultimately argued that social work educators have a crucial role to play in ensuring that social work students are aware of the potential challenges that refugees face and the supports that they may need, so that they can ensure that social work services are accessible and that they facilitate and contribute to integration. Social work educators play a crucial role in ensuring this knowledge base is present and in ensuring that practitioners are trained to work ethically with asylum seekers and refugees so that they can:

- Collaborate with migrant groups in addressing their needs
- Advocate for agency and government policies that are consistent with principles of social justice and human rights.
- Use information gained from casework to support arguments for supports/accommodation suitable for asylum seeking families with children

**Remember also our social media stuff... Twitter (SWAN\_IRL) and Facebook (Social Work Action Network Ireland) page**

- Use information gained from research to improve social work services to those living within the asylum system and those transitioning out into the community.

## Note:

The recently established Irish Association of Social Workers' (IASW) special interest group 'Social Work and Migration' meets quarterly and held its first conference in UCC in September 2017. More information at <https://www.iasw.ie/group.aspx?contentid=6576>



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If you have any questions or comments on what you read in this bulletin, please feel free to get in touch with us at [socialworkactionnetworkireland@gmail.com](mailto:socialworkactionnetworkireland@gmail.com). We are also delighted to receive any submissions for future bulletins to this email.



*Call Mrs. Claus, arrest without probable Claus...!*

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