



# Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers

## An Overview of the Challenges of the Recent 'Report on Review of Cash Allowance Paid to Asylum Seekers: 2017'

5<sup>th</sup> February 2018

For those who arrive to Northern Ireland as asylum seekers, the Home Office is obligated to ensure they are not left destitute by providing appropriate support under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. This support is limited, however, and until recently, included asylum accommodation (of varying standards)<sup>1</sup> and asylum support of £36.95. In order to reflect the changes and realities of living costs, pressure over the years has been placed on the Home Office to review this amount and increase this figure in order to be more reflective of living costs today.

In January 2018, the Home Office published a 'Report on Review of Cash Allowance Paid to Asylum Seekers'. Coming into effect on the 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018, this new report highlights the living allowance the Home Office deems sufficient. The decision made by the Home Office sees an increase of 80p to an amount of £37.75 per week, which falls at approximately half of what those on social welfare are awarded. This figure, unfortunately, fails to reflect actual costs of living, realities of additional financial support needed in medical, social and economic emergencies, and the level of support asylum seekers and their dependants rely on charitable supports.

It is not surprising, therefore, that NICRAS remains highly concerned of this minimal increase. Since 2002, NICRAS has been placed in a unique position of assisting asylum seekers and hearing directly from those who are affected by such changes in legislation. It is not surprising that after being concerned with their asylum process, the worry of most asylum seekers remains the very limited financial support they are provided. Over the years, NICRAS, alongside many other charities in Northern Ireland, have supported hundreds of asylum seekers in Northern Ireland seeking additional finances, as well as emotional and logistical support. This support remains unreflected by the Home Office, and should not be a mechanism in ensuring that asylum seekers are not left destitute. This is particularly true to those with dependants.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2016, NICRAS conducted a review of asylum seeker accommodation in Northern Ireland and found that accommodation provided were of varying standards, including accommodation that was deemed unsuitable for living.



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Although the Home Office reported that this support 'ensures that all asylum seekers and their dependants are provided with sufficient cash to provide for their essential living needs through the period they remain on support', this is not reflective of the knowledge and experience of the staff at NICRAS. NICRAS therefore urges that a more comprehensive review be conducted, including with consultation with asylum seekers and key stakeholders to ensure that living costs adequately reflect the financial needs of the asylum seeker.

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