



*MANIFESTO 2017*

# NICRAS Manifesto 2017



NICRAS is the only refugee and asylum seeker led organisation in Northern Ireland and was established in 2002. It works for the benefit of refugees and asylum seekers by providing advice, support, and a community for people in situations of extreme vulnerability.

Our mission is to inspire and enable refugees and asylum seekers to break through injustice, deprivation and inequality so they can achieve their full potential. Our vision is of a vibrant, welcoming, just and inclusive society which promotes diversity and equality, and effectively respects the human rights and dignity of refugees and asylum seekers.

## ***1. Keeping the needs of refugees and asylum seekers at the heart of policy development***

- **Disaggregation of Data:** To ensure that all policy development related to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers is evidence based, NICRAS urges the Executive to lobby the Home Office to supply disaggregated data as to how many asylum seekers and refugees there are in Northern Ireland. NICRAS has concerns that this data had not been obtained prior to the development of the anticipated *Refugee Integration Strategy* (OFMDFM).

Department of Health

## ***2. Ensuring the needs of refugees and asylum seekers are met in mental health services***

- **Specialised assessment and treatment for torture survivors:** many of the asylum seekers that come to Northern Ireland are fleeing persecution and torture in their home countries. Unlike England and Wales, where [Freedom from Torture](#) offers specialist care and advocacy for survivors, there are no specialists currently residing in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, there are no specialised mental health assessments carried out on refugees and asylum seekers. NICRAS would urge the Executive to ensure there are specialists in place that can adequately assess and treat those fleeing torture. We would recommend the Freedom from Torture model of specialised centres.

Department of the Economy

## ***3. Ensuring refugees and asylum seekers can reach their full potential and contribute to the development of Northern Ireland***

Access to employment is pivotal to the process of settlement and integration by both refugees and asylum seekers. Many express a desire to provide for themselves and to positively contribute to Northern Ireland society and dislike being reliant on state benefits.

- **Supporting medically trained refugees and asylum seekers:** The conversion course for trained and experienced Doctors, Pharmacists and Nurses costs £10,000 in Northern Ireland. A grant is available in both Scotland and England & Wales which is not available in the region. NICRAS urges the Executive to ensure this grant is available so that Doctors, Pharmacists and Nurses can utilise their skills and contribute to Northern Ireland's Health and Social Care system.



- **Changing the attitude of employers:** NICRAS would urge the new Department of the Economy to provide guidance to employers to ensure they understand alternative qualifications not obtained in the UK. This would ensure a fair application process when those with indigenous qualifications are competing against equally qualified candidates and ensure the employer can make an informed choice.

#### Department for Communities

#### ***6. Ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers aren't at risk of destitution or intimidation in Northern Ireland and can integrate fully into communities.***

- **Conduct an independent review of the accommodation system:** There is an urgent need for an independent review of the asylum accommodation process specifically related to Northern Ireland to ensure that specific issues arising in Northern Ireland are identified and addressed. A commitment to hold regular reviews of accommodation in Northern Ireland will ensure that all issues arising continue to be identified and addressed.
- **Provide effective monitoring of accommodation standards and the complaints process:** In November 2016 we published a report entitled 'Home Sweet Home?' which detailed the substandard accommodation that asylum seekers are being placed into. There is an urgent need for clear, regular and independent monitoring of the standard of accommodation to ensure it meets standards set out by the Home Office. Monitoring should ensure that all issues raised by asylum seekers are addressed within a reasonable period (three days), particularly emergency repairs (24 hours). Asylum seekers should have access to clear and translated information about the complaints process and there should be opportunities for collective feedback from asylum seekers. This ensures that fears of complaints aren't link to individual asylum cases.
- **Advice provision:** Due to the complex needs that refugees and asylum seekers face, it is imperative they are able to access advice on all issues they face from people who understand their needs. The Home Office, Jobs and Benefits Office and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs practices make refugees extremely vulnerable in the transition from asylum support as they have to negotiate a confusing range of government agencies that do not always consult with each other. NICRAS urges the Executive to allow BME specialist advice services, such as the service provided by NICRAS, to bid for funding from the money allocated to advice services. Currently BME advice providing organisations can only access funds from the MED Fund in the Racial Equality Unit (OFMdFM) and capacity has suffered as a result.
- **Refugee week:** On a regional level, NICRAS urges the Executive to fund a programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate the contribution of refugees to Northern Ireland and promoting a better understanding of why people seek sanctuary. Currently there is no sustainable funding committed to the NI chapter of a UK wide celebration.