

# The Advocacy Initiative

## Case study 1: Doras Luimní in co-operation with Crosscare and Nasc

### Achieving Improvements in Accessing Social Welfare for Immigrants: Collaborating in Carrying out Research across the Regions (2012)

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#### Background

As worrying evidence mounted as to how migrants were treated, three agencies, Crosscare (Dublin), Doras Luimní (Limerick) and Nasc (Cork) came together with other national and regional NGOs, 'to compile a snapshot of the barriers facing migrants trying to access social protection'. The resulting report 'Person or number?' thus arises from the shared experiences of NGOs in assisting migrants to access their rights to social protection.

#### Approach

The research which was carried out by Joe O'Brien (Crosscare) had two key aims - to offer stakeholders an opportunity to pause and see some of the issues vulnerable immigrants face when trying to access social protection, and secondly to offer some practical suggestions that they believe would contribute to making a better system of social protection. It was motivated by the following values:

*'The belief that particularly during a time of scarce resources Ireland should prioritise those most in need and should protect all vulnerable members of society.'*

*'The belief that through our relevant state institutions we should endeavour to provide social protection and a level of service of the highest standards.'*

*'The need to respond to the increasing number of immigrants across the country presenting to NGOs who are having difficulty accessing social protection when it was apparent that they have a right to such protection.'*

In order to carry out the research, six organisations agreed to contribute representative information on the issues faced by immigrants trying to access the social protection system. The resulting sample of 54 cases was representative of those who have presented to NGOs with a question or issue concerning social protection.

#### Research Findings

Eleven specific problems areas were identified. These are spelt out in the report along with a number of recommendations on how they should be addressed.

Overall the report found that the *'Irish social protection system is failing some immigrants. The most basic duty of accurate information provision on the crucial right to social protection is not being carried out consistently. Adversarial approaches; reliance on speculation; and inappropriate, aggressive and racist language by departmental staff were identified.'*

In order to address both the common and specific issues, the report proposes that:

*'The Department of Social Protection establish a Migrant Consultative Forum, to operate in a similar fashion to the already established Disability Consultative Forum. Such a forum, it was stated, 'could lead to improvements in the general service provision of the Department of Social Protection for immigrants and on the implementation and overall understanding of issues such as the Habitual Residence Condition.'*

**"The Irish social protection system is failing some immigrants. The most basic duty of accurate information provision on the crucial right to social protection is not being carried out consistently."**

#### CASE STUDIES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY

## Success Achieved

The Minister for Social Protection agreed to launch the report and met the three organisations involved prior to the launch to agree how best to respond to its findings. The report has since been widely disseminated.

It was agreed that a Migrant Consultative Forum would be set up to review the relevant guidelines which will meet three times a year. An initial exploratory meeting has been held involving senior officials in the department with responsibility for developing relevant policies and procedures and the three NGO organisations. The forum will be jointly chaired by the Department of Social Protection and the NGOs.



*'Person or Number? Issues Faced by Immigrants Accessing Social Protection' report cover*

## Learning

The following learning arises from this research:

- \* The importance of a sound evidence base in influencing decision makers - hearing the voices of those affected.
- \* The benefits of collecting information from clients in a systematic way, identifying trends and key concerns and priorities.
- \* The benefits of collecting information across organisations and regions to demonstrate how prevalent the issues are.
- \* Engaging in a constructive dialogue with department officials.
- \* The instance of involving key officials and politicians in launching the report.
- \* Having funding and funder support for carrying out research to inform the policy making process.

*"This is an informative and challenging publication and one which merits the attention of all public servants who interact with the poor and the vulnerable in their daily work." Emily O'Reilly, Ombudsman, November 2011*



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