

Local authority refusals resulting in homelessness - MLRC

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Some authorities failed to comply with basic legal requirements, such as not supplying written reasons for a decision in 2023, the the Mercy Law Resource Centre found (Stock image)

Families and individuals in dire need of emergency homeless accommodation are being refused access by some local authorities which is masking the real extent of homelessness, according to the Mercy Law Resource Centre.

According to its latest annual report, some local authorities are not allowing people access to emergency accommodation, forcing them into couch surfing, hidden homelessness and, for some rough sleeping.

Some authorities failed to comply with basic legal requirements, such as not supplying written reasons for a decision in 2023.

Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) is an independent law centre and registered charity.

A team of three solicitors provide free legal advice and representation for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

It recorded a 30% increase in phone calls from people looking for help in 2023, with 2,740 calls received and 758 new requests for legal assistance.

Staff on the frontline found "inconsistency" where laws were applied and at times, where they appeared to be "ignored".

The centre saw a 157% increase in queries regarding emergency accommodation last year.

The report states that there have been "alarming reports" of families at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness. Notably, over 50% of these cases involved domestic violence.

Many cases concerning conditions in emergency accommodation were also linked to individuals with health issues, addictions, or disabilities, underscoring the inadequacy of emergency accommodation for those with specific health or disability needs.

MLRC Solicitor Adam Boyle said its clients continue to face significant barriers in accessing emergency accommodation and that many are turned away despite meeting the necessary criteria, often with no clear explanation.

"The inconsistent application of rules leaves already vulnerable individuals at greater risk of rough sleeping or precarious living situations. People should not need to engage solicitors in order to access emergency homeless accommodation," he said.

The report also notes that for the first time, over half of MLRC's clients were based outside Dublin, reflecting its growing national reach and the rising levels of rural homelessness.

Casework from these areas revealed "poor administrative decision-making by local authorities" with discrepancies in their homelessness reporting.

They found that some authorities were underreporting official figures despite the evident increase in rough sleeping in rural towns.

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