

Press Release – New Report Highlights the Impact of Family Homelessness on Minority Ethnic Families and Children in Ireland

Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) is proud to announce the release of a groundbreaking report, *“Excluded and Left Behind: The Lived Experience of Long-Term Family Homelessness on Minority Ethnic Families and the Effects on Their Children.”* This comprehensive study explores the experiences of family homelessness among minority ethnic families in Ireland and sheds light on the unique challenges they face, as well as the detrimental effects of long-term homelessness on their children.

The report will be formally launched by Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC at a multidisciplinary conference in Dublin on 10 September 2024. MLRC extends sincere thanks to Caoilfhionn Gallagher for her participation in the launch. The report and conference have been funded under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Grant Scheme 2023-24.

Other speakers at the conference include:

- **Dr Méabh Savage**, Lecturer, SETU and author of the report
- **Maria Joyce**, National Traveller Women’s Forum
- **Dr Aoibhinn Walsh**, Consultant General Paediatrician with a special interest in Inclusion Health, Children’s Health Ireland
- **Rory Hearne**, housing expert and Lecturer in Social Housing at MU
- **Abniled Hernandez**, Psychologist, MA, MPSI, Focus Ireland

The report examines the legal and policy landscape and builds on existing research to reveal how long-term homelessness exacerbates inequalities and violates the human rights of minority ethnic children. It highlights the importance of recognising diversity within the lived experiences of family homelessness and how intersectional identities—such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, and migration status—contribute to the complex challenges these families face.

Key Findings:

- **Intersectional Inequalities and Racialized Barriers:** The study shows how intersectional inequalities, including race, ethnicity, class, gender, and migration status, combined with racialised institutional barriers, prolong families' experiences of homelessness. This has severe effects on the mental health and well-being of both parents and children.
- **Lack of Culturally Appropriate Support:** The report reveals a lack of access to culturally appropriate accommodation and support, creating additional stress and exclusion for families and children. This often results in family separation and breakdown, further diminishing the resources needed for caregiving and child development.
- **Impact on Children:** The study confirms that the conditions of emergency accommodation are often unsuitable for family life, negatively impacting children's development, mental health, education, and sense of identity. Children frequently face double stigmatisation as members of a minority group and as residents of emergency accommodations.

Recommendations for Policy and Legislative Change:

- **Standardising Minimum Accommodation Standards:** Ensuring all family emergency accommodations, both public and private, meet minimum standards for cooking, washing, and child play facilities that fulfil the cultural and religious needs of minority families.
- **Comprehensive Training for Staff:** Requiring all staff involved in social housing and emergency accommodation to undergo comprehensive cultural competence, trauma-informed, and anti-discrimination training.
- **Increased Housing Stock:** Urging the government to prioritise increasing the availability of larger multi-bedroom social housing to accommodate larger families.

- **Proposing amendments to the Housing Acts** and other legislative instruments to better capture the lived experiences of families and children experiencing homelessness, and to prioritise the best interests of the child in housing policies.

Dr Méabh Savage said:

“I see children being left behind, especially in terms of their education. When they live in unstable environments, their fight-or-flight response is constantly activated. They may have to take multiple buses to school, be embarrassed that their clothes aren’t washed, and deal with various stressors. By the time they get to school, their bodies and brains are already under stress, and they are falling behind.”

Teresa Kelly, Managing Solicitor of MLRC, stated: *“We are proud to present this vital report. The findings underscore the critical gaps in our current housing system and call for immediate action to protect the rights and well-being of these vulnerable families and their children. Legislative and Policy change is necessary to address family homelessness among minority ethnic communities and put an end to a generation of children suffering due to inaction by the state.”*

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Notes to editors

1. **Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC)** is an independent law centre, registered charity, and company limited by guarantee. MLRC provides free legal advice and representation for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. MLRC provides the following services: free legal advice clinics; legal representation in the areas of housing and social welfare law; legal support and training to organisations working in the field of homelessness; and policy work. MLRC’s clients are local authority tenants and people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. They include people who are trying to move away from homelessness who may be struggling with issues often linked to homelessness, e.g., discrimination, addiction, leaving prison, mental illness, and relationship breakdown.
2. Since its inception in 2009, MLRC has provided free legal advice and/or representation to over 10,000 individuals and families. In 2022, MLRC received 560 new requests for legal assistance, an increase of 10% on 2021. For more about our work, see www.mercylaw.ie