

Echoes of Resilience

**Migrant Women's experiences in Ireland's
Emergency Accommodation.**

Published by AkiDwA, The Migrant Women's Network in Ireland
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Unit 2, Killarney Court, Upper Buckingham Street, Dublin 1, Ireland
Email: info@akidwa.ie | Website: www.akidwa.ie

This publication contains a collection of the experiences of women seeking international protection in Ireland's Emergency Accommodation Centres.

The stories herein were collected and compiled by Sharon Etokhana and edited by Victory Nwabu-ekeoma.

AkiDwA does not accept responsibility for the factual exactitude of the facts presented by the contributors.

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FOREWORD

Women and girls are estimated to make up about half of the world's 281 million international migrants.^[1] Both women and men migrate in search of better living conditions, but in recent years, women from diverse social and educational backgrounds have increasingly migrated independently. This trend includes educated women who face employment discrimination in their home countries and migrate in search of opportunities that better utilise their skills and provide higher wages.^[2]

Female migration is also driven by non-economic factors, including societal pressures, patriarchal traditions that restrict freedom and opportunity, the need to escape abusive marriages, female genital mutilation or domestic violence, and the pursuit of equality and autonomy.^[3] Discrimination against specific groups of women—such as single mothers, unmarried women, widows, divorcees, and LGBTQ+ individuals—also compels many to seek refuge elsewhere.^[4] However, a significant number of women still migrate as spouses, with their migration status tied to that of their partners.^[5]

In the year 2022, there was a growing dependence on emergency accommodation centres, a trend that coincided with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, which resulted in a significant influx of displaced people.^[6] These centres often consisted of repurposed spaces such as disused offices, large conference rooms, schools, and sports halls to accommodate international protection applicants.^[7]

According to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), the IPAS weekly overview for the first week of May 2024 reported a total of 291 centres accommodating international protection applicants. These centres housed a total of 30,027 individuals, including 7,314 children.^[8] Of these, 236 were emergency accommodation centres.^[9]



[1] UN Women, "Facts and figures: Economic empowerment" 2023. Available at :

Women and girls are estimated to make up about half of the world's 281 million international migrants.^[1] Both women and men migrate in search of better living conditions, but in recent years, women from diverse social and educational backgrounds have increasingly migrated independently. This trend includes educated women who face employment discrimination in their home countries and migrate in search of opportunities that better utilise their skills and provide higher wages.^[2]

Accessed 20 December 2024.

[2] Ibid, International Labour Organisation, ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: Results and Methodology (3rd edn), 2021

[3] International Organisation for Migration, 'Action against Violence and Discrimination Affecting Migrant Women and Girls (2013).

[4] Ibid.

[5] (n 2) ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers (2021)

[6] Asylum Information Database, 2Types of Accommodation : Republic of Ireland" (2024).

[7] Ibid.

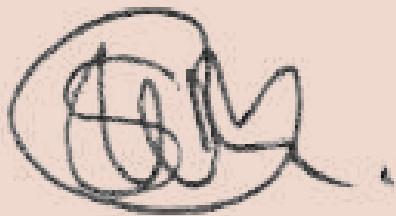
[8] Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, "IPAS Weekly accommodation and Arrivals Statistics" (2024).

[9] Ibid.

IPAS provides residents with full-board accommodation and a weekly personal allowance of €38.80 for adults and €29.80 for children.[10]

As a migrant-led women's organisation, in the last three years, AkiDwA has faced growing demand for services from women living in these emergency accommodation centres seeking support. The organisation continues to advocate for the urgent need for comprehensive vulnerability assessments, improved quality of accommodation, and mandatory vetting for all staff, including security personnel, working in emergency accommodation centres. Major concerns persist regarding safety and protection, lack of privacy, and numerous other challenges faced by residents.

It is important to recognize that women seeking international protection are not a homogenous group. Many of these women possess significant expertise and experience across various fields. Their migration journeys and experiences should be acknowledged, and they should be encouraged to participate in activities that empower them and help shape their lives and those of their families. Recognising their agency and the positive contributions of their integration is essential. These women are drivers of change and should not be confined to situations of disempowerment. By creating empowerment structures and opportunities, we can all learn from and benefit from their resilience, skills, and potential to contribute to society.



Dr Salome Mbugua

CEO AkiDwA

[10] Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, "International Protection Accommodation Services IPAS" (2023).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AkiDwA extends its deepest gratitude to the resilient women who shared their stories for this booklet. Special thanks to Dr. Salome Mbugua, CEO of AkiDwA, whose vision and leadership brought this project to life. We are also grateful to Sharon Etokhana for her dedicated coordination and story compilation, and to Victory Nwabu-ekeoma for her meticulous editing. We would like to acknowledge the generous support of Lucy Gaffney and the All-Ireland Funds whose funding made this project possible. Without their financial backing, the outcomes of this work would not have been realized.

Our thanks also go to the staff, volunteers, and supporters of AkiDwA. Your unwavering commitment to uplifting and empowering migrant women has provided essential support to those navigating the challenges of life in a new country. Your efforts affirm the humanity and potential of every woman who seeks our assistance, making a profound difference in their lives.

DEDICATION

This collection of experiences is dedicated to the courageous women who have shared their stories with us, trusting that their voices will resonate far beyond the confines of their current circumstances. To the women seeking international protection in Ireland, we honour your resilience, strength, and unwavering hope for a better future. Your journeys are a testament to the human spirit's ability to endure, adapt, and rise above adversity.

We also dedicate this work to all migrant women in Ireland who, despite facing countless challenges, continue to contribute to the fabric of this society with grace, dignity, and determination. Your presence enriches our communities, and your contributions, often overlooked, are invaluable.

Finally, we dedicate this booklet to all who believe in justice, equality, and the power of collective action. May these stories serve as a call to continue the work of building a more just and compassionate society, where every woman, regardless of her background, is given the opportunity to thrive. Let this dedication be a reminder that every voice matters and that together, we can make a difference.

INTRODUCTION

Ireland has long been recognized as a country that values human rights and social justice. The recent influx of asylum seekers has exposed significant challenges in its ability to provide for those seeking refuge within its borders. The sharp increase in the number of people seeking international protection has put immense pressure on an already strained system. This has led to a range of issues that directly affect the lives of those who arrive on Irish shores in search of safety and a new beginning. This booklet presents the personal experiences of asylum seekers living within Ireland's system, shedding light on the realities they face and the urgent need for reform.

One of the most pressing issues is the standard of living and accommodation provided to asylum seekers. Internationally, there are minimum standards of living that must be met to ensure that individuals are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their circumstances. In Ireland, the system of Direct Provision (DP), which was established in 1999 as a temporary measure, has been widely criticized for failing to provide adequate living conditions. Over the years, asylum seekers have been housed in overcrowded and substandard accommodation, with limited access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment. The result has been a situation where people, many of whom have already experienced significant trauma, are left in limbo for extended periods, unable to rebuild their lives.

One positive development in recent years has been the reduction in the timeline for asylum seekers to gain the right to work. Previously, asylum seekers were not allowed to work while their applications were being processed, leading to prolonged periods of enforced idleness and dependency. However, in 2018, the Irish government introduced changes that allowed asylum seekers to apply for work permits after 9 months, which was further reduced to 6 months. This change has been welcomed as a step towards integrating asylum seekers into Irish society and allowing them to contribute to the economy. Despite this progress, significant barriers remain, particularly in accessing jobs that match their skills and qualifications, further exacerbating feelings of frustration and helplessness among this vulnerable group.

The broader context of Ireland's housing crisis has only intensified the challenges faced by asylum seekers. The shortage of affordable housing has led to increased reliance on emergency accommodation centres, which were initially introduced as a temporary solution but have become a more permanent fixture in the system. These centres are often located in remote areas, far from essential services and employment opportunities, making it difficult for asylum seekers to access the support they need to integrate into Irish society. The use of emergency accommodation has also raised concerns about the safety and well-being of residents, with reports of overcrowding, lack of privacy, and inadequate facilities becoming all too common.

The experiences in this booklet highlight the significant impact that these living conditions have on asylum seekers, who are already a vulnerable population. The uncertainty and instability of living in emergency accommodation, coupled with the challenges of navigating the asylum process, have left many feeling isolated and forgotten. The state has a duty to protect those who seek refuge within its borders, and it is clear that the current system is failing to meet this obligation.

AKIDWA: EMPOWERING MIGRANT WOMEN IN IRELAND

Established in 2001, Akina Dada wa Africa - AkiDwA (Swahili for sisterhood) is a national network of migrant women living in Ireland. Since its inception, AkiDwA has been a driving force in promoting equality, justice, and social integration for migrant women across the country. The organization's vision is rooted in the belief that every woman, regardless of her background or circumstances, should have equal opportunities and access to resources in all aspects of society.

Over the past two decades, AkiDwA has established itself as a leading non-governmental organization (NGO) addressing the unique challenges faced by migrant women in Ireland. The organization has developed and implemented a wide range of programmes and support services, particularly in areas such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), reproductive health, and integration. Through these initiatives, AkiDwA has successfully empowered thousands of migrant women, helping them build the skills and resilience needed to thrive in their new environment. The organization has been instrumental in raising awareness about the specific vulnerabilities faced by migrant women, particularly those seeking international protection and living in emergency accommodation centres. These women often face heightened risks of exploitation, including sexual violence, due to their precarious living situations and lack of access to adequate support services.

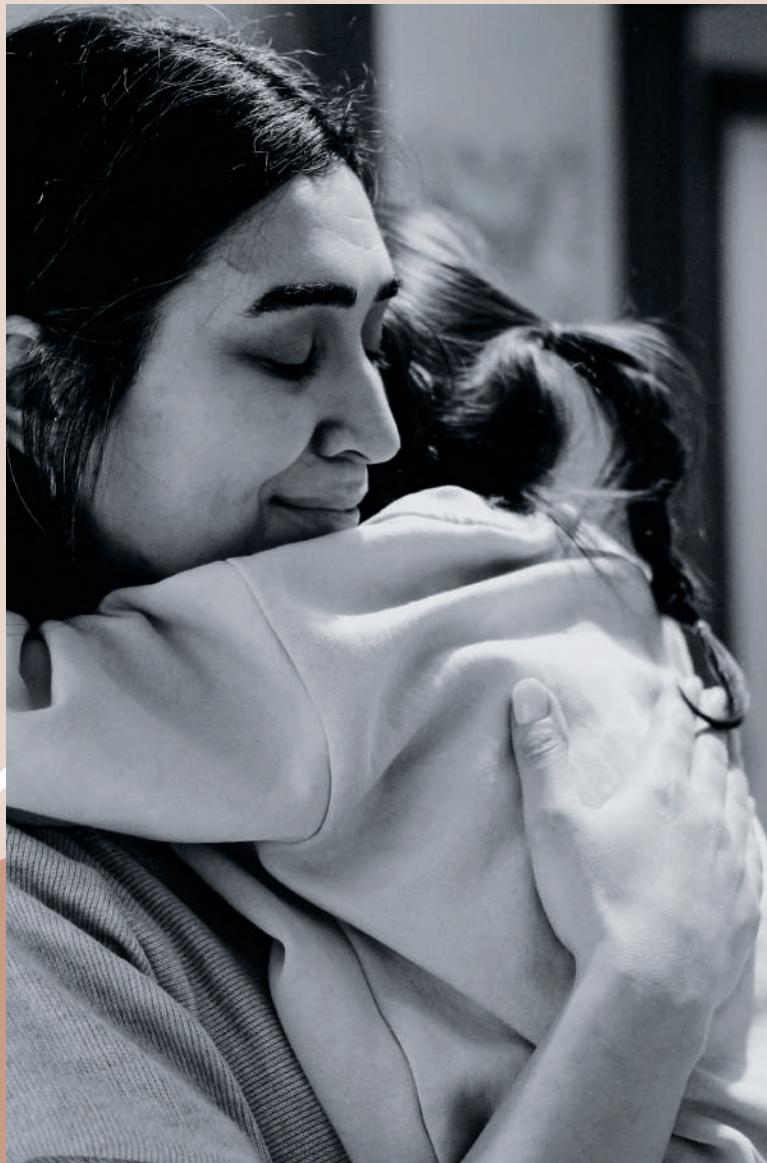
Recognizing the urgent need to address these issues, AkiDwA launched the Unheard Voices project, a key initiative aimed at supporting women seeking international protection. This project is designed to provide women with essential information about their rights, available services, and opportunities for personal and social development. It also offers peer-to-peer and psychosocial support, helping women navigate the complex challenges they face in their daily lives.

AkiDwA's commitment to documenting and sharing the experiences of these women culminates in this testimonial booklet, Echoes of Resilience. This collection of stories serves as a powerful reminder of the strength and courage of migrant women who have faced unimaginable hardships. Their experiences, shared anonymously, reflect the resilience and determination of women who continue to fight for a better life for themselves, their children, and their communities.

Through Echoes of Resilience, AkiDwA amplifies the voices of these women and brings their stories to the forefront of public consciousness. The organization hopes that sharing these experiences will inspire positive change and development, not only for the women featured in this booklet but for all migrant women in Ireland. AkiDwA remains steadfast in its mission to advocate for the rights and well-being of migrant women, ensuring that their voices are heard, their needs are met, and their contributions to Irish society are recognized and valued.



Collection of Migrant Women's Experiences



Samia's Story: In Pursuit of A New Beginning

Samia, a 30-year-old mother of two young children, hails from Algeria. Seeking a better and safer life for her family, she embarked on a challenging journey to Ireland with her husband and children. "We didn't expect what was waiting for us," she recalls, her voice tinged with a mix of regret and determination. The family hoped Ireland would provide them with the protection and opportunities they sought, but their experience has been far from what they imagined.

Samia's journey to Ireland was a difficult one. With a visa obtained from the UK, she flew from Algeria to the UK and then took a bus from Belfast to Ireland. She hoped that Ireland would offer her family the safety and support they desperately needed. However, upon their arrival, Samia quickly realized that the reality of seeking asylum in Ireland was fraught with challenges.

Living Conditions and Accommodation Challenges

From the moment they were placed in an emergency accommodation centre in northwestern Ireland, Samia and her family faced difficulties. Initially, she was told that they would be the only occupants of a five-bedroom house. However, within a week, the house was filled with five other families from different cultural backgrounds, all struggling to coexist. "Living with 22 people in the same house is the worst idea," she says. "We had to deal with each other every day, constantly explaining our cultures to one another."

The overcrowded living conditions were a source of constant stress for Samia. With only three bathrooms and one kitchen, tensions frequently arose over chores, cooking, and the use of common spaces. "People are fighting for the oven, the washing machine, for everything," Samia explains. "It feels like we're living in a hostel, not a home."

For Samia, the situation was further complicated by her deteriorating relationship with her husband. "We were fighting all the time," she admits. "Sometimes I can't control myself, and I find myself shouting and yelling." The constant tension in the house eventually led to a separation, and her husband divorced her. In her culture, this meant that her ex-husband could no longer see her without her hijab, which created even more difficulties in the already crowded and chaotic living environment. "I can't remove my hijab in my room or anywhere in the house because my ex-husband cannot see me without it," she says, her voice reflecting the exhaustion of constantly navigating such challenges. "I get only an hour a day without my hijab when he's out, but even that is stressful."

Samia's room, located on the ground floor of the house, is another source of discomfort. With two young children to care for, she finds it nearly impossible to rest. "The washing machines and dryers are right next to my room, and they run all day and night," she says. "Because my room is on the ground floor, I constantly have a pain in my head from the noise." Despite explaining her situation to the manager and requesting to be moved to a quieter room, her pleas were ignored. "When I told the manager about the serious pain in my head, he just said he would look into it, but nothing was done."

Despite the daily struggles, Samia's calls for help were largely ignored. She repeatedly asked the manager of the accommodation centre to move her to a different location, explaining the emotional abuse she was enduring from her ex-husband and the negative impact the living conditions were having on her and her children. "My ex-husband is narcissistic and emotionally abusive," she says. "But the manager told me that IPAS [International Protection Accommodation Services] refused to move me because the emergency accommodation centre near us was reserved for Ukrainian refugees."

Feeling trapped, Samia reached out to a local domestic violence advocacy service (DVAS) for help. The advocate she spoke to was understanding and compassionate but limited in how she could assist Samia due to her asylum status. "She told me that if I had my residency, she could help me move out of the centre," Samia explains. "But as an asylum seeker, she couldn't do much because if I moved, I might be sent outside northwestern Ireland, and I couldn't risk that." Samia's children had finally settled into school, and she had established a support network in the area. "I've built relationships here, and I don't want to start over again in another county," she says. "It took me so long to feel comfortable here."

Samia's frustration with the system is palpable. She feels abandoned and unsupported, both by the accommodation centre and by the larger system meant to protect her. "Sometimes I regret coming to Ireland," she admits. "It feels like the government doesn't care about asylum seekers. They don't care if you're happy or if the accommodation suits you. They act like they're doing you a favour."

Samia's challenges extend beyond her living situation. She has also struggled with accessing services and support. Despite having applied for legal aid in August, she has yet to receive a response. Employment opportunities have also been scarce. Despite holding a master's degree in food quality control and having significant work experience in Algeria, Samia has been unable to secure a job. Having obtained a right to work after 10 months of being in Ireland, finding a job has been difficult. "I've been applying for work for months, but I haven't had any replies," she says. "I don't know if it's because of my CV or my background. I have so many skills, but it feels like they don't matter here."

Samia also feels there is a lack of community and support within the accommodation centre. "There's no sense of community here," she says. "And I feel like there's a kind of racism. The manager seems to treat Christian families better than Muslim ones. The Christian families always seem to get their needs met first. I feel like the manager is deliberately doing this." In terms of safety, Samia confirmed that she feels very safe here. "Me and my children are safe".

Hope for a Better Future

Despite everything, Samia remains determined to build a better life for her children. "I know that one day I will be out of this," she says, holding on to hope. "I've been patient for so long, and I have to be patient more and more. But sometimes, I feel like I'm losing my mind."

Looking to the future, Samia hopes for change - not just for herself, but for all asylum seekers in Ireland. She believes that the system needs to be more responsive to the needs of vulnerable individuals and that emergency accommodation centres should provide a more supportive environment. "The managers are selfish," she says bluntly. "Putting so many families in one house just to get more money is not fair. We're treated like animals - they just feed us and that's it. They need to understand that we chose to come to Ireland because we believed it would be a better place for us. But they need to do better by us."

Samia dreams of a day when she can live independently, free from the stress and instability of the emergency accommodation centre. "I've considered taking my children to another country," she says, "but I've built relationships here, and I don't want to start over again. I just want to live a peaceful life, to work, and to give my children a stable future."

FREE
Overcrowded **RACISM**
HOPE noise
COMMUNITY **SAFETY** **Selfish**
STRESSFUL **VULNERABLE**

“—

"I've been patient for so long, and I have to be patient more and more. But sometimes, I feel like I'm losing my mind."



Beauty's Story: From El Salvador with Hope

Beauty, a 30-year-old from El Salvador, arrived in Ireland with her partner, seeking safety and a fresh start. Their journey began in the summer, full of hopes for a better future away from the violence they had endured back home.

Beauty's past in El Salvador was marked by significant trauma due to her sexual orientation. "In my country, it's illegal to be gay," she explains. "I experienced three attacks because of my orientation. One time, a man hit me in the head with a gun. I went to the police, but they didn't take action because such violence is normalized there." The threats and violence they faced led them to choose Ireland over Spain, as Spain had a large number of gang members from their country, which felt unsafe for them.

Their initial placement was at Citywest Dublin, a temporary stopover for just three days. Despite the many obstacles, Beauty remains hopeful. "I didn't have any vulnerability assessment done," she says. "We were very lucky because, after us, many people faced issues with a lack of beds and shared accommodations," Beauty reflects. Their temporary relief was short-lived, as they soon found themselves moving to different accommodations.

Living Conditions and Accommodation Challenges

From Citywest, Beauty and her partner were relocated to three different centres within their first four months. It was not until December last year that they moved to their current residence at an emergency accommodation centre in Leinster. This building, once an office, was not initially ready for residential use. "We were the first residents here," Beauty recalls. "The building wasn't prepared for us. The rooms had no proper walls—just plastic. You could see your neighbours through the gaps, and there was no privacy."

The initial conditions were difficult and uncomfortable. The lack of privacy was just the beginning. The only showers available were in the basement, and the absence of hot water during the winter made bathing a painful experience. "There was no hot water all winter," Beauty explains. "We had to shower with cold water, which was especially harsh when washing hair. We preferred to just wash our bodies when we could."

The situation began to improve when walls were installed, and hot water became available in March. However, the water issues persisted. "Sometimes the water is too hot, almost burning," she says. "And at other times, we don't have any water at all. This can happen four times a month."

A new manager brought some improvements. "The food is better now," Beauty notes. "Previously, we only received sandwiches and soup every day. Now, we get real meals, which is a positive change." Despite this, problems with water supply and building maintenance continued. "Last week, the showers were closed from 9 am to 5 pm," she reports. "This happens frequently, and I'm not sure if it's due to the building's age or some other issue."

The building's layout was reorganized to separate single men, single women, and families onto different floors, which has helped reduce incidents of inappropriate behaviour. "I live with a woman, and we are partners," Beauty says. "It's good that we are on the first floor where we feel safer." Cooking facilities remain a significant issue. The building's regulations prevent cooking in individual rooms, leading to conflicts over the use of shared appliances like microwaves and blenders. "Some people have these appliances in their rooms, which sets off the fire alarms frequently," she explains. "In the event of a real fire, we wouldn't be prepared because the alarm goes off so often."

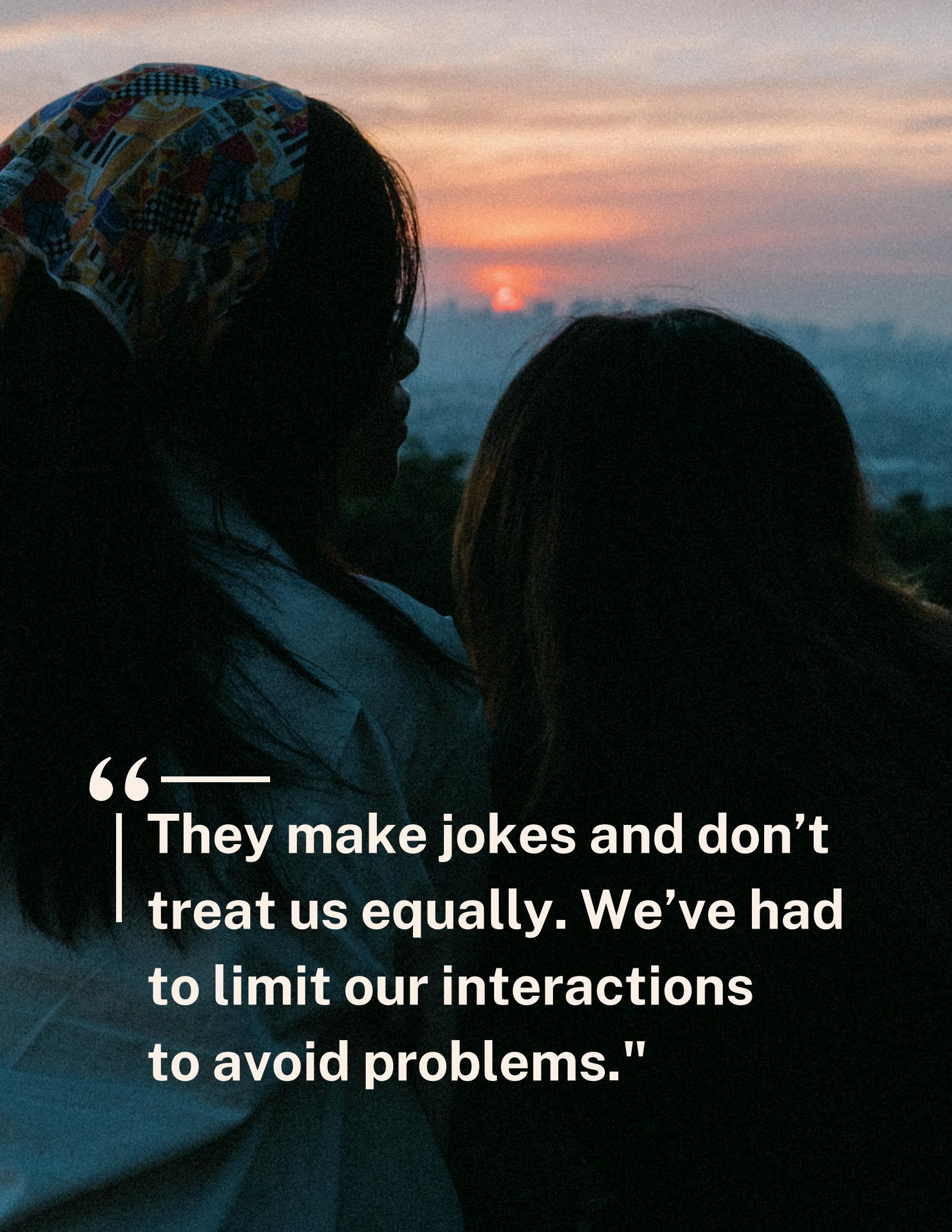
Safety concerns are ever-present. The building has been a site of protests, which causes anxiety among residents. "When news broke about an incident where a male immigrant injured children in Dublin, we were very afraid," Beauty says. "We worried that the protesters might target our building next." This fear is compounded by issues with security staff who have shown discrimination towards Beauty and her partner. "Some security personnel don't like us because of our sexual orientation," she says. "They make jokes and don't treat us equally. We've had to limit our interactions to avoid problems."

Education and Employment Experiences

Beauty is currently studying health and working part-time. "I work and study, so the plumbing issues affect me a lot," she says. "Sometimes I can't take a shower before work or class, which is very uncomfortable." Despite these challenges, she appreciates the support available. "We have access to information about courses, and organizations like AkiDwA have helped us by offering online meetings. There are also visits from HSE staff who provide medical advice and appointments."

Employment has been a positive aspect of Beauty's experience. "I received my work permit in February," she shares. "I found a job as a kitchen porter through Facebook, which led to an opportunity to learn pastry work. It's been a great experience because I have a background in dessert and gastronomy." Although communication with colleagues has been challenging due to language barriers, Beauty values the work and the opportunity to improve her English. "I think it's important for people to see that we are not just taking from the system. We are trying to build a life here, just like anyone else."

Beauty's future aspirations include further education and career advancement. "I plan to complete my course in IT Skills and Graphic Design in two years," she says. "I hope to get a better job with more pay and improve my English." She and her partner also dream of getting married and possibly adopting or pursuing fertilization options to start a family. "We are working hard to help our mothers who are ill and build a life here in Ireland".

A photograph of a woman and a man looking out over a sunset. The woman is in the foreground, wearing a colorful, patterned headwrap and a dark, striped shirt. The man is to her right, mostly in shadow. They are looking towards a horizon where the sun is setting, casting a warm glow over the sky and water.

“—

They make jokes and don't treat us equally. We've had to limit our interactions to avoid problems.”

Nancy's Story: From South Africa with Resilience

Nancy is a 32-year-old from South Africa navigating the challenges of asylum-seeking in Ireland. Her story is one of resilience, adjustment, and the quest for a better life for herself and her two young children who remain in South Africa under the care of a cousin. Nancy's journey to Ireland began with hope and determination but has been marked by unforeseen challenges and moments of kindness.

A Difficult Transition

Eight months ago, Nancy arrived in Munster in the south of Ireland after a challenging start in Dublin's Balseskin Centre. Her arrival in Ireland was marked by uncertainty and the weight of separation from her two young children. "Being away from them is incredibly hard," Nancy says, her voice tinged with sadness. "I left them behind in the hope of creating a better future, but the separation is painful."

Nancy's journey began with high hopes, but the reality has been more arduous than anticipated. Upon arriving, she faced immediate setbacks. "Since South Africa is classified as a safe country, it's been tough to secure the right to work," she explains. "I received a denial within two months of being here, which means I can't legally work for another six months." This restriction forces her into a precarious situation where she must keep her job hidden, a challenging and stressful reality.

Life in A New Community

The emergency accommodation centre where she resides is a converted hotel which offers a glimpse of community life in a remote setting. "The people here are incredibly welcoming," Nancy shares. "They've taken me under their wings and helped me find work, though it's at minimum wage - €12 to €13 per hour. Despite this, my employer was kind enough to drop me off at the bus stop when I needed it."

Transportation, or the lack thereof, presents a significant challenge for Nancy. "The only buses come at 8 am, 11 am and 3 pm," she says. "If I miss the 11 am bus, I have to wait until 3 pm, which is very limiting." The remote location of the centre means that the nearest convenience shop is quite far away and not very affordable. "The hotel does have a small shop with basic necessities and some culturally appropriate foods, including Nigerian items," she adds. "But it's still difficult to manage."

Life in A New Community

Cooking facilities within the centre have been adapted to accommodate the needs of its diverse residents. “We can cook in the centre, which is a blessing,” Nancy says. “Now, there’s a point system where we buy our own food and there are no more than about 9 cooking stations in the kitchen, and we’re assigned to different sections.”

Nancy’s transition from the bustling environment of Dublin to the isolated setting of rural Munster was jarring. “Arriving here in the middle of winter was overwhelming,” she recalls. “There wasn’t a single car on the road, and I felt so isolated. The adjustment was tough, and I fell sick shortly after arriving.”

The transportation issue remains a persistent problem, especially when it comes to accessing necessary medical procedures. “To get to the hospital in a neighbouring town for my procedure, I have to travel early, but the transport options are limited,” Nancy explains. “I often have to stay overnight in a midway community because the bus doesn’t run late enough. It’s a significant hurdle.”

Despite these adjustments, Nancy finds solace in the community she has built at her centre. “We come from various cultures, so people tend to group according to their backgrounds,” she explains. “There’s a real sense of community here, even though we’re all from different places.”

Nancy’s experience in Ireland so far is a mix of challenges and small victories. The supportive community and access to cooking facilities have been lifelines, but the transportation issues and separation from her children weigh heavily on her. She hopes to overcome these obstacles and eventually reunite with her family.

RESILIENCE
Separation **ISOLATION**
KINDNESS Denial
Diversity **FAMILY** **HOPE**
REMOTE **COMMUNITY**



“—
I left them behind in the
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is painful.”

Dembe's Story: In Pursuit of Freedom

Dembe, a 29-year-old woman from Uganda, faced an arduous journey to seek safety and a better life in Ireland. Her escape from Kampala to Dublin consisted of a series of travel arrangements orchestrated by her brother.

In Nairobi, Dembe was accompanied by a woman who guided her through the airport process. This was a crucial step for ensuring her safety during the transit. Dembe's journey continued with flights from Nairobi to Qatar and then to Ireland. Upon arriving in Ireland, Dembe was taken to the International Protection Office (IPO) for her asylum application.

"At the IPO, I was extremely uncomfortable with how my application was handled," Dembe reflects. "The process was very brief. I answered 'yes' or 'no' to questions, and I wish I had been more involved in filling out my form myself. I regret not being more proactive in managing my application."

Living Conditions and Accommodation Challenges

Dembe's living conditions in Ireland have been a mixed bag. "Generally, I feel safe. I have my basic needs met. I am happy I have my medical card." With regards to the accommodation, initially designed with poor functionality, has led to significant issues. "The design of the accommodation is problematic," she explains. "We are often stepping over each other due to cramped spaces. Rooms that are supposed to accommodate one person are shared between two, leading to constant friction and lack of privacy. We are not asking for a luxurious standard but we don't have basic suitable standards."

When Dembe and other residents first moved into their accommodation, the conditions were particularly severe. "The initial state of the rooms was difficult - there were plastic dividers instead of proper walls, which meant you could see and hear everything from the neighbouring rooms." Also, the management of the accommodation has been a source of frustration for Dembe. "Our manager is okay. [But] I would like to [hope] they go for training courses because you can see their favouritism," she notes. "Some individuals receive better services and accommodations than others. This favouritism extends to basic requests and support. [But] it's not racist per se." Dembe feels that her concerns are often ignored or handled poorly by management. "When I request basic items like soap or repairs for issues in my room, the manager tends to dismiss my requests or attend to others more promptly,"

Dembe has not had any formal vulnerability assessment. "I haven't gone through any structured vulnerability assessments," she admits. "The only support I receive is from external institutions and organizations that come to the centre. We have flyers around the building with information, but the support is limited and not always tailored to our specific needs."

Community Dynamics and LGBTQIA+ Issues

Dembe's experience within the accommodation has been impacted by the social dynamics of the community. "Although I know people here, I don't feel a strong sense of community," she says. "The environment is predominantly African, and as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, I encounter attitudes and comments that make me uncomfortable."

The presence of LGBTQIA+ individuals in a predominantly conservative environment has been challenging for Dembe. "Being open about my sexuality in this setting can be difficult," she explains. "There is a lot of stigma and discomfort around LGBTQIA+ issues. I am aware that being part of the LGBTQIA+ community makes me a topic of conversation, which can be isolating."

Despite efforts to create supportive spaces, Dembe has faced barriers. "I find one-on-one interactions to be more comfortable than group settings. I feel they are less judgmental."

Food and Hygiene Concerns

Food quality and hygiene have been significant issues for Dembe. "The food provided is often substandard," she reports. "We're not allowed to cook, which would be a better option. Lunch usually consists of leftovers that smell off, and breakfast is monotonous - always milk and cereal. Dinner can be inconsistent, with good days and very poor days."

The hygiene of the shared facilities is also problematic. "Although the cleaning staff do their best, the misuse of facilities by residents leads to issues like contaminated water," Dembe explains. "For instance, there was an instance when the tap water turned green due to contamination, and management's response was inadequate."

Future Aspirations and Goals

Despite these challenges, Dembe remains hopeful and determined. "My main goal is to achieve the freedom I currently lack," she says. "I'm looking forward to completing my studies in IT skills and communications. After finishing my course in June, I plan to take a six-month program working with people in similar situations. I want to support immigrant women and contribute to their well-being."



“—
I am aware that being part
of the LGBTQIA+
community makes me a
topic of conversation,
which can be isolating.”

Hamia's Story: Seeking Safety from Algeria

Hamia, a 29-year-old Algerian woman, embarked on a difficult journey seeking safety and a new beginning in Ireland. Her decision to leave Algeria was driven by her need to escape a forced marriage and find a place where she could live under protection and pursue her education. "I chose Ireland because it is known for supporting asylum seekers and offering access to education and healthcare," Hamia explains. Her journey to Ireland was fraught with challenges, marked by fear and uncertainty. She had to destroy her passport in desperation and out of fear for her safety.

Upon her arrival, Hamia encountered a series of bureaucratic and personal hurdles. "I was initially guided through the process by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), but I have not undergone a formal vulnerability assessment," she shares. Her experience with the support system was disheartening, as she felt that it did not fully address her unique needs. "I had some sessions with officers and psychologists, but it felt like everyone was just trying to catch me out. Since I came here, I have felt more like a case file than a person with specific needs."

Living Conditions and Accommodation Challenges

Hamia's accommodation situation has been challenging and distressing. For the past 15 months, she has lived in emergency accommodation that she describes as inadequate. The accommodation consists of a large building housing around 16 people per floor, with shared facilities that are stretched thin. "The noise is constant conversations, phones ringing. It's a temporary accommodation, but it's been far from temporary for us," Hamia describes.

The living conditions are cramped and lack basic privacy. "Here, we have 150 women sharing just four bathrooms. Rooms for those with children are slightly better, but overall, the conditions are very poor," she says. The facility's age and the absence of proper maintenance exacerbate the problems. "The building is old, with numerous issues such as water leakage and inadequate bathroom facilities. There is no proper shower closet." Hamia notes. Additionally, the lack of a dedicated library or proper study area has hindered her ability to focus on her education.

Hamia's safety and security have been compromised by problematic management. "The manager has verbally abused residents and misused his authority," she explains. "He has threatened to throw our clothes outside and has taken food away. He even told people not to talk to me." The lack of safety and respect in the accommodation centre has been deeply troubling for Hamia. "I feel unsafe because of the manager's abusive behaviour," she says.

“He insults people and threatens them with relocation to other centres. Despite reporting these issues, nothing is done because the complaints are often brushed aside or mishandled. The manager uses his position to exert power and control, creating a hostile environment for many of us.” Despite reporting these issues to his superiors, Hamia feels that nothing changes. “International Protection Accommodation Services doesn’t seem to take action. I know that if I complain, it could result in worse treatment or even transfer to another accommodation,” she says. Despite the difficulties, Hamia has managed to access some basic human rights. She has a medical card and regularly visits her GP. “Healthcare access has been somewhat adequate, but there are limitations,” she says. She is currently pursuing a healthcare certification and English language studies, aiming to improve her qualifications and future job prospects.

However, Hamia’s journey has been marred by challenges related to her prior qualifications and employment opportunities. “In Algeria, I studied telecommunications and worked in commercial support. Here, I am focusing on healthcare, but the transition has been difficult. I am dealing with depression and struggling to find stable employment,” she admits.

Community and Social Interaction

The sense of community within the accommodation centre is a mixed experience for Hamia. “People are generally nice and try to support each other despite the hardships,” she explains that this offers some solace. “We are all here with the same goal of integrating into society and improving our lives, but the sense of community is often overshadowed by our collective suffering and the daily challenges we face.”

Hamia has managed to connect with other residents and form some supportive networks, which has been helpful in navigating her circumstances. “I am involved in voluntary work and focused on my studies,” she says. “While the accommodation centre has its issues, the support from fellow residents has been invaluable.”

Future Aspirations and Suggestions for Improvement

Looking to the future, Hamia remains hopeful despite the numerous obstacles she faces. “I hope to develop my career here in Ireland, as it is a country with opportunities,” she says. “However, the problems with accommodation and the stress they cause make it hard to focus on my goals.” She recognizes the need for improvements in the accommodation system to better support asylum seekers.

“If I could suggest improvements, it would be to shorten the duration people spend in emergency accommodation,” Hamia suggests. “Long-term stays in such conditions lead to depression and hinder progress. The system needs to address basic needs more effectively, such as providing adequate privacy, better food, and improved management practices. Asylum seekers need a stable and supportive environment to succeed and integrate into society.”



“—
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Safia's Story: Beginning Again

At 32 years old, Safia's journey from Nigeria to Ireland was driven by a desperate need for safety and a fresh start. Her story begins in Nigeria, where she faced numerous challenges that eventually forced her to seek refuge far from home. Having initially settled in the UK, Safia's situation took a turn for the worse, prompting her to move once again in search of stability.

A New Beginning and Immediate Challenges

Safia's journey to Ireland started in December 2023, following a difficult period in the UK. "I was already settled in the UK," she explains, "but the issues I had left behind in Nigeria were catching up with me. I needed a fresh start, a place where I could be safe and find some peace." In the UK, she had hoped to escape her troubled past, but her circumstances remained unsettled, prompting her to move to Ireland.

Upon reaching Dublin, she went to the International Protection Office (IPO) to begin her asylum application. The process started with filling out forms, but complications arose with her documentation. "They couldn't get my blue card done immediately, so I was told it would be sent to my accommodation later," Safia says.

She was then moved to a temporary accommodation centre in north west Ireland, where she was introduced to the centre manager. Here, Safia faced immediate difficulties. "The living conditions were not what I expected. The centre manager's attitude and the overall management left much to be desired," she explains. The situation was exacerbated by personal tragedy - Safia's sister had passed away, adding to her emotional strain.

Living Conditions and Accommodation Issues

The accommodation centre presented numerous challenges. "The space is very small," Safia describes. "I share a room with two other Somali girls and a pregnant woman. There's no proper storage, and we have to keep our belongings in nylon bags." The lack of privacy and inadequate facilities created a stressful environment. "There's no wardrobe in the room; we complained, and after two weeks, they finally brought one. But the ventilation is still poor, and the room is cramped."

The accommodation struggles were not limited to Safia's room. "In the next room, there's a family - a mother, father, two kids, and a teenager. One of the children is autistic, and the teenage daughter is uncomfortable sharing the room with her father. The space is just not suitable for everyone," she explains. The centre has only four bathrooms shared among many residents, and the quality of living is further compromised by the lack of adequate washing facilities. "We can only wash our clothes once a week, and with children who wet the bed, this system is problematic," Safia adds. "We have very limited supplies. The soap we get is rationed, and not everyone receives milk."

Food and kitchen facilities also present issues. “We are allowed to cook, but there are significant problems with the kitchen space. Muslims need specific areas for halal food, while Christian residents also struggle with the lack of dedicated storage,” she explains. The allocation of kitchen spaces appears to be uneven, with some residents having multiple spaces and others having none. “There should be proper regulations and management to address these issues,” Safia argues.

Safety and Support Concerns

Safia's sense of safety within the centre is somewhat mixed. “In the house, I feel safe,” she says, “but the protests and negative news about asylum seekers make it frightening to go out.” The management issues in the centre have been a significant concern. “Some African women were always reporting issues, which made them targets,” Safia explains. The arrival of a new manager a few weeks ago has done little to improve the situation. “The new manager seems incapable of addressing the problems,” she adds.

Support services have been lacking as well. “I was advised by my GP to register with Spirasi for support, but I haven’t received any help from them yet,” she says. Heating and maintenance issues are ongoing problems. “The centre is always so cold, and even though the heating was fixed after an IPAS [International Protection Accommodation Services] visit, it feels like they’re only making token efforts,” Safia notes. The uneven distribution of resources, such as washing machines, further complicates daily life.

Transportation and Employment Challenges

Transportation is another significant hurdle for Safia and other residents. “In this village, job opportunities are scarce. Most positions available are in healthcare, which is not suitable for everyone,” she says. “Getting to neighbouring potential job locations is difficult because of unreliable transportation. Buses are often delayed, and getting a cab is nearly impossible.” This makes it challenging for residents to seek employment and manage their daily lives.

Community and Future Aspirations

Despite the challenges, Safia has found a sense of camaraderie among some residents. “We help each other out as best as we can,” she says. “There isn’t much of a community spirit, and people can be selfish, but we try to support one another.” Safia is involved in volunteering within the community, though transportation issues have made this difficult. “The bus service is unreliable, and it’s challenging to get around, especially for appointments and work,” she explains.

Her future aspirations remain focused on education and career development. “My priority is to continue my education. I have applied to schools in Dublin and TUS, hoping for advanced entry into a third or fourth year,” she says. Safia is determined to build a new life in Ireland despite the hurdles she faces. “I want to make the most of this opportunity, but the ongoing accommodation issues and transportation barriers make it challenging,” she adds.

Suggestions for Improvement

Reflecting on her experiences, Safia suggests several improvements to the accommodation system. “The current setup is only suitable for short-term stays. Extended periods in such conditions can lead to mental health issues and hinder personal development,” she argues. She advocates for better management, equitable distribution of resources, and more support for residents, especially those with children. “There should be proper onboarding for new arrivals, particularly parents, to help them navigate the challenges they face,” she adds. She believes that better management, improved living conditions, and more reliable transportation could significantly enhance the well-being of asylum seekers.

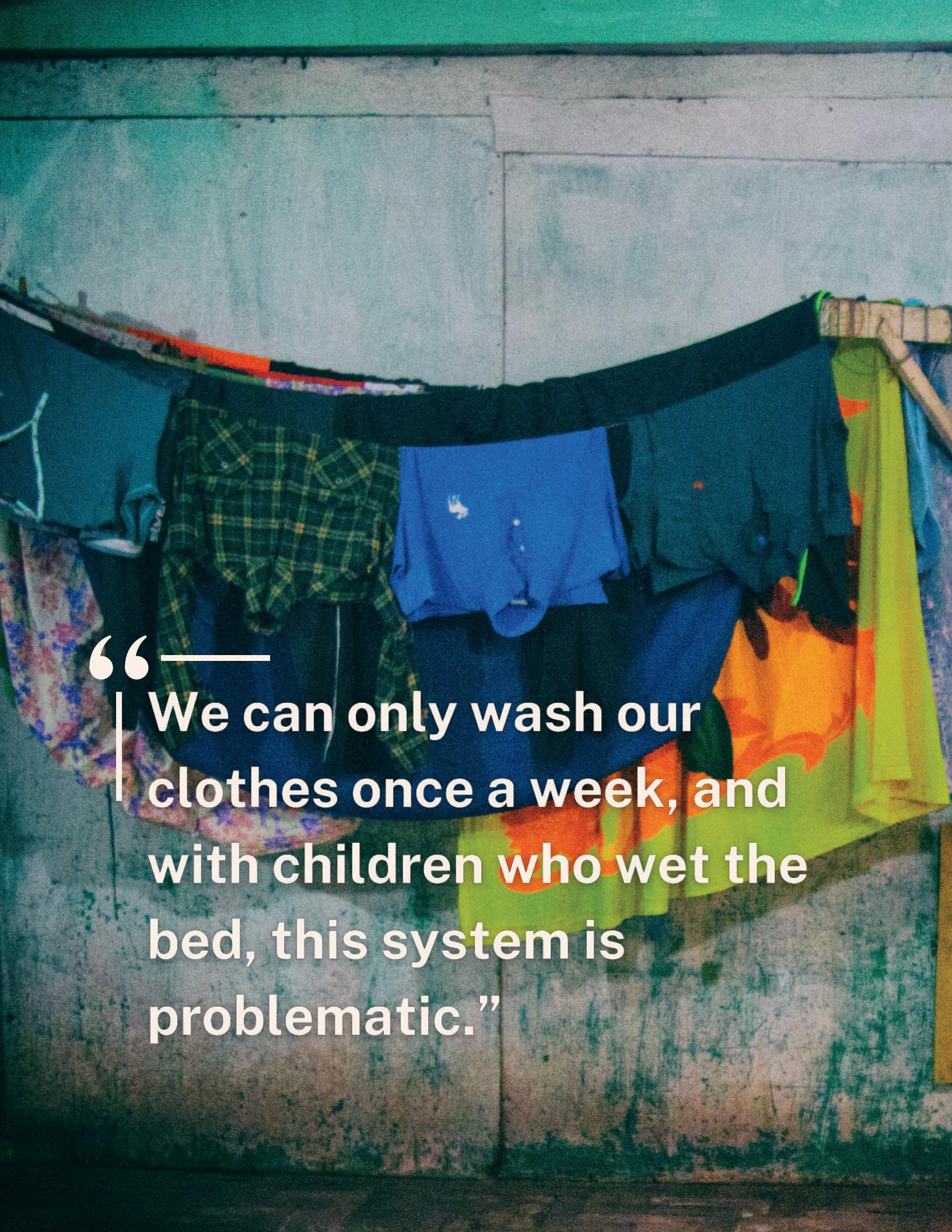


SAFETY CHALLENGES
Refugee

PRIVACY Supplies
Overcrowding EDUCATION

PROTESTS

SAFETY COMMUNITY

A photograph showing a clothesline with various laundry items hanging against a light blue wall. The laundry includes a green and yellow plaid shirt, a blue t-shirt, a dark blue shirt, a patterned skirt, and a yellow and orange cloth. The scene is lit with a warm, slightly overexposed glow.

“—
We can only wash our
clothes once a week, and
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problematic.”

Vanessa's Story: In the Between

Vanessa, a 39-year-old from South Africa, carries with her the echoes of a tumultuous past. She experienced a childhood marred by instability and frequent relocations due to family conflicts and community strife. Her grandfather, a bus owner, found himself at odds with the local taxi industry, escalating tensions that forced Vanessa and her family to move often. This instability shaped her life and her journey to Ireland, which she came to view as a chance for a fresh start.

A Journey to Ireland

Vanessa's life in South Africa was a complex tapestry of roles and challenges. "During the pandemic, I faced persecution and was driven into depression," she reflects. Vanessa's arrival in Ireland was far from ordinary. Her initial plan was never to settle there, but a family friend's invitation changed the course of her life. "I was going through a tough time and talked to my pastor about needing a fresh start," she recalls. "Ireland wasn't part of my plan, but I was invited here, and it felt like a miracle." Arriving in April 2022, she came as an artist, accompanying a friend who was performing a gig. Although her friend left after the event, Vanessa made the pivotal decision to stay. "I knew I wasn't ready to go back home," she explains. "I moved out of the hotel we were staying in and went straight to the IPO to seek asylum."

Living Conditions in Emergency Accommodation

Vanessa's experience in the emergency accommodation centre has been challenging. "The conditions here are far from ideal," she explains. "There's a clear bias towards certain groups, particularly the Georgians. Their preferences dominate, and it feels like our opinions are disregarded." Vanessa described a meeting about food distribution where the management had already pre-decided the options based on the Georgians' preferences, rendering the meeting meaningless.

Racial tensions have further complicated her experience. "The treatment of Africans here is discriminatory," Vanessa asserts. Discrimination is a constant issue. Vanessa describes an environment where racism is prevalent, with derogatory comments and hostile behaviour towards black residents. "The Georgians have called black people 'human animals' and even used racist terms towards our children," she says. "This kind of racism is a serious problem, and it seems to be tolerated." She recounts an incident where a Georgian resident removed her clothes from the dryer to make space for their own, highlighting a broader issue of disrespect and inequality. "It's as if our needs don't matter."

Safety Concerns and Security Issues

Safety is a major concern for Vanessa. “There’s a real sense of insecurity here,” she says. “When we first arrived, there was a gate that was later removed, supposedly to avoid being ‘caged,’ but it left us vulnerable. The lack of surveillance cameras adds to our fears.” Vanessa describes an incident where an outsider entered the premises unnoticed, further raising her anxiety about safety. “I’m constantly worried about attacks, especially given the hostility towards asylum seekers rising and in other centres.”

Challenges with Basic Rights and Services

Vanessa’s struggles extend to accessing basic human rights. “It took nearly five months to get my PPS number,” she reports. “Education has been another challenge. My application was rejected because I was working, but thanks to my employer’s sponsorship, I am now pursuing studies in administration.” Despite this, Vanessa feels the education system’s bureaucracy is frustrating and delaying her progress.

Employment Opportunities and Support

Vanessa’s employment journey has been marked by ups and downs. She previously worked in a flower company’s warehouse, a job she found unsatisfactory. “The treatment was horrible, and I left after a short time,” she says. “My current employment in a warehouse for one of the big international companies has been a much better experience. They offer growth opportunities, and their support for education is impressive.”

Support Services and Community

While support services such as sanitation and cleaning are provided, Vanessa feels they fall short. “We have basic supplies, but the system is flawed,” she notes. “There’s a need for better anti-racism policies and more effective counselling for both adults and children. The current setup often feels like we’re just being managed rather than genuinely supported.”

The sense of community within the centre is weak. “We live in a survival mode,” Vanessa explains. “Attempts to form supportive networks have largely failed. The Georgians are united and dominant, while the Africans are fragmented and often at odds.” The divisions between different nationalities, such as Zimbabweans and Nigerians, further complicate the social dynamics.

Future Aspirations and Barriers

Vanessa dreams of starting her own business as a music organizer, continuing her work in gospel music. “I used to organize gospel music concerts back home, and I’d love to do that here,” she says. She also hopes to start a family in the near future. However, the lack of status and stability hinders her progress. “I haven’t been able to pursue my plans fully because of the uncertainty,” she laments.

Suggestions for Improvement

Vanessa is candid about her lack of hope for significant improvements. “We’ve made many requests without much response,” she laments. “We need our voices to be heard, but it often feels like nothing changes. More effective management and genuine attention to our needs would make a difference.” She advocates for better systems, more inclusive policies, and a genuine effort to address the concerns of residents.



STABILITY Discrimination

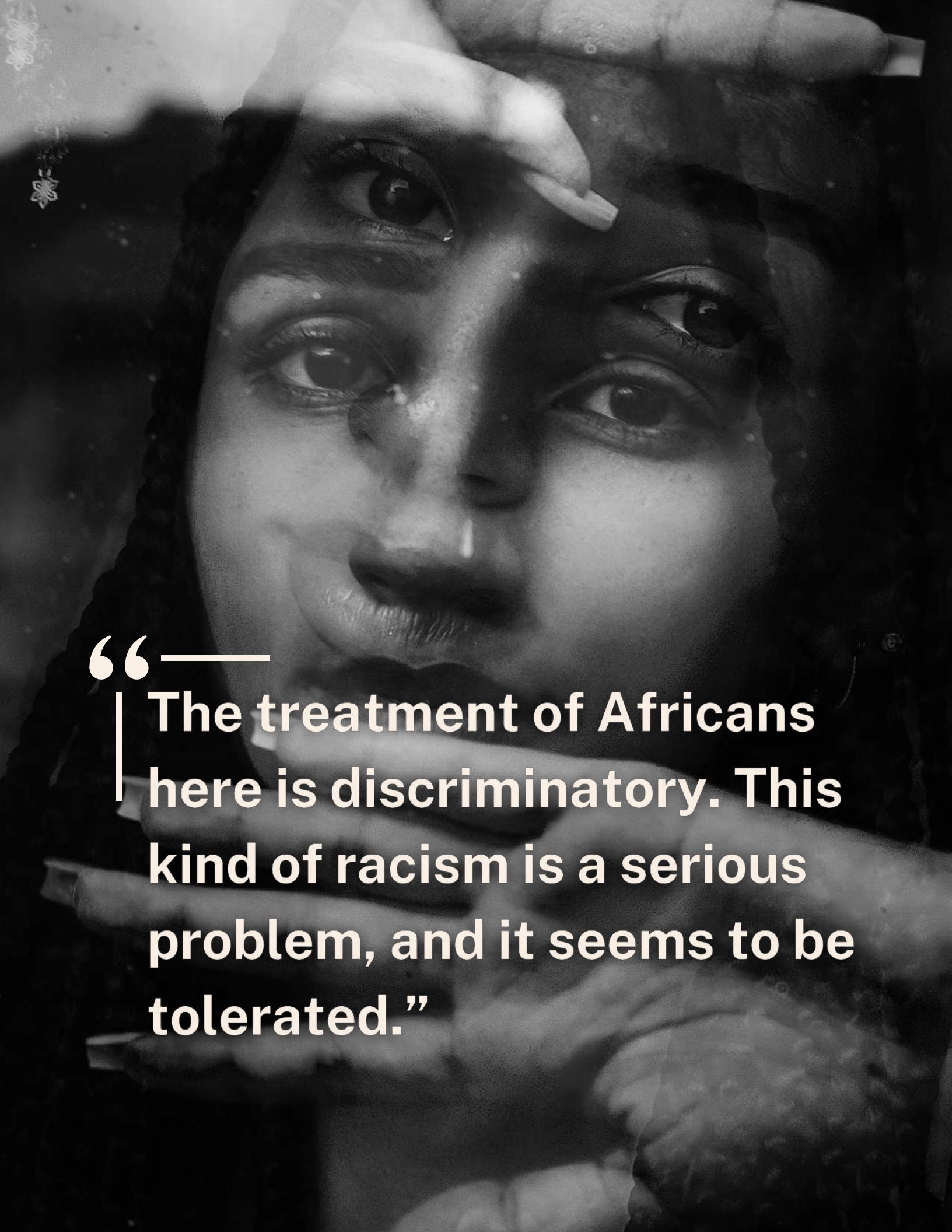
Divisions **INCLUSIVITY**

EDUCATION Community

Sanitation **EMPLOYMENT**

HOSTILITY Depression

SAFETY **RACISM**



“—
The treatment of Africans here is discriminatory. This kind of racism is a serious problem, and it seems to be tolerated.”

Betty's Story: Finding Hope in Uncertainty

Betty, the youngest of her biological siblings, has traversed a harrowing journey in search of safety and freedom. Her story is marked by profound loss, a quest for personal liberation, and the enduring struggle for stability in a new land.

A Courageous Move

Betty's life took a significant turn in 2010 when her mother passed away. Her father's death followed soon after. She moved in with a woman who became her adoptive mother in 2012, trying to piece together a semblance of normalcy. By 2018, she relocated to Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, seeking new opportunities and a fresh start.

Her journey from Nigeria to Ireland was driven by the need for safety and acceptance as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. "Life was incredibly hard in Nigeria," Betty reflects. "When the opportunity arose, I knew I had to leave." Her decision to come to Ireland wasn't made independently; it was facilitated through a perilous and illegal route. From Nigeria, she travelled to France and then to Ireland, enduring a gruelling three-week journey across sea and land.

Trauma and Escape

The journey was fraught with exploitation and danger. Betty endured sexual exploitation as a criterion for her relocation. "During transit, I was handed over to someone who abused me. This continued until I reached France," she recounts. She travelled among a group of people and managed to escape further exploitation until arriving in Ireland. At that point, she faced another financial challenge - being asked to pay 1.5 million naira for travel assistance when she only had 750,000 naira and her own body as collateral.

Despite the hardships, Betty is grateful to be in Ireland, where she finds herself safe for the first time in years. However, the trauma she experienced continues to haunt her. "I can't sleep without the lights on," she admits. "What I went through still affects me deeply. I need counselling but haven't been able to access it yet."

Betty arrived in Ireland in February 2024. Her transition from Abuja - a place she fondly remembers as offering a good life - to a remote centre in the countryside of eastern Ireland, has been challenging. "The community here is very small, and I feel like I have to keep to myself because everyone knows your business," she says.

The living conditions at the centre are far from ideal. The centre is cramped and Betty often finds herself at odds with her roommates. “We’re three in a room, and it’s hard to manage because I can’t sleep with the light off due to nightmares, while one of my roommates can’t sleep with the light on due to eye issues,” she explains. Additionally, the room’s heating system is uncomfortable, leading to further disputes.

Betty is also struggling with limited privacy and cleanliness issues. “I’m always cleaning up after my roommate, who doesn’t manage their space properly. I like my space clean, but it’s frustrating not being able to control how others use their space.”

Pursuing Dreams and Facing Challenges

Despite these challenges, Betty remains hopeful and is determined to improve her situation. She has applied for a healthcare course, which she hopes will offer a pathway to stable employment. “The course is free, but I haven’t received admission confirmation yet,” she notes. “I also want to pursue a career in tech, but right now, I’m just trying to hold my body and soul together.”

Betty’s immediate need is a laptop, which she hopes to obtain through a crowdfunding campaign. “I need a laptop with enough space to support my learning and work,” she says. She also has the option of attending a computer class, focusing on basic skills like Word and Excel.

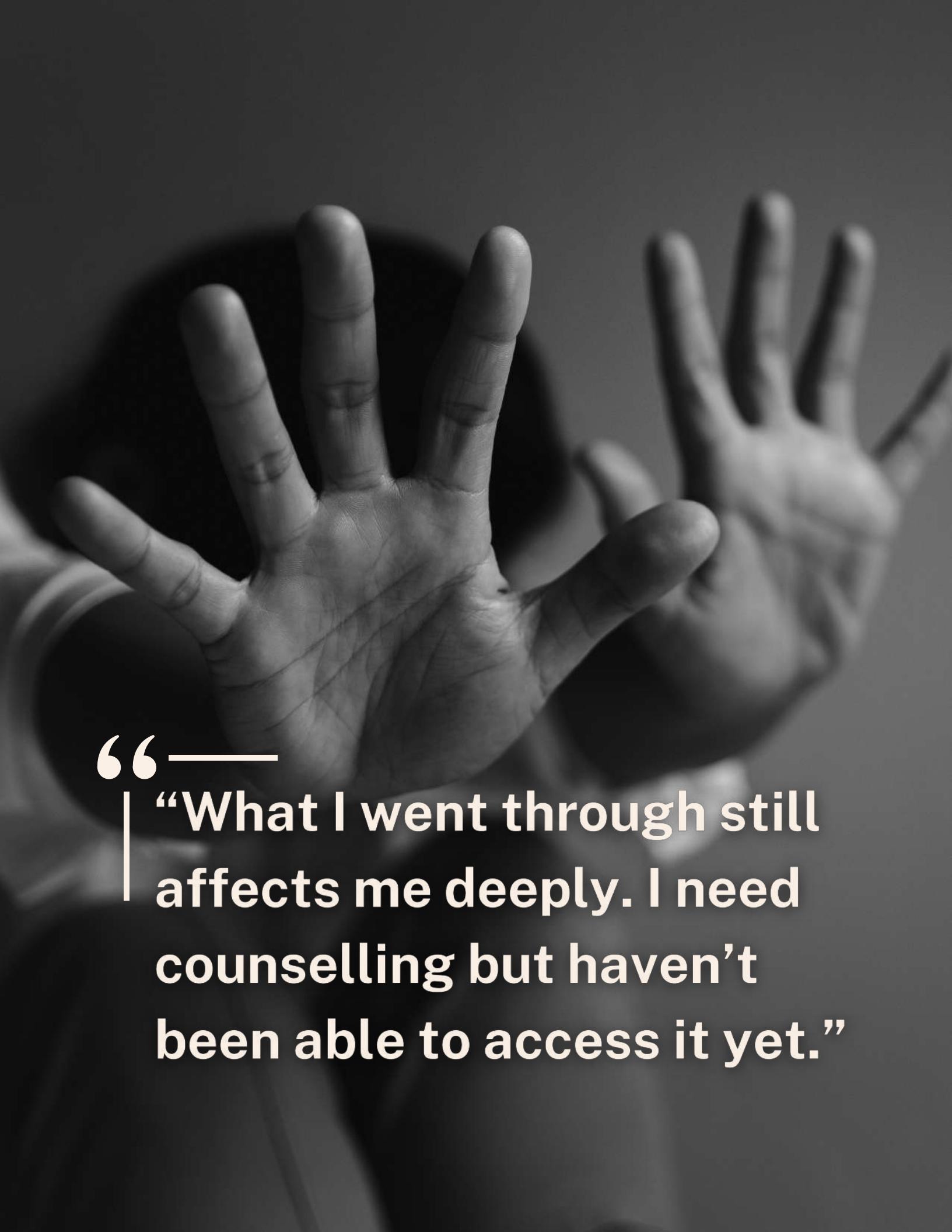
Social and Emotional Struggles

Socially, Betty finds herself isolated. The community at her emergency accommodation centre consists of a mix of nationalities, but she feels disconnected. “There are a few South Africans, Saudis, and Nigerians, but it’s hard to find a sense of belonging,” she says. She has tried to engage in activities outside the centre, like attending a book club, but finds the experience challenging due to language barriers and a lack of social interaction.

Support and Suggestions

Betty is grateful for some support she’s received, such as assistance from the hotel managers in applying for her PPS card. However, there are gaps in support. “I haven’t had any contact from a lawyer or social worker yet, and I still don’t have a medical card,” she explains. The local doctor is accessible, but her healthcare registration process has been hampered by technology barriers.

Betty suggests improvements for the centre, such as better listening to residents’ needs, creating a lounging area, and addressing issues like insect infestations. “There should be a focus on meeting the most important needs of residents,” she suggests.



“—

“What I went through still affects me deeply. I need counselling but haven’t been able to access it yet.”

Moreniqe's Story: A Mother Between Hardship and Hope

Moreniqe, a 45-year-old Nigerian woman of Yoruba descent, arrived in Ireland in October 2022, with her three children, aged 11, 10, and 8. She had endured a difficult journey, leaving Nigeria for Ethiopia before making her way to the UK and finally Ireland. Despite her hopes of finding safety in one of the world's safest countries, the reality she encountered was far from what she had imagined.

"I didn't know anyone in Ireland," Moreniqe recalls. "I was scared. My children were crying in the taxi on the way to the IPO [International Protection Office]. I was crying too." At the IPO, they were met with confusion and anxiety. There was no vulnerability assessment conducted, and she was too nervous to fill out the forms on her own. "The tension was too much," she says. "The staff had to help us with the forms."

Life in Emergency Accommodation

From the IPO, Moreniqe and her children were sent to Citywest Dublin, where they stayed for two weeks before being moved to an emergency accommodation centre in northwestern Ireland. The transition to life in the Direct Provision system has been anything but easy. "In terms of privacy, there is none. We are facing discrimination and abuse from the management. The black people here are treated as second-class citizens. It's been a big battle."

Moreniqe shares a disturbing incident involving her son, who was involved in a fight with a white child of a resident at the centre. "At their school, the white girl slapped my son, and he hit her back. The children settled it themselves, but when they got home, the girl's mother started shouting at my son, scaring him. She never approached me to discuss it, nor did she apologize. When I reported to management, they sided with her. It seems they have the right to do whatever they want."

Moreniqe also highlights the lack of security at the centre, "This place is not secure. There's no gate, no security personnel. We've asked for a gate since last year, but nothing has been done." The lack of safety is exacerbated by the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in the area, making the residents feel even more vulnerable.

Balancing Work, Motherhood, and Aspirations

Despite the challenges, Morenike has tried to make the best of her situation. She has started working at a nursing home. She is determined to move forward for her and her children. "I want to start university again, maybe in law or nursing," she says. "I'm soft-hearted and love caring for people."

Morenike has also found some solace in building networks, particularly through the AkiDwA mentorship system, and has made a close friend who helps her with her children.

Her children have also begun to adjust, although the journey to their school in a neighbouring town is long and arduous. "They said the school in our town is full so I had to put my children in the school in a neighbouring community." Morenike dreams of a better future for them. "My daughter wants to be a doctor, and my last son dreams of becoming a judge," she says with pride.

Resilience Amidst Adversity

Morenike's story is one of resilience, but also of deep frustration with the system that was supposed to protect her. "The Irish government welcomed us, but the managers of these facilities are oppressing us," she says. She calls on organizations to continue advocating for the rights of asylum seekers and to hold those in power accountable. "People are having depression in direct provision, and it's not easy. We are going through a lot," she says, her voice heavy with the weight of her experiences.

"The government is trying its best, but the people in charge of these centres are not doing well. We need routine inspections and better oversight. We need to be heard."

Morenike remains hopeful for a better future. "I got my refugee status after a year in Ireland, and now I can finally buy a car. It's just God," she says with a smile, reflecting on how far she has come. However, she now faces the daunting challenge of being asked to leave the centre where she and her children have lived since arriving in Ireland. The notice to leave the centre, while lacking a specific timeline, looms over her as a stark reminder of the precariousness of her situation. With the severe housing crisis gripping the country, finding affordable and secure accommodation feels like an insurmountable task. The fear of homelessness now overshadows the joy of receiving her status, leaving Morenike anxious and uncertain about what the future holds for her family.

Notwithstanding the long road ahead, Morenike remains hopeful for a better future, not just for herself, but for the many others like her who continue to struggle in a system that often feels indifferent to their plight.

“—

"The government is trying its best, but the people in charge of these centres are not doing well. We need routine inspections and better oversight. We need to be heard."



Bisi's Story: Between the Farm and the Future

Bisi, a 42-year-old Nigerian woman, began her life in Lagos, a bustling city known for its vibrant culture and relentless pace. Born and raised in this dynamic environment, Bisi pursued her education and started a family. However, life took an unexpected turn, leading her to separate from her husband and seek a new beginning elsewhere. With her two daughters, she made the difficult decision to leave Nigeria behind, hoping to find safety in Ireland. Upon arrival, Bisi was taken to the Irish Protection Office (IPO), where the initial steps of her asylum application process began. Bisi and her daughters were assigned to a remote emergency accommodation centre in the southern Ireland countryside.

Living Conditions in Emergency Accommodation

The centre, a converted farm surrounded by vast stretches of fields and livestock, was a stark contrast to the urban life they had known in Lagos. "When we first arrived, my kids asked why there were bushes everywhere. I wasn't surprised because a friend had warned me that sometimes asylum seekers are housed in rural settings here, but it was still a shock," Bisi says. The isolation of the centre, with its surrounding farmland and lack of nearby amenities, was something she had never imagined.

Their initial accommodation was far from satisfactory. The room they were assigned was cramped. The lack of space and privacy weighed heavily on her, especially after having lived in a more comfortable environment in Nigeria. For five months, Bisi persistently advocated for better living conditions for her family. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, her request was granted, and they were moved to a more suitable room. This new space, while still not ideal, offered a semblance of privacy and comfort, providing her daughters with their own beds and a bit of personal space.

Challenges for Her Children's Education

Living in the centre presented its own set of challenges beyond the physical discomfort. The remote location meant limited access to essential services and opportunities. Transportation quickly became a significant issue. Initially, Bisi was informed that her children could only attend school three days a week due to the inadequate bus service. "I said hell no," Bisi recalls with determination. She knew the importance of education for her daughters and fought to ensure they could attend school every day. After much persistence, a bus service was provided, but the problem was far from solved. The bus schedule was irregular, often leaving her children to miss several classes. "The bus driver seems to prioritize other children, and mine end up missing three classes in the morning and two in the afternoon. It's frustrating," she says.

The transportation challenges extended beyond her children's education. Bisi herself faced difficulties in getting to work. After months of waiting, she finally received her work permit and quickly secured a job as a kitchen porter at a nearby airport. However, the remote location of the centre made it nearly impossible for her to manage the long commute. "My work schedule requires an early start, but the first bus doesn't come until 8 am and the last bus leaves at 3:40 pm," Bisi explains. Without a car, she had to rely on a neighbour for rides, adding to her daily stress and making it difficult to keep her job. "I don't have money to buy a car, and even if I did, driving lessons for an automatic are expensive. A lot of people here have the same problem. Transportation is a major challenge," she adds.

However, Bisi was frustrated by the lack of transparency and communication from the centre's management. "The manager keeps things vague so we don't know the rules and regulations. It's tiring because nothing changes, no matter how much we complain," she laments. The residents were often left in the dark about decisions affecting their daily lives, and requests for improvements, particularly regarding transportation, seemed to fall on deaf ears. "I know of a person who has written to the IPAS (International Protection Accommodation Services) asking to be moved, but nothing has been done. I don't want to hope on false promises," she says. The constant pushback from the management left Bisi feeling disillusioned and weary of making complaints. "Some people say we should be grateful for what we have, but it's hard when nothing changes, no matter how much we ask," she adds.

Despite these challenges, Bisi remained resilient. Her job as a kitchen porter, though far from her dream role, provided some financial stability. "I would have loved to be a waitress again, but with my age and this weather, I'll do what I can," she says. Bisi had worked as a waitress in Nigeria, a job she enjoyed and felt proud of. Recognizing the demand for healthcare workers in Ireland, Bisi began exploring opportunities in the care sector. "I'm going to apply for the healthcare assistant course. Everyone here is doing it because that's where the jobs are," she explains. The idea of becoming a chef also crossed her mind, but the commitment required - a full-time course spanning four years - seemed unrealistic as she sighted her age and responsibilities as obstacles for going down this path.

Life at the centre was a mixed experience for Bisi. On the one hand, she appreciated the sense of safety the centre provided. Since moving in, she had not faced any significant security issues, and the community within the centre was generally supportive. "It's mostly women and children here, so we all try to understand each other. There's no racism, which is a relief," she says. The women in the centre formed a close-knit community, supporting one another in the face of shared challenges.

Dreams of a Brighter Future

As Bisi looks to the future, her hopes are tempered by the realities of her situation. Her primary goal is to gain refugee status and move her family to a better environment, away from the isolation and discomfort of their current accommodation. "If I get my status, my first action is to move from here to a better place where I am not seeing animals so close to me daily," she says, referring to the livestock that roam near the centre. Bisi dreams of a future where her children can grow up in a more supportive and nurturing environment. One of her daughters has expressed an interest in becoming a dentist, but Bisi encourages her to take her time in making such a life-defining decision. "Every parent prays for a good future for their children," she says, holding onto hope even in the face of uncertainty.

As she continues to navigate the complexities of her new life in Ireland, Bisi remains hopeful that, one day, she and her daughters will find the peace and stability they seek.



ISOLATION Privacy

Expenses **RESILIENCE**

SAFETY Refugee

Peace **STABILITY**

COMPLAINTS Transparency

ASYLUM

HOPE

“—

Some people say we should be grateful for what we have, but it's hard when nothing changes, no matter how much we ask.”





Phone: +353 (0)1 8349851

Email: info@akidwa.ie

Location: Unit 2 Killarney Court, Buckingham Street, Dublin 1, Ireland



Registered Charity Number: 20063641