To: Regina Doherty, Minister for Enterprise and Social Protection

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you as I am concerned about asylum seekers living in direct provision accommodation and the financial support available to them at this time.

I was deeply disappointed to learn that asylum seekers living in direct provision who have become unemployed are excluded from the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP). This includes asylum seekers who are self-employed or business owners and accumulate expenses from business overheads even while they are unable to work or open their businesses.

It is disingenuous to say that asylum seekers in direct provision have their needs met through the Daily Expenses Allowance. At €38.80, this represents a significant fall in income for people who have become unemployed. It is also inconsistent with the Department’s policy of extending the PUP to other unemployed persons in receipt of social welfare payments.

There is no clear legislative basis for this decision, and it would be a simple matter for your Department to reverse this policy. This policy has been criticised by NGOs and by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC).

I also understand that your Department has refused a request made by 40 organisations around the country working with asylum seekers to temporarily increase the Daily Expenses Allowance for the duration of the pandemic. I am requesting that your office reconsider this decision. Expenses for people living in direct provision have increased greatly during the crisis as community resources such as public libraries etc are no longer open and available. Direct provision residents have lost many supports from local community groups that are no longer able to operate in centres. The increased cost of keeping safe and well and providing resources for children who are often stuck in one room rather than being able to experience some normality in their local school has been hugely challenging for families in direct provision. As parents in direct provision are also excluded from child benefit, they receive only €29.80 per week for children.

I am now asking you to please:

1. Extend the Employment Pandemic Payment to residents of direct provision who have become unemployed.
2. Increase the Daily Expenses Allowance by €20 per week for residents of direct provision

I look forward to hearing your response.

Yours faithfully,