

Cabinet ministers must show leadership on refugee crisis

NGO Coalition Statement, Wednesday 9th Sept 2015

As the Cabinet meets to discuss the ongoing refugee crisis, a coalition of expert groups has set out the actions the Government must take to address the suffering at Europe's borders. The coalition has been formed to respond to the ongoing refugee crisis from a humanitarian and social justice perspective.

Over the past week, it has become increasingly clear that the Irish public is overwhelmingly supportive of the Government taking action and welcoming large numbers of refugees to Ireland. Government response, however, has been inadequate. The humanitarian crisis at European borders is worsening by the day. Lives are being lost, families are being torn apart and countless children are suffering. Money is available at EU level to support the acceptance of refugees to Ireland: this is not a question of finances.

As the Cabinet meets to agree plans for the ongoing refugee crisis, and in advance of the extraordinary EU Justice and Home Affairs meeting on 14th Sept, **we, the undersigned organisations, call on the Government to take the following essential steps:**

- Show leadership, as demanded by the Irish public, and **be a strong voice for refugees and migrants at a European level**, advocating for safe and legal access to Europe.
- **Develop a firm plan of action**, in consultation with civil society, on how Ireland intends to respond to the needs of refugees seeking protection in Europe, in preparation for the EU Justice and Home Affairs meeting on the 14th September. The crisis must be considered a priority issue and kept on the Cabinet agenda as long as it continues.
- **Significantly increase the numbers of people** seeking protection to be welcomed to Ireland, and agree additional numbers of people over the coming years. This decision must be grounded in fact – capacity, funding, percentage share as an EU member state, and the understanding that this is a time of humanitarian crisis which requires exceptional measures. Both recognised refugees and those seeking protection should be included in government proposals.*
- Develop and **implement a transparent and accelerated process of relocation and resettlement**, with clear guidelines and timeframes in place. Expand legal channels of migration to Ireland and across the European Union, including humanitarian visas and less rigid family reunification measures.
- **Immediately suspend the return mechanism of the Dublin Regulation** in Ireland and call on other European Union member states to do likewise.

- Take decisive action to **provide appropriate reception accommodation in a community setting** which upholds human rights standards and responds to the short- and long-term needs of refugees in Ireland. It is vital that this is operated on a not-for-profit basis. Work with communities, NGOs and the community sector to ensure the integration of people coming to Ireland.
- **Continue search and rescue in the Mediterranean** beyond the November deadline and throughout the winter.
- **Address the root causes of the crisis** by urging European governments to honour their international development aid commitments and increase investment in inclusive development, decent work and social protection in countries of origin so that migration becomes an option, not a necessity. Call on EU member states to strengthen long-term efforts to resolve the underlying causes of growing refugee numbers, investing in urgent political solutions to conflict and inclusive socio-economic development across Africa and the Middle East.

Failure to act now will lead to increased loss of life and continued suffering for people fleeing war, poverty and persecution. Ireland needs to act with courage and conviction in this time of need. The public is calling for it, civil society is calling for it, and humanity demands it.

Signed:

ActionAid Ireland
 Comhlámh
 Christian Aid Ireland
 Community Workers' Co-operative
 CORI (Conference of Religious in Ireland)
 Crosscare Migrant and Refugee Project
 Dóchas
 European Network against Racism (ENAR) Ireland
 Immigrant Council of Ireland
 Irish Missionary Union
 Irish Refugee Council
 Mayo Intercultural Action
 Mercy International Association
 Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
 Oxfam Ireland
 Trócaire

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NOTES

* Resettlement of refugees from outside the EU, the Government's apparent preferred option, will not address the situation within the EU of people who have arrived independently and claimed asylum.