

## **Media Release**

### **Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

#### **One year on, Government needs to act fast to keep its promise on refugees**

- **Coalition says Ireland has taken in just one unaccompanied child since pledge**
- **Group of NGOs call for speedier relocation and humanitarian scheme to bring loved ones to safety here in Ireland in advance of first UN Summit on Migration**

A year since Ireland pledged to take in 4,000 refugees, the Refugee and Migrant Coalition has called on the Government to ensure it keeps its promise.

The group of organisations working with asylum seekers, migrants and refugees both in Ireland and overseas was formed one year ago following public outcry at the plight of refugees, like three-year-old Syrian Alan Kurdi, who washed up on a Turkish beach having drowned with his mother and brother.

On September 10<sup>th</sup> 2015, the Government pledged to take up to 4,000 refugees through the Irish Refugee Protection Programme as part of the European response to the crisis, but since then just 311 refugees have arrived.

In advance of the first ever UN Summit on Refugees and Migration, co facilitated by Ireland and Jordan, the coalition is calling on the Government to urgently increase its intake of refugees, to make good on its stated commitment to prioritise unaccompanied children and to introduce a humanitarian scheme that would allow people living here to bring loved ones to safety in Ireland.

**Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) Director Edel McGinley said,** “In the year since Alan Kurdi’s death, Ireland has taken in just one unaccompanied child. This is unacceptable. Children seeking safety and protection who are separated from their families are languishing in squalid camps, suffering abuse and exploitation and falling prey to human traffickers because of the failure of EU leaders to manage this crisis effectively and humanely.

**McGinley continued,** “The number of vulnerable children at risk is especially striking in Italy, where more than 90 per cent of all refugee and migrant children are on their own. It is scandalous that the Irish Government is failing to respond to this and protect children in line with international law. We must act immediately to create real solutions to this crisis based on solidarity and human rights.” "

**Sheila Curran, Justice Coordinator of Conference of Religious in Ireland (CORI) and Irish Missionary Union said,** “In the year since the Government made its pledge to take in 4,000 refugees, just 311 have arrived. The Government needs to step up its reception of refugees immediately if it is to meet this most basic of commitments.”

**Curran continued,** “The Tánaiste should use the opportunity of the UN Summit to match the spirit of the Irish people and commit to expediting and increasing these numbers”.

**Maria Hennessy, Legal Officer with the Irish Refugee Council Ireland,** after a recent visit to Greece said ““The living conditions for refugees in Greece camps are appalling. Families with young children are left in tents in the sweltering heat or steel containers with insufficient sanitation facilities and limited access to nutritious food and healthcare”.

**Hennessy continued** “Refugee children do not go to school and unaccompanied children are detained if there is no space in care homes for them. Hosting these children in Ireland is one concrete way Ireland can help alleviate their situation”.

**Réiseal Ni Chéilleachair, Humanitarian Policy Advisor with Trócaire** said “The passport office hired over 200 extra staff to deal with the post-Brexit demand for Irish passports. The Government must be equally proactive in providing adequate administrative, financial and logistical support to meet the needs of refugees in Ireland who are fleeing desperate situations”.

**Ni Chéilleachair, concluded,** “We should not measure our success by the failures of other Member States; we should ask instead how future generations will view Irish inaction in the face of desperate need. It is now imperative that the Government speed up the pace of relocation, ensure children separated from their families are prioritised and commit to introducing a humanitarian scheme to bring loved ones to safety here in Ireland”.

**\*ENDS\***

**Contact**

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**Notes to Editor**

**Press Conference**

**WHEN: 11am, Wednesday 7th September 2016**

**WHERE: Buswells Hotel, 27 Molesworth St, Dublin 2**

**SPEAKERS will include a newly resettled refugee** and representatives from Trócaire, the Irish Refugee Council and Migrant Rights Centre Ireland.

- The first ever [UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants](#) will take place in New York on 19th September. President Obama will host a “Leaders’ Summit” on refugees the day after in which Ireland is unlikely to participate. The outcome document which will be agreed by world leaders at the UN summit was negotiated by UN Member States during the summer, co/facilitated by the Ambassadors of Ireland and Jordan to the UN in New York.

- The European Union devised a system to relocate 160,000 people in need of protection. The allocation was non-binding and the United Kingdom opted out of the mechanism. On September 10<sup>th</sup> 2015, Ireland opted in and committed to relocate and resettle up to 4,000 people.
- The Irish Government established a mechanism for relocation to protect the rights of selected refugees relocated here. 311 people have been welcomed to Ireland in 2016, 38 via a relocation scheme and 273 via an established resettlement scheme. This puts Ireland on par with Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in terms of relocation from Greece.
- In March 2016, the much criticised EU-Turkey Deal was announced. The majority of Dáil Members were critical of the Deal. Further concerns have been raised by Members of the Oireachtas on the legality of the deal and the implications for families and unaccompanied children minors who are now effectively trapped in transit.
- The Syrian Humanitarian Admissions Programme (SHAP) was introduced in response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria that focused on offering temporary Irish residence to vulnerable persons who are present in Syria, or who have fled from Syria to surrounding countries since the outbreak of the civil war, who have close family members residing in the State. 111 people came through this programme. There are many lessons to be learned from SHAP, not least the process, documentary requirements, costs and timeframes. The coalition is seeking a new Humanitarian Admission Programme (HAP) which would build on SHAP lessons and be broader in scope and application - not limited to Syrian nationals.
- Ireland needs a more coherent effort between the government, and civil society organisations to ensure relocation and resettlement takes place in the best way possible and far faster between now and the end of 2017.
- The rate of unaccompanied minors is especially striking in Italy, where more than 90 per cent of all child migrants and refugees are on their own. Around 10,500 unaccompanied children have arrived in Italian ports so far this year - more than double the number for the same time period in 2015.

#### Refugee and Migrant Coalition

ActionAid Ireland; Community Work Ireland; Christian Aid; Comhlámh; Crosscare; Conference of the Religious of Ireland; Cultúr Migrants Centre; Dóchas; Doras Luimní; ENAR Ireland; Immigrant Council of Ireland; Irish Missionary Union; Irish Refugee Council; Jesuit Refugee Service; Mercy International Association; Migrant Rights Centre Ireland; Mayo Intercultural Action; Nasc Ireland; National Women's Council of Ireland ; Oxfam Ireland; Trócaire ; World Vision Ireland