



17 August 2021

**To: Taoiseach Michaél Martin TD**

CC:

Heather Humphreys TD, Minister for Justice

Roderic O’Gorman TD, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Simon Coveney TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs

James Browne TD, Minister of State at the Department of Justice

Dear Taoiseach,

We are a group of organisations working on Migrant, Asylum and Refugee rights. We are writing to you in relation to the unfolding crisis in Afghanistan. We strongly welcome the initial commitment to offer 150 people humanitarian admission to Ireland, plus commitments to prioritise family reunification. We are also ready to

support this process in any way we can. In addition we call on the Irish government to take the following important steps:

1. Increase resettlement places for Afghan refugees and provide additional support and assistance for the Irish Refugee Protection Programme and participate in a wider EU redistribution

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme has a good track record of supporting and resettling refugees in Ireland, including through Community Sponsorship. We believe, with support and additional staffing, it can lead in the response to this crisis. We note that Ireland set itself a target of 1,350 resettled refugees in 2020 and 2021 but, due to Covid 19 and other reasons, only approximately 250 people have been resettled, leaving 1,100 places unfilled. According to UNHCR there are approximately 96,000 Afghan people in need of resettlement around the world but in particular in neighbouring countries.

**We call on Ireland to commit to resettle a minimum of 1,000 Afghan refugees. This scheme should be flexible and include people in neighbouring countries. We call on Ireland to participate in any wider resettlement and relocation scheme that the EU proposes.**

2. Humanitarian admission of people at high risk of persecution

We welcome the initial commitment of the evacuation of 150 Afghan people made by Minister Simon Coveney on 16 August.

**We call on Ireland to proactively identify people who have worked with the EU, humanitarian organisations and their partners and women and girls at risk of persecution.**

3. Ensure international protection is provided to Afghan protection applicants currently in Ireland through an expedited process

Approximately 70 Afghan people have applied for international protection in Ireland in 2021 (up until June). There are approximately 211 Afghan nationals currently living in Direct Provision (as of July). UNHCR stated last week that Afghans outside of the country may have international protection needs. Afghan nationals are already on a prioritisation list (produced by the International Protection Office and UNHCR Ireland) due to the likelihood that their applications are well-founded due to the country of origin. However, projected waiting times are currently 19.5 months for prioritised applications.

**We call on the Irish government, the Department of Justice and the International Protection Office to ensure international protection is provided to Afghan protection applicants currently in Ireland through an expedited process**

#### 4. Fast track family reunion applications and broaden criteria

Some Afghan refugees in Ireland may have outstanding family reunification applications with family in Afghanistan. Waiting times for family reunification applications are currently approximately 12 months.

**We call on the Government to prioritise and expedite these applications as family members are likely to be in dangerous situations.**

In addition, the International Protection Act has a narrow definition of family resulting in many family members not being able to reunify. As organisations we work with many people who have family members in desperate situations but who are not eligible for reunification because they are outside the statutory definition.

**We also call on the Government to introduce an Irish Humanitarian Admissions Programme (IHAP) to enable Afghans living in Ireland to apply for extended family members such as parents and siblings.**

#### 5. Leave to land and access to the international protection process

Approximately 97 Afghan people were refused leave to land in Ireland between 1 January 2020 and 31 May 2021.

**We call on the Irish authorities to ensure Afghan people have access to the protection process in Ireland, including when entering Ireland at border points such as Dublin airport.**

#### 6. Continue positive leadership via Security Council seat

We believe, through membership of the Security Council, and other diplomatic channels, Ireland can continue to show strong humanitarian leadership on this issue. Backing this up through the responses outlined above will add weight and credibility to Ireland's leadership.

Yours faithfully,

Nick Henderson, Chief Executive Officer, Irish Refugee Council  
Lucky Khambule, Movement of Asylum Seekers Ireland  
John Lannon, Chief Executive Officer, Doras  
Brian Killoran, Chief Executive Officer, Immigrant Council of Ireland

Liam Herrick, Irish Council for Civil Liberties  
Fiona Finn, Chief Executive Officer, Nasc, Migrant & Refugee Rights Centre  
Tinu Achioya, Program Manager, Cultúr Migrants Centre  
Tiffy Allen, Places of Sanctuary Ireland  
Edel McGinley, Director, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland  
Orla Ni hEili, Clare Immigrant Support Centre  
Colm O’Gorman, Executive Director, Amnesty International Ireland  
Jim Clarken, CEO, Oxfam Ireland