



## Press Release

10<sup>th</sup> September 2021

### Refugee Support Organisations Call on Government to Implement Humanitarian Admission Programme

Refugee support organisations have called for the speedy implementation of the humanitarian admission programme announced by the Government on August 28<sup>th</sup> in response to the crisis in Afghanistan. Doras, Nasc, the Irish Refugee Council, Crosscare, and the Immigrant Council of Ireland have all welcomed the announcement of the programme which plans to admit up to 500 Afghan refugees. However, it is essential that the application criteria for the programme are sufficiently broad and that the programme is opened without delay as the situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate.

A Humanitarian Admission Programme would allow people from priority countries who are resident in Ireland to apply for family members to join them. The application process needs to be cognisant of the limitations faced by Afghans in getting passports or other original documentation out of Afghanistan at the moment.

In light of the extreme urgency of the crisis, the five organisations have also called for a more sympathetic and flexible approach to visa applications for people from Afghanistan who already have family members in Ireland.

“We cannot overstate the urgency of the need to establish a temporary humanitarian admission programme to address the ongoing crises in Afghanistan, Syria and other parts of the world.” said John Lannon, CEO of Doras. “A dedicated scheme which would include extended family members is necessary in light of the limitations of existing mechanisms such as ‘D’ (long-stay) visa applications and family reunification under the International Protection Act 2015.”

Over the last few weeks organisations like Doras, Nasc, the Irish Refugee Council, Crosscare and the Immigrant Council have been inundated with calls from Afghan nationals living in Ireland who are seeking information and support with immigration, family reunification and visa applications. They are also calling on the Government to ensure that families can be reunited in Ireland by taking a flexible and inclusive approach to processing visa applications.

“Afghan families in Ireland are terrified for their families’ safety. We’re hearing of incidents in the past three weeks of punishment beatings, property confiscation, disappearances and tragically a number of deaths. We are very concerned that 500 places will not be enough to meet the need and would caution against the government imposing an upper limit at the outset of the programme. Ireland’s restrictive family reunification laws which exclude children who have turned 18 from the right to family reunification mean that many Afghan families are separated, and vulnerable family members have been left behind in increasingly unsafe conditions. We call on the Government to take swift action to enable people to apply for their family members to join them in Ireland.” said Fiona Finn, CEO of Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre.

Nick Henderson, CEO of the Irish Refugee Council said “We and many members of the legal and NGO community are assisting Irish citizens, residents and refugees in applying for visas for family members who are at risk in Afghanistan. The Department of Justice has an important opportunity to respond to those visa applications with flexibility and with regard for the humanitarian and human rights situation in Afghanistan. The Irish-Afghan community is going through immense pain and heartbreak, and they need safe and legal

pathways to bring their families here as quickly as possible. We must do everything we can to ensure that families have opportunities to be reunited in Ireland.”

“We are hearing the frustration and heartbreak that people in the Afghan community in Ireland are enduring every day. Like our colleagues in other organisations we stand in solidarity with all who are affected by the humanitarian and human rights crisis in the country.” said Richard King of Crosscare.

Doras, Nasc, the Irish Refugee Council and Crosscare have written to the Minister for Justice calling for a multi-faceted approach to this crisis, including flexible and inclusive approaches to processing visa applications, as well as the establishment of the Humanitarian Admissions Programme. In their letter they outlined a number of practical suggestions that they urged the Department of Justice to implement immediately. These include the establishment of an online visa application process whereby documents are uploaded to a secure portal, or until such a process is established, by email to the Visa office in Dublin; the acceptance of electronic copies of documents where these are available, given the limited access to original identity and other documentation available to Afghans; and the waiver of certain normal criteria for ‘D’ visa applications including financial and relationship criteria.

Highlighting the need for a more proactive response to the Afghan situation at European level, John Lannon said “Ireland's leadership is also vitally important in the EU, where we are now witnessing a worrying response to refugee protection. We call on the Irish Government to continue to be a positive force, leading by example and encouraging EU member states to respond appropriately and compassionately to the crises, not just in Afghanistan but in other parts of the world.”

#### **Notes to Editors**

1. Announcement that the Government is preparing a new humanitarian programme to admit up to 500 more Afghan refugees is at <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/asia-pacific/government-prepares-scheme-to-admit-up-to-500-more-afghan-refugees-1.4658201>.
2. Key recommendations from listed NGOs to the Government are:
  - Speedy implementation of the humanitarian admission programme announced by the Government on August 28th
  - Ensure the criteria for the humanitarian admission programme are sufficiently broad to allow people from priority countries who are resident in Ireland to apply for family members to join them
  - To help Afghan families to be reunited in Ireland, take a flexible and inclusive approach to processing visa applications
  - Recognising the limitations faced by Afghans in getting passports or other original documentation out of Afghanistan at the moment, establish an online visa application process whereby documents are uploaded to a secure portal, or until such a process is established, by email to the Visa office in Dublin.
  - In recognition of the current exceptional humanitarian circumstances, apply para 1.12 of the Policy Document on non-EEA Family Reunification which provides for the waiver of the normal criteria, including financial and relationship criteria.
  - Expedite positive decisions for international protection applicants from Afghanistan to enable them to begin the process of family reunification immediately
  - Encourage other EU member states to respond appropriately and compassionately to the crisis in Afghanistan

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