



Safe Passage: Humanitarian Admission for Families Fleeing Conflict

This proposal offers a safe and legal migration route for people who are currently suffering as a result of conflict in their country of origin, and who have family members who wish to sponsor them here in Ireland. This proposal also provides a vehicle for migrants, refugees and new Irish citizens to work together with the Irish people and the government, to harness the outpouring of support and goodwill and offer hope and survival for hundreds of people trapped in appalling conditions in conflict zones around the world. This proposal was developed in consultation with members of impacted communities, and has the support of the Irish UNHCR office.

We are currently witnessing the largest global humanitarian crisis the world has seen since the end of World War II. Ireland has committed to take 4,000 refugees and asylum seekers under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). However, progress on our actual intake of people under the IRPP has been extremely slow. As of June 2017, 779 refugees have been resettled in Ireland. In contrast, only 459 asylum seekers have been relocated to Ireland. The IRPP is due to end in September 2017, and to date we have only taken in 1,238 of the 4,000 Ireland has committed to.

In the meantime, many people already legally resident in Ireland or naturalised here are desperately seeking to bring family members out of conflict zones, and are experiencing significant delays and refusals in the processing of their visa applications for family reunification. The recent commencement of the International Protection Act, 2015, significantly restricts the family reunification rights of refugees, making a safety net an urgent requirement for family members in conflict zones.

New Irish, migrants and refugees living in Ireland are willing and able to support their family members when they arrive with no additional cost to the State.

More must be done to bring these families together in a safe and legal way, to remove the need for people to undertake dangerous crossings, and to stop the smugglers profiteering from this human misery.

“I’M CONTRIBUTING TO THIS SOCIETY AND ALL I ASK FOR IN RETURN IS A SAFE PLACE FOR MY BROTHERS. JUST CONSIDER THAT WE ARE HUMAN BEINGS. IMAGINE IF THIS HAPPENED TO YOUR OWN FAMILY. I’VE LOST MY MOTHER AND MY FATHER. I ONLY HAVE TWO BROTHERS, I DON’T HAVE ANYONE ELSE.”

Syrian / EU Citizen living in Ireland

Nasc has a pragmatic, cost effective and efficient solution to this problem, that ensures the safety of those seeking protection while also promoting integration and reuniting families – a true cornerstone of our national identity enshrined in our Constitution and idealised in the 1916 Proclamation, which we commemorated the centenary of last year. Potentially hundreds of people could be welcomed to Ireland under this proposal, going some way to filling our as yet unfulfilled commitments under the IRPP. Our proposal is based on our 17 years of experience providing legal advocacy to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and our direct work over the past several years supporting clients applying for visas to bring their family members to safety here in Ireland.

This proposal is designed to complement the existing Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). There is significant international precedent for humanitarian admission and sponsorship schemes, and for the benefits they confer. **Schemes of this nature lead to faster, safer and more positive integration opportunities and outcomes for recipients.**

A New Approach is needed to respond to the Refugee Crisis

Nasc is calling on the Department of Justice to introduce humanitarian admission for families fleeing conflict:

The Refugee Crisis in Numbers

4,000	The number of refugees & asylum seekers Ireland has committed to bring in under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP)
1,238	Number of refugees & asylum seekers that have arrived (as of 1 January 2017)
139	Number still unallocated under IRPP
119	SHAP applications approved (out of 308 submitted)
26	Number of visa applications submitted by Nasc to bring family members to Ireland in 2016
55%	Refusal rate on visa decisions – including 3 cases from Syria for 9 people
92	Number of family reunification applications Nasc assisted refugees in submitting in 2016
43%	Refusal rate on FR decisions – all from conflict zones
1,200	Estimated number of Syrians now living in Ireland, including legally resident migrants, refugees, asylum seekers & naturalised

Introduce a Humanitarian Admission Programme for Irish citizens, beneficiaries of international protection and/or legal residents, to become sponsors for family reunification for extended family members fleeing conflict zones. · The Programme would provide a secure, reckonable and independent residency permission for arriving family members, allowing them to fully integrate into Irish society.

Allow members of Irish society to co-sponsor family reunification applications. The enhanced humanitarian admission programme could include a 'co-sponsorship' element, which would allow Irish citizens, community and faith based groups, charities and NGOs, business, and universities to support a family reunification application, providing financial, social and institutional backing and thus improving a person's opportunities for integration. This co-sponsorship aspect allows the Irish government to harness the outpouring of support and goodwill coming from Irish society in support of those fleeing conflict, while also easing the financial burden on the host family in Ireland and on the Government to provide for those who have newly arrived.

The proposal is modelled on humanitarian admission programmes and private sponsorship schemes in place in other jurisdictions, including Canada, Germany and most recently the UK, as well as the Irish experience with the 2014 Syrian Humanitarian Admission Programme (SHAP). Our proposal is designed to complement the Government-agreed resettlement and relocation quotas to address the current humanitarian crisis.

About Nasc

Nasc (the Irish word for *link*) is an NGO and registered charity based in Cork. Nasc works for an integrated society based on the principles of human rights, social justice and equality. Nasc offers free legal clinics and provides advocacy in the areas of immigration, protection and social welfare law. One of the key focuses of Nasc's work is reuniting families. Over the past 17 years, Nasc has worked with thousands of individuals and families seeking to bring family members to safety in Ireland. As a result, we have developed extensive knowledge of and experience with of the issues and barriers that this community is facing when seeking to bring family members to safety.

For more information about the Safe Passage Campaign, please visit our website at <http://www.nascireland.org/campaigns-for-change/safe-passage/>.