

Evening Echo

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Action needed on consultants

The Minister for Health needs to immediately look into the findings of the RTE Investigates television programme this week, which found a failure by the HSE and hospital managements to properly implement the 2008 Hospital Consultants' Contract across acute public hospitals, and said this is affecting public patients' access to care.

The programme found - 14 out of the 47 acute public hospitals exceeding the 20% limit of private work; over 43,500 public patients on waiting lists lost out to private patients in 2015-2016; the HSE stopped gathering national data on compliance with private practice limits in 2014; and only 6% of all consultants treat public patients only.

The figures nationally show the 80/20 ratio is being met. However, according to the RTE Investigates programme, these figures mask the fact that the ratio target is only being met because some hospitals do exceptionally well when it comes to public patients and carry out very little private work.

"However, when it comes to regional hospitals the story is different. A sizeable number of regional hospitals are significantly off target and this is having an effect on public patients."

Overall, the programme estimated that a total of more than 43,500 public patients on waiting lists lost out to private patients in a two-year period.

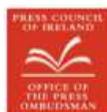
RTE had to go through the Freedom of Information system to get the information.

All of this data should be out in the open. If it was, there is no doubt the public would not tolerate what is going on. It is time for quick, decisive action by Minister Simon Harris.

Congrats to Midleton heroes

The presence of marine litter in our oceans is a global concern that requires action. Measures are needed to address the impacts of litter in the marine environment. Public awareness and community action plays a vital role. The Clean Coasts Ocean Hero Awards bring together key stakeholders in the area of marine litter such as coastal communities, NGOs, tourism bodies, the science community, business and the fishing industry. This week, St Colman's Community College, Midleton was announced as Ocean Hero School of the Year, for third year in-a-row at the prestigious awards at the Royal College of Physicians, Dublin. Congratulations to everyone involved.

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Plans to introduce a new scheme to support refugees to reunite with their family members are welcome, says Jennifer DeWan Campaigns and Communications Manager NASC



MINISTER for Justice Charlie Flanagan and Minister of State David Stanton announced last week that the Government will be introducing a new scheme to support refugees to reunite with their family members who are currently in conflict zones around the world.

The Family Reunification Humanitarian Admission Programme – or FRHAP – will provide a safe and legal pathway for family members of refugees here in Ireland to flee conflict and persecution, and rejoin their families here in safety. It will work in conjunction with the existing family reunification rights that are provided for in Irish law.

We need safe passage for refugee families. We at Nasc, the Irish Immigrant Support Centre, are delighted with this announcement. We have long called for the introduction of a humanitarian admission programme to help reunite families, and our campaign – Safe Passage – has received huge public and political support over the last 18 months. This is a most welcome initiative by the Government, and in particular Cork's own Minister Stanton, to provide protection for some of the most vulnerable people in the world today.

While we do not yet know the details of what this new scheme will look like, we do know that it means that refugees currently in Ireland will be able to apply for additional family members than is currently allowed under Irish law. That means that families currently living the nightmare of separation in the midst of war and persecution will have some additional ways to be reunited with their loved ones.

LIFE DOES NOT BEGIN

We know from our 17 years working to support refugees seeking family reunification, that for many newly arrived or newly recognised refugees, life cannot really begin again until they have their families with them here in safety. The introduction of new restrictions to family reunification with the commencement of the International Protection Act last year has meant that a refugee can now only apply for specific immediate family members, namely a spouse and any minor children.

Refugees are no longer eligible to apply for other family members, such as children over the age of 18, elderly parents, or brothers and sisters.

The changes to the family reunification rights in the last year have had a devastating impact on refugees here and their families in conflict zones. Imagine a situation where you have just received refugee status after waiting for your application to be assessed for several years, and in the meantime, two of your four children that you had to leave behind have turned 18 and you can now no longer apply for them to join you here. Or another situation, where you have been resettled here, but your elderly parents are stuck in a war zone without access to medical care. You are forced to choose between some family members and others – a horrific scenario for any person to imagine.

This new scheme has the potential to help families in just these kinds of situations.

FAMILY IS AT THE HEART OF IRISH SOCIETY

While we very much welcome it, we also recognise that the scheme being introduced by

Early Christmas present for refugee families



ENACTING CHANGE: Minister Charlie Flanagan who is introducing the new reunification scheme.

the Government is a limited one, and will apply to just 530 potential family members over the next two years. That 530 comes from a quota of 4,000 which the Irish government had already committed to in 2015, to support European efforts to tackle the refugee crisis at Europe's borders. It is 530 people currently living in conflict, in the midst of the largest global humanitarian crisis the world has ever seen, where 66 million people are currently displaced, and 20 people are forcibly displaced every minute of the day.

All around us, we see the impacts of rising intolerance – in the UK, in the United States, in Europe and all over the world. This scheme is a positive and innovative response to that

growing intolerance, a strong statement from our small country that we can all do more to make the world a more welcoming place.

As we move into the Christmas season, it is important to remember that family is at the heart of Irish society and we can do no better work in the world than bring some families separated by violence together again in peace and safety.

Now is not a time to turn our backs on people in need, regardless of where they come from. It is time to look around you, to your neighbours and to your community, to those newly arrived who may need your welcome, your kindness and your support.

People who have loved ones living in fear and persecution, who now may have an opportunity to come here and be safe.

For more information about Nasc and the work we do, visit www.nascireland.org