The Irish Refugee Council replies to the proposed changes on family reunifications and other issues

The Irish Refugee Council has said that proposed changes announced by the Department of Justice (Ireland) are deeply concerning and risk undermining key elements of refugee integration in Ireland.

The organisation stated that the measures would weaken two central pillars of integration: a clear pathway to citizenship and the ability for refugees to reunite with their families. It said that while the Government asks refugees to integrate into Irish society, these proposals would make that significantly more difficult.

The Council warned that the policies could keep families separated by preventing children from being reunited with parents and separating spouses and partners. It said the measures could leave loved ones stranded in countries where they may still face persecution.

The organisation also expressed concern that the proposals would undermine refugees' ability to build stable lives in Ireland, leaving people who have already been recognised as being at risk of persecution in what it described as a second-class status. It said the consequences of these policies would ultimately be borne by families — including wives, husbands, partners and children — who have fled persecution and have been granted protection in Ireland. The Council described the proposals as deeply disappointing and suggested that those affected could suffer as a result of what it characterised as political posturing.

Family reunification

The Irish Refugee Council said that the proposed changes to family reunification could create significant practical barriers for people seeking to be reunited with loved ones. Under the proposals, refugees would need to secure accommodation in an already strained rental market, demonstrate the financial means to rent it, and then wait for their application to be processed — a process that currently takes around 18 months.

The organisation noted that similar requirements in the recent Afghan Admissions Programme Ireland did not function effectively and placed people in very difficult circumstances. It added that Ireland's existing family reunification

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system is already narrowly defined, slow and complex, and warned that the proposed changes could make reunification practically impossible for many families.

Citizenship

The Council also raised concerns about a reported proposal that applicants for citizenship must not have received certain social protection payments in the previous two years before applying. It said such a requirement would force refugees into an impossible choice: either avoid accessing necessary social supports, regardless of circumstances such as illness, disability, pregnancy or job loss, or seek support and risk undermining a future citizenship application.

The organisation said that placing people in such a situation would be irresponsible and could penalise individuals for legitimate and unavoidable life circumstances.

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Family reunification

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Contribution to accommodation

Regarding proposals related to financial contributions for accommodation, the Council noted that Regulation 5 of the Reception Conditions already provides the State with the power to seek rent contributions from international protection applicants, a provision that has been in place for seven years.

The organisation said that in its experience, people in stable and long-term employment who are already paying tax are generally willing to contribute. However, it emphasised that many people in the international protection system are in part-time or insecure work, frequently moving in and out of employment while supporting families on limited incomes.

The Council highlighted that there are currently 9,608 children living in accommodation provided under the International Protection Accommodation

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Services (IPAS) system, nearly a third of the overall population. It noted that children in the protection process do not receive Child Benefit (Ireland) and warned that the policy, particularly if introduced without safeguards or a full impact assessment, could push more children into poverty.

The organisation also said it would be unreasonable to expect financial contributions when the quality of accommodation is often poor and largely unregulated. It pointed out that the Health Information and Quality Authority is currently able to inspect only 35 out of 319 centres, and that more than 400 people are currently living in government-provided tents.

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Source(s)

- Irish Refugee Council (26 November, 2025), [Policy changes will keep families apart and push refugees further into the margins of our society], https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/media-centre/press-releases/policy-changes-will-keep-families-apart-and-push-refugees-further-into-the-margins-of-our-society/

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