Irish Refugee Council criticise government's initiative encouraging voluntary return to individuals still in the asylum process

The Irish Refugee Council has expressed serious concern over the new incentive scheme designed to encourage voluntary returns for people with an outstanding application in the international protection process.

The organisation has stated that voluntary return is only appropriate at the end of the process and that people seeking safety should not be paid to abandon their claims. It said that Ireland has been, and must remain, a nation that offers refuge. The Council highlighted that people in the protection system are often in extremely vulnerable situations, frequently living in or close to poverty.

The organisation said that emailing applicants while they are still awaiting a decision, many of whom have waited months or even years, offering a cash payment to encourage them to return to their country of origin is deeply concerning. It noted that this concern is heightened by the fact that approximately 30% of appeals were successful in 2024, meaning many applicants may have a reasonable prospect of success. The Council emphasised that applicants have a statutory right to appeal and that this right is a fundamental element of any international protection process.

The Irish Refugee Council has also called on the Department of Justice (Ireland) to refrain from direct communication of this nature with applicants. The organisation said it had written to the Department requesting that it not contact people in the protection process directly by email, warning that such communication risks causing additional distress and confusion among individuals who are already in highly precarious situations.

The organisation also criticised the Department’s failure to engage with stakeholders before announcing the scheme.

Source(s)

- Irish Refugee Council (30 October, 2025), [Irish Refugee Council call on Department of Justice to halt voluntary return campaign], https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/media-centre/press-releases/irish-refugee-council-call-on-department-of-justice-to-halt-voluntary-return-

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campaign/

Related development(s)

Minister announced new incentives for voluntary returns

Date of development

30.10.2025

Country

Ireland

Thematic area(s)

Return

Development type

Practice

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