UNHCR welcomes the new International Protection Bill and urges safeguards and adequate resourcing

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has welcomed the passage of the International Protection Bill through both Houses of the Oireachtas, describing it as a significant step towards the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, which is due to come into effect on 12 June. The organisation said the legislation represents progress towards a more streamlined and efficient asylum system in Ireland.

UNHCR noted a number of provisions it considers positive, including the establishment of a Chief Inspector to oversee the asylum border procedure, the designation of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) as the monitoring body for international protection accommodation centres, strengthened assessment mechanisms for identifying applicants with specific needs, and enhanced safeguards for unaccompanied children.

The agency also highlighted the importance of adequate resourcing for key institutions involved in the asylum process, including the Legal Aid Board and the new Chief Inspector’s office, to ensure effective access to legal advice, timely processing, and robust oversight. It said this would require investment in staffing, training, and infrastructure.

At the same time, UNHCR expressed concern about provisions allowing for the detention of children in exceptional circumstances, even as a measure of last resort. It reiterated its position that children should not be detained for immigration-related reasons, in line with international human rights standards. The organisation also noted concerns regarding new restrictions on freedom of movement and cautioned that such measures should not amount to de facto detention in practice.

UNHCR also raised concerns about changes to family reunification rules, including the introduction of a two-year waiting period before applications can be made and stricter income requirements. It stated that these changes could significantly limit the ability of refugees to reunite with close family members, with potential implications for integration and well-being.

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The organisation recommended that the implementation of the new provisions be reviewed in a timely manner to ensure compliance with Ireland’s international obligations, particularly in relation to family unity and private and family life.

UNHCR said that while efficiency and fairness in asylum systems are both important objectives, they should be balanced in a way that ensures protection standards are maintained. It added that it stands ready to support the Irish authorities in implementing the legislation in line with international refugee and human rights law.

Source(s)

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (15 April, 2026), [UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency welcomes asylum laws and calls for fair, human-rights based implementation], https://www.unhcr.org/ie/news/press-releases/unhcr-un-refugee-agency-welcomes-asylum-laws-and-calls-fair-human-rights-0

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