**Tánaiste confirms plans to accept 260 more refugees under resettlement programme**

* Ireland to meet resettlement commitment of 520 refugees ahead of EU deadline
* A further 260 refugees to be admitted from Lebanon under the resettlement strand of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP)
* Progress made in Relocation of persons from Greece
* Numbers relocating to Ireland from Greece to ramp up in the coming weeks

6th July 2015

The Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald TD, today confirmed she will send a selection team to Lebanon to select an additional 260 refugees under the Refugee Resettlement Programme.

The Tánaiste said “I am pleased to confirm that the Refugee Resettlement Strand of the Programme has seen significant progress. Two hundred and seventy three refugees have already arrived from Lebanon and the remainder of the 520 refugees we committed to resettle in Ireland in 2016 will be here by the autumn. This is in advance of the EU deadline and clearly demonstrates Ireland’s continued proactive approach to resolving this unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Yesterday I informed the Government of my decision to send a further mission to Lebanon in the autumn to select an additional 260 refugees to be admitted in Spring 2017”.

The decision by the Tánaiste to increase the number of refugees to arrive in Ireland under the Resettlement Strand of the IRPP takes account of the slower than anticipated arrival of asylum seekers from Greece and Italy as a result of administrative issues in those countries.

“My decision reflects the Government's commitment to welcome vulnerable refugees fleeing war and conflict and is another positive step towards delivering on Ireland's overall commitment to accept 4000 persons. Once in Ireland, these refugees will have access to vital health and education services. Our focus will be on helping them to rebuild their lives here in Ireland”.

Last week, on 27 June, the Tánaiste chaired a meeting of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme Taskforce. The Taskforce is an all of Government response to the EU migration crisis and brings together the key Departments playing a role in delivering on Ireland’s response to the crisis.

The Taskforce meeting was informed that 250 of the 273 refugees displaced by the Syrian conflict admitted to Ireland have already completed their initial language training and orientation programmes. Another 23 refugees are completing their initial language training and orientation programmes in one of two Emergency Reception and Orientation. The remainder of the quota of 520 refugees are being health screened in Lebanon at present prior to transfer to Ireland.

The relocation strand of the IRPP was also discussed at that meeting and it heard from the Programme Director of the IRPP who recently travelled to Greece in order to talk to key people there with a view to increasing the numbers coming from Greece and reducing the time scale for their arrival.

The Tánaiste said “A further 28 Syrians arrived in Ireland in the last couple of weeks under relocation from Greece. I am aware that progress regarding the relocation of persons from Italy and Greece has been slower than we would have wanted but this should not be taken as any diminution of our commitment to delivering on this part of the programme”.

“The delay has been largely outside of our control and my officials have been working closely with their Greek and Italian counterparts on this issue. The Greek authorities have now agreed that they will double the numbers available for transfer to Ireland to 40 persons every 4 weeks with the prospect of this number increasing further later in the year. In effect this means that the relocation strand will now be fully operational”.

ENDS

Note for Editors

Numbers

Of the 4,000 people committed to under the September 2015 Government decision establishing the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, 2,622 are to be taken in under the EU relocation scheme from Italy and Greece and 780 (520 of whom will arrive in 2016 and 260 in 2017) from Lebanon under the refugee resettlement programme. A decision has yet to be taken on the mechanism under which the residual will be taken. Ireland is not at present participating in the EU Turkey 1:1 programme as it has no unused quota from the Council Conclusions of 20 July 2015 on resettlement that could be used to pledge under the first tranche of the programme. Participation in the second tranche of the EU Turkey 1:1 scheme will require the exercise of an opt in.

Cross-Departmental Taskforce

A Cross Departmental Taskforce chaired by the Department of Justice and Equality, to deal with the operational and logistical aspects of the support programme has been established. The Taskforce is adopting a whole of Government approach. Its membership comprises all the main Government Departments and State agencies as well as the UNHCR and the Red Cross.

Refugee Resettlement Programme

The Irish refugee resettlement programme has been in operation since 2000. 1,400 vulnerable persons from 30 different countries, including Iraq and Syria, have been resettled in Ireland to date. Refugees have been resettled in 29 different communities throughout Ireland and in all four Dublin local authorities. The key elements of the programme are:

* The programme is overseen at national level by an Inter Departmental Working Group chaired by the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (OPMI) in the Department of Justice and Equality and at the local level by an inter-agency working group established in each receiving community and chaired by the Local Authority.
* Receiving communities are selected by OPMI in consultation with the National Inter-Departmental Working Group.
* OPMI arranges a selection mission to the country of refuge and interviews cases registered with UNHCR in the region.
* Arrangements are made for security clearance of the cases selected and for their transfer to Ireland - the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) makes the travel arrangements on OPMI's behalf, exit visas and travel documents are arranged etc.
* Pre departure health screening is also arranged through IOM and the results are passed to local GPs in Ireland.
* The OPMI resettlement team meets the refugees on arrival in the airport and accompanies them to a Resettlement Reception Centre where they are accommodated for 8 to 10 weeks.
* An 8-10 week language training and orientation programme is provided by the Education and Training Board in cooperation with OPMI. Speakers are invited from various organisations to provide information about their services to the refugees. Interpretation is provided to ensure a full understanding of the content on the part of the refugees.
* Crèche facilities are also provided to allow the adults to attend the programme.
* Education provision is also made for school age children by the Department of Education and Skills.
* GP services are provided and refugees are assisted to apply for medical cards.
* Refugees are taken to register with the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service where they are issued with a Registration Certificate and to the Department of Social Protection to register for a public services card and to be assessed for a social protection income.
* Programme refugees have, in general, the same rights and entitlements as an Irish citizen. OPMI works in consultation with all relevant agencies at the national and local level to ensure that refugees can access services to which they are entitled and that the necessary services are put in place as quickly as possible.
* Prior to the transfer of refugees to their permanent location, decisions about housing, education, health services etc will have been taken by the local inter-agency working group in consultation with OPMI. The OPMI arranges the transfer from the reception centre to the receiving community. OPMI staff also accompany refugees to their first appointments with the various public services in the local community and assist in resolving any difficulties etc. OPMI also provides interpretation for these appointments
* Language training is provided in the receiving community by the Education and Training Board for a period of 12 months post arrival.
* The OPMI resettlement team supports the local interagency working group for approx 18 months after the transfer of the refugees to the receiving community. Grants are made by the OPMI to the receiving community to employ a resettlement support worker for a period of up to one year. The Resettlement Support Worker organises a suite of integration initiatives during the first year post arrival, such as the establishment of homework clubs, develops links with sporting clubs, promotes participation in local men’s and women’s activities, organises intercultural events and promotes participation in the arts and in volunteering at a local level.
* All resettled refugees have the contact details of their key OPMI resettlement officer should any issues arise that cannot be resolved locally.

Progress to date

520 refugees are to be resettled in Ireland by 31 December 2017, of whom 273 have been admitted from Lebanon to date since 20 July 2015 (date of Council Conclusions on resettlement). Sufficient cases were selected during a selection mission to Lebanon in January 2016 to fill the rest of the quota by the end of the summer. They have been security screened and are in the process of being health screened at present. They are expected to arrive between July and September.

250 of the refugees admitted to Ireland have completed their initial language training and orientation programme in one of the two Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres opened to date (see below) and have been resettled in housing in Kerry, Cork, Clare and Limerick.

A further 260 refugees will be admitted from Lebanon in 2017.

Relocation Programme

So far 38 Syrians have arrived in Ireland under the relocation scheme. They are housed in the same Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre as the resettled refugees and benefitted from a similar programme once their asylum application had been determined.

The slow pace of the relocation programme is mainly due to difficulties in getting migrants to register in Italy and Greece. The pace is expected to pick up significantly and the Greek authorities have agreed that they will double the numbers available for transfer to Ireland to 40 persons every 4 weeks.

Some technical issues have arisen with regard to the programme in Italy. Government officials are working closely with the authorities in Italy to resolve these.

The relocation programme intends to utilise integration mechanisms similar to those in use by the established and successful refugee resettlement programme. The methodology in use has been outlined above under the “Refugee Resettlement Programme”.

Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROCs) Two dedicated EROCs are in operation - the Hazel Hotel in Monasterevin and the Clonea Strand Hotel in Dungarvan.