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Ireland on a "dangerous path" – civil society raises alarm over fast-tracked International Protection legislation

Civil society organisations from the Coalition on the EU Migration Pact have strongly criticised the rushed passage of the International Protection Bill 2026 though the Oireachtas, warning it raises serious human rights concerns.

The legislation, which will significantly overhaul Ireland's asylum system, was fast-tracked through the Dáil and Seanad, with debate curtailed at final stages. The Bill now awaits presidential signature.

John Lannon, CEO of Doras, said, "While the current protection system has its flaws, it includes established practices that have acted as important safeguards for families and individuals. Removing these protections, as well as introducing the concept of detention of children and broader use of border procedures, will exacerbate its current problems. Ireland is on a dangerous path, moving away from its international human rights commitments to uphold the rights to dignity, family life and freedom of movement. Civil society will continue to stand alongside families and individuals navigating this new system – much of which remains unclear in how it will operate in practice."

Fiona Hurley, CEO of Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre said, "This legislation risks closing off one of the few safe and legal pathways available to refugee families, prolonging separation and increasing the likelihood that people will remain in danger or be forced to consider unsafe alternatives. It will keep families apart for years, leaving partners and children in situations that are often dangerous and unstable, including in conflict zones where there is no realistic way to reunite safely.

She continued, "Family reunification is granted to a relatively small number of people each year, in the hundreds, and predominantly children. Claims that these changes are necessary on economic grounds are not credible and do not justify the scale of harm these provisions will cause to families. Prolonged separation exposes families to ongoing risk and makes it significantly harder for people here to rebuild their lives, find work and integrate into their communities while also knowingly leaving vulnerable family members in danger."

Nick Henderson, CEO of the Irish Refugee Council, said, "This complex legislation has been progressed without sufficient time for proper scrutiny, adequate safeguards and limited clarity on implementation.

Substantial work will be needed to ensure the system can efficiently function in practice, particularly in relation to capacity, processes, and resourcing. As it stands, the Bill does not address the underlying structural weaknesses that continue to drive

backlogs in processing applications, and ongoing challenges in age and vulnerability assessments. With barely two months to implementation, and significantly shortened processing timelines laid out, it is unclear whether people seeking international protection will have a genuine opportunity to present their claims and access procedural safeguards, including appeal, under this Bill. Yet this system has real consequences for people's lives."

The Bill has also faced criticism from across the political spectrum, with concerns raised about the limited time for debate and the potential long-term implications for Ireland's international protection framework.

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Notes to Editor

The Coalition on the EU Migration Pact includes the Irish Refugee Council, Crosscare, Doras, Nasc, Irish Council for Civil Liberties, Immigrant Council of Ireland, Irish Penal Reform Trust, Jesuit Refugee Service, Oxfam Ireland, LGBT Ireland, Spirasi, Outhouse, Akidwa, ActionAid and Sanctuary Runners.

Many members of the coalition have raised serious concerns about the Pact, including its focus on deterrence and externalisation, and its potential impact on fundamental rights.

The coalition has engaged extensively on the proposed legislation, including submitting detailed analysis to the Justice Committee. Key concerns with the legislation include:

- The potential detention of unaccompanied children
- Broad and disproportionate powers granted to the Minister for Justice across the protection process
- Significant restrictions on family reunification rights
- Unclear age assessment provisions lacking key child protection safeguards
- Limited access to oral appeals
- Expanded Garda powers
- The absence of key safeguards throughout the process