

17th September, 2015

Ms Frances Fitzgerald
Minister for Justice & Equality
Department of Justice & Equality
94 St Stephen's Green
Dublin 4

Re International Refugee Crisis

Dear Minister

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions is deeply disappointed at the failure of the European Union justice ministers to reach agreement on a humane and effective response to the current refugee crisis.

If social solidarity is to mean anything, Europe must respond with speed, generosity and compassion to the plight of those who seek refuge from persecution, war and hunger. They are not the architects of the appalling situation in which they find themselves, yet our failure to mount an appropriate response would seem to indicate that we hold them responsible.

Trade Unions from across Europe will echo this sentiment at the ETUC's 13th Congress in Paris later this month and will demand a sound, coherent European asylum policy that reinforces the key principles of solidarity and cooperation.

This must be led jointly by the EU and member states, so as to prevent further tragic and unnecessary human suffering at sea and on our land borders and to help combat trafficking.

A repressive approach has to be replaced by measures to integrate refugees and the development of clear, humanitarian policies on migration.

Despite the failure to reach agreement at EU level this week, we acknowledge the decision of the government to accept 4,000 refugees in line with our international obligations. We encourage you to continue to respond in such a manner, despite disagreement at EU level.

We would particularly urge government to ensure that refugees are fully integrated in suitable accommodation and that all necessary support is provided.

Experience to date of the direct provision regime shows that isolation in institutionalised holding centres is neither appropriate, nor fair.

Congress believes that such support should involve local communities and voluntary agencies in planning for the arrival and integration of refugees and their families.

Finally, we would like to draw your attention to the Congress Centres Network – comprising 25 centres nationally - provide support, resources and a range of services to vulnerable groups in our society and excel in key aspects of training, upskilling and job seeking supports.

The Centres are firmly embedded within their local communities and it is our view that they could play a key role in the government programme to assist, settle and integrate refugees. We would be happy to meet with you to discuss this matter in greater detail.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Patricia King', written over a circular stamp or seal.

Patricia King
GENERAL SECRETARY
pk/es