

David Miliband calls for leadership on refugee resettlement in the EU

Head of International Rescue Committee says the EU should increase its intake of refugees to 108,000 each year.



David Miliband at IRC headquarters, New York. Under the IRC proposal, the EU would take in more refugees from countries such as Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. Photograph: Mike McGregor/Commissioned for The Observer

David Miliband has called on the European Union to bring half a million refugees to Europe over the next five years, which would mean providing homes for almost 10% of the world's most vulnerable refugees each year.

Under the targets proposed by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), of which Miliband is chairman, the EU would commit to increasing targets of European resettlement schemes to take in 108,000 refugees every year for five years from refugee camps and communities in countries such as Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are 22.5 million refugees worldwide, and of these roughly 1.2 million are in need of resettlement, because they are sole parents caring for children, are victims of torture, have severe disabilities or are vulnerable for other reasons. Each year between 5-6% of eligible people are resettled.

In 2017, 65,000 refugees were resettled worldwide, a third of the number resettled the previous year (189,300). The EU provided resettlement places for 23,000 refugees - or 1.9% of those eligible for resettlement. Under the target being called for by the IRC, the EU would resettle 9% of eligible refugees.

Miliband said Europe had been “playing catch up” with the refugee crisis as it dealt with large numbers of people arriving and claiming asylum over the past few years, but now had an opportunity to “become a proactive player” on this issue.

“Europe needs to recognise that this refugee crisis around the world is not going away and Europe needs to have a proactive policy which includes the option of refugee resettlement for a portion of the most vulnerable who are identified as qualifying for refugee resettlement,” he said.

Miliband said the need for Europe to provide world leadership had increased after the Trump administration announced last year it would slash the US resettlement target from 110,000 places in 2017 to a maximum of 45,000 places in 2018. The US has traditionally taken the most refugees through resettlement programmes of any country.

The European parliament has called for a similar target to that imagined by the IRC – calling on the EU to bring in 230,000 refugees over two years. That target, which is part of the Union Resettlement Framework, is under negotiation between the European parliament and council.

However, the calls are likely to face opposition from some member states, which have refused to share the responsibility of refugee hosting across the EU. Last year, the European commission began a legal case against the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland for refusing to participate in a programme that relocated refugees that had arrived in Greece and Italy.

Under the IRC’s proposal, all EU member states would be required to set a target for refugee resettlement, proportionate to GDP and population. Most countries would have to dramatically expand their resettlement programmes to meet this target.

The IRC suggested Britain might take in 15,000 refugees a year, up from 6,859 resettled in 2017. However, Miliband said given the wealth of European countries, these numbers were possible.

“It’s doubling from a very low number to another very low number,” he said. “In Britain the number of refugees coming in [each year through the resettlement programme for vulnerable Syrian refugees] is the equivalent of six per

parliamentary constituency. No one's going to tell me that my former constituency of South Shields is going to be overwhelmed by six refugees."

"It's a matter of standing up for the values of the best of the west, and the best of the west has been to say that people who are fleeing persecution should have havens in western pluralist democracies."

Husn and Haiyan in Coventry



FacebookTwitterPinterest

Syrian refugees Husn Alsankari and her husband Haiyan Srihini. Photograph: Daniel Hambury/Stella Pictures Ltd

Husn Alsankari said if she had the opportunity to speak to the prime minister, she would beg her to take in more Syrian refugees.

"Firstly, I would thank her because she brought us here, and then [I would say] if you can bring all Syrians who are suffering I would give you a thousand thanks, because they suffer lots and lots and lots."

Alsankari, 38, her husband Haiyan Srihini, 36, and their two children arrived in the UK in 2015, as four of the 20,000 Syrian refugees the then prime minister, David Cameron, promised Britain would take in under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, which he announced in 2015, following the death of three-year-old Syrian boy, Aylan Kurdi.

Alsankari and Srihini fled from their home in Hama, Syria, after repeated attacks: their house was burned down, Srihini was shot twice, detained multiple times and tortured while imprisoned.

The family fled to Lebanon but while there they received threats after Srihini

refused to join a terrorist organisation. Srihini was beaten and their young son was kidnapped. Alsankari remembers exactly how long they were living there.



FacebookTwitterPinterest

Husn Alsankari, right, and Haiyan Srihini with two of their children. Photograph: Daniel Hambury/Stella Pictures Ltd

They registered with the UNHCR for resettlement programmes and six months later flew to the UK. Arriving at their new home in Coventry was the first time Alsankari had felt safe in years.

“You will laugh when I tell you, I slept for two days [after arriving] because of the fear I had before. I slept without any fear that somebody would call or knock on the door,” said Alsankari.

“Definitely we were very happy. First of all just to get away from the problems we were having in Lebanon. We didn’t have an idea about life in Europe, how to live there, how to get by, but we were very happy that we can go.”

Since arriving, Srihini has been able to receive medical treatment and physiotherapy; the two older children are in school and thriving and Srihini and Alsankari have had two further children, two boys, aged 18 months and three months old.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/03/david-miliband-calls-for-leadership-refugee-resettlement-eu>

[Disclaimer]