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Quick Links

8th May 2018	2
Syrian Conflict	2
Asylum Applications Data	3
Citizenship Ceremonies.....	4
9th May	5
Immigration Policy	5
Garda National Immigration Bureau.....	6
Immigration Controls	6
10th May	7
Visa Applications.....	7

8th May 2018

Syrian Conflict

106. Deputy Brendan Ryan asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if he will report on the Syria Donor Conference; the measures Ireland is undertaking to press EU and UN member states to pursue a full diplomatic resolution to the Syrian conflict and increase humanitarian assistance to displaced Syrians who require better solutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
[20160/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Ireland has consistently been a strong donor to the victims of the Syria crisis. At the Second Brussels Conference for Syria and the Region, Ireland pledged €25 million in humanitarian support for 2018. This brings Ireland's support since 2012 to over €100 million – our largest ever response to a single crisis. Our funding provides supports to those in need inside Syria, as well as Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in the region.

Given my responsibility for International Development, I led Ireland's delegation to the Conference and met with key EU, UN and NGO humanitarian and political partners. These included EU Commissioner Christos Stylianides and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi. At these meetings we reiterated our concerns about the deteriorating humanitarian and protection situation and our commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Ireland is also concerned with supporting longer-term responses for Syrians and host communities affected by the crisis. To this end, we also made a commitment to provide multi-annual, predictable assistance in response to the Syria crisis beyond 2018. In particular, support for learning and protection of young people is an issue that Ireland is committed to do more on. I was honoured therefore to join the Political Champions for Education in Conflict initiative, spearheaded by the Malala Fund and the Education Cannot Wait Fund, at the Conference.

Humanitarian assistance alone will not address the root causes of this crisis however. A comprehensive, sustainable, Syrian-owned and Syrian-led resolution is urgently required to provide lasting relief to the Syrian people. UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura is leading political negotiations to end the conflict based on the 2012 Geneva Communique and UN Security Council resolution 2254. Ireland and the EU fully support this process. The EU provides direct assistance to the UN-led Geneva peace talks and has launched, in coordination with the UN, an initiative to develop political dialogue with key actors from the region to identify common ground. At international level, we use every opportunity to highlight our deep concerns in relation to the Syria crisis. The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade discussed the situation in Syria with his EU counterparts at their informal meeting on 15 February and again at the Foreign Affairs Council meetings on 26 February, 19 March and 16 April. At their most recent meeting, EU Foreign Ministers reiterated their support for the UN-led political negotiations to end the conflict, and the urgent need to reinvigorate the political track.

Asylum Applications Data

192. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the number of persons that are in the asylum process for more than three, five and seven years, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19702/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): It is important to note that a very small proportion of applicants in the system for three or more years are awaiting a first instance decision on their refugee status. They will have had a negative first instance decision which determines that they have not demonstrated that they are in need of international protection. If they remain as applicants for the years in question, they are likely to be exercising their right to appeal either to the International Protection Appeals Tribunal or to the Courts for Judicial Review. Applications remain live on the system while the Courts determine the cases presented.

On 31 December 2016, the International Protection Act 2015 (IPA 2015) was commenced, providing for the introduction of a single application procedure for people seeking international protection in the State. The 2015 Act replaces the previous sequential application system with a single application process, for asylum, subsidiary protection and permission to remain in the State, bringing Ireland into line with the processing arrangements applicable in other EU Member States. However, the Act also contained transitional arrangements which has put further pressures on processing. The main challenge now faced is the need to quickly process the substantial number of cases on hand many of which were carried over from the previous system.

As of 27 April 2018, there are a total of 5,300 applications for international protection pending in the IPO. Some 2,200 applications were made before the commencement of the 2015 Act but were not finalised by the former Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and the former Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) by that date. These applications reverted to be processed by the IPO under the transitional provisions of the 2015 Act. Notwithstanding the increased caseload arising from the transitional arrangements, over 87% of applications are in the system for less than 3 years. This is a major improvement from the situation when the McMahon Working Group reported on the matter in June 2015.

The challenge of clearing this additional caseload is being addressed by deploying increased resources and a continued review of efficiency and effective use of those resources, having due regard to the requirements of the 2015 Act, in order to maximise quality output, produce impartial decisions and ensure value for money for the taxpayer. In this regard, it is planned to increase the strength of the IPO Processing Panel over the coming months following public advertisement and interview.

The following Table provides a breakdown of the numbers of applicants 3 years and more being dealt with by the International Protection Office (IPO) and the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT). It is of note that approximately 40% of the applicants in the IPO figures were returned from the RAT

under the transition arrangements under the Act. In addition, over 80 cases included in the overall figures in the table are the subject of Judicial Reviews, usually instigated by the applicants.

Timescale since first application	No. cases in the IPO	No. cases in the IPAT
3 years - 5 years	447	176
5 years - 7 years	17	9
7 years or more	51	23

Citizenship Ceremonies

196. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the waiting times for citizenship ceremonies; and the reason for the long delays. [19752/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements, not only within the State but also at European Union as well as international level. It is therefore important that appropriate procedures are in place to ensure that the integrity of the regime for granting Irish citizenship through the naturalisation process is held in high regard both at home and internationally.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While the Citizenship Division endeavours that most straightforward cases are processed to a decision within six months, this has to be seen in the context of the work involved in dealing with volumes of applications, some of which can be very complex in nature, and the need to ensure that each applicant fulfils the statutory conditions for naturalisation. The nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases can take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks may take a considerable period of time.

Processing timescales can often be impacted due to further documentation being required from the applicant, or payment of the required certificate fee is awaited, or the applicant has not been engaging with the office. In some instances delays can arise at the final stage of the naturalisation process, for example, where additional information comes to light which requires to be considered. In other instances the applicant themselves may request that a hold be put on their application, for example, where they may have returned to their country of origin for a prolonged period, to facilitate them in making arrangements to return to reside in the State, or where they have difficulty in obtaining satisfactory evidence of their identity or nationality.

The final stage requires the applicant to attend at a citizenship ceremony. Citizenship ceremony days take place periodically throughout the year, at which up to 3,500 candidates for citizenship make their declaration of fidelity to the Irish nation and loyalty to the State, give an undertaking to uphold the laws

of the State and to respect its democratic values and receive their certificate of naturalisation. The organisation of a citizen ceremony day involving over 3,500 applicants, together with their family and friends, is a significant logistical exercise usually taking a number of months to organise. The next citizenship ceremony day will take place on 21 May 2018; persons in respect of whom the Minister has indicated an intention to grant a certificate of naturalisation are in the process of being invited to attend. A very small number of persons whose applications were only approved in the very recent past cannot be accommodated at this ceremony and will be invited to attend the next ceremony.

INIS devotes a considerable amount of its overall resources to the processing of these cases. It also operates a dedicated phone helpline and email helpdesk available for all applicants interested in the progress of their application, details of which are available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie

9th May

Immigration Policy

138. Deputy Joe Carey asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the status on the civilianisation of immigration control in Dublin Airport; the progress that has been made for civilianising the other ports of entry including Shannon and Cork airports and Dublin Port; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20259/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The civilianisation of immigration checks at Dublin Airport is part of a wider transformation programme relating to the transfer of certain largely administrative immigration functions from An Garda Síochána to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS), including some frontline immigration controls and the registration of non-nationals.

The civilianisation of all frontline immigration checks at Dublin Airport was completed on 2 October 2017. These checks are now undertaken by uniformed civilian staff from INIS. This has released Gardaí previously carrying out these tasks to core policing duties. An Garda Síochána will continue to carry out investigative and detention functions at Dublin Airport and an appropriate number of Gardaí will be retained there for this purpose.

A number of administrative functions that remain with An Garda Síochána at Dublin Airport are due to be transferred in 2018, principally the initial interview of persons seeking international protection presenting at the airport.

In relation to further civilianisation at other ports of entry, any developments in relation to these ports will take into account a number of factors including passenger numbers, frequency of

flights or sailings, the potential, if any, for redeployment of Garda resources having regard to the need for a proper balance between civilian and Garda staff to protect our borders.

Garda National Immigration Bureau

141. Deputy Joe Carey asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** his plans to civilianise immigration registration offices nationally following the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service takeover of Garda National Immigration Bureau registration in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20303/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a project to investigate options for the civilianisation of the immigration registration function outside of Dublin commenced this year. This follows on from the successful civilianisation of the Dublin Registration Office and ongoing work to streamline processes, including the introduction of online appointments systems and the integration of other work streams such as re-entry visa processes.

As part of this wider project, when options are developed for extension to regional offices, it is planned to commence by way of a pilot project later this year. The pilot will will inform the plans to civilianise the function nationally.

Immigration Controls

145. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the basis on which a person (details supplied) is being held in Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20339/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): It would not be appropriate for me to go into the details of the case referred to by the Deputy. I can say however, that the person concerned was refused permission to enter the State on 2 May 2018 and left the State on the same day. He is not the subject of an Irish Deportation Order.

The following matters pertain in all cases where a person is refused permission to enter the State.

- There are in total twelve (12) grounds on which an immigration officer may refuse to give a permission to enter the State and these are set out at Section 4 (3) of the Immigration Act 2004 (as amended by the International protection Act 2015). While a person may be refused permission to enter the State based on a number of grounds, such refusal need only be based on any one of those grounds. Immigration officers are required to provide a written notice to the person refused entry that sets out the reasons for

the decision. In all cases, removals from the State are conducted in accordance with the law. Translation facilities are available where necessary.

- An Immigration Officer before confirming a decision to refuse permission will consult with his or her Supervisor.

- Removals are essentially operational matters for the Garda National Immigration Bureau who work closely with civilian immigration officers on these matters.

- Section 5 of the Immigration Act, 2003 (as amended by the International protection Act, 2015), contains the main provisions dealing with the removal from the State of persons refused leave to land and specifies that a person to whom this section applies may be arrested by an immigration officer or a member of the Garda Síochána and detained in a prescribed place of detention for the purpose of facilitating their removal from the State, which must be as soon as is practicable.

- It is the practice to remove persons from the State on the next available flight or ship.

It should be noted that should any person who has been refused leave to land in the State seek entry to the State at a future point, their application will be assessed on its own merits taking all relevant information into consideration at that time. Their prior immigration history is a matter of record but does not preclude them from seeking permission to enter the State in the future.

10th May

Visa Applications

151. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** his views on whether it is now time to examine the possibility of requiring Israeli citizens who reside in illegal settlements to undergo the same visa application process as that which Palestinians are subject to in order to enter here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20763/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The requirements for which countries are visa-required to come to Ireland are kept under regular review in consultation with my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

A wide range of factors are considered in determining which countries are visa required. In particular, the Government is pursuing a strategy of greater co-ordination and co-operation on visa matters with the United Kingdom (UK) in the context of the Common Travel Area (CTA) - a matter which commands even greater importance in a post BREXIT scenario. This is exemplified by the operation of the British Irish Visa Scheme in China and India which allows for travel to and around Ireland and the UK on a single visa.

As part of this greater co-operation, the matter of alignment of those States whose citizens are visa-required is also being kept under review. The greater the extent of alignment between the two jurisdictions, the greater the opportunity to increase the numbers of tourism and business visits to the CTA. At present, both Ireland and the UK (in common also with States in the Schengen Area) require citizens of Palestine to be in possession of a visa for travel to their jurisdictions and, while there are no plans to do so at this time, any proposals for change would need to be considered in this context.