

PQ Digest | 14.05.18 – 18.05.18

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15th May 2018

Passport Applications

35. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the actions he has taken to address delays with regard to the issuing of passports. [21118/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The turnaround timeframe for a passport application will depend, in the first instance, on the channel through which the application was submitted. The Passport Service provides a range of channels to Irish citizens wishing to apply for a passport. These include a postal application system, online passport application service, in person counter application facilities in Dublin and Cork and the network of Irish Missions worldwide.

The target turnaround time for applications made via the online passport application service is 10 working days plus postage. The majority of online applications are currently being processed within 5 working days, well ahead of target. The online service currently accommodates adult renewals and passport card applications and it is planned to further extend this service to other categories of renewals by the end of 2018.

The highest proportion of applications are submitted through the An Post Passport Express postal channel. The average turnaround time for renewal applications submitted through Passport Express is currently on target at 15 working days.

Other types of application, which are generally submitted through Passport Express, such as first time applications or applications to replace lost, stolen or damaged passports take longer. Such applications must undergo additional processes including security checks.

Measures taken by the Passport Service to minimise the impact of peak time application volumes on turnaround times for all categories of applications include the recruitment of additional staff and the use of targeted overtime for all Passport Offices.

The Passport Service received sanction this year for 220 Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs) for appointment to the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork. All TCOs in this intake have been fully trained and placed since March. These TCOs are working together with permanent staff to process passport applications and to deal with the high number of enquiries being made through the Passport Service's various customer service channels.

The number of Full Time Equivalent staff permanently employed by my Department and assigned to the Passport Service stood at 322 at the beginning of the year. This compares to 310 Full Time Equivalent staff assigned to the Passport Service at the same point last year. In addition, over 20 additional permanent staff have been assigned to the Passport Service in 2018. Targeted overtime was also sanctioned for both temporary and permanent staff in the Dublin and Cork offices to help deal with high application volumes.

My Department has an extensive communication strategy to promote good practice amongst passport holders when planning to travel abroad. We regularly advise applicants of 3 golden rules:

- to check the validity of the passports in advance of booking travel;
- to apply at least 6 weeks in advance of their travel plans; and
- for eligible adults renewing their passport to consider the Online Passport Renewal Service passport application online facility, which is a fast, secure way for adults renewing their passport.

Passport Applications Administration

41. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the resources being allocated to the passport office in Cork to allow for faster processing of passport applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21112/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service, located in my Department, is one unified service composed of 3 constituent offices located in Mount Street, Dublin; Balbriggan, County Dublin and South Mall, Cork. My Department continues to closely monitor the level of passport demand to ensure that all resources are effectively deployed within the Passport Service.

Additional measures taken by the Passport Service to address seasonal demand and anticipated application increases include the recruitment of additional staff and the use of targeted overtime in all offices.

The Passport Service received sanction this year for 220 Temporary Clerical Officers to be appointed to the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork in accordance with application volumes allocated to each office. Of these Temporary Clerical Officers, 40 were assigned to the Passport Office in Cork. In addition to this, 10 Clerical Officers and 1 Executive Officer have joined the Cork Passport Office's permanent staff since the beginning of the year.

Passport Services

42. **Deputy John Curran** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** when he expects passport renewals for children to be processed online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20792/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As part of an ongoing Passport Reform Programme, an online passport application service was launched on 30 March 2017. To date over 160,000 adults have renewed their passport using the online facility, with an average processing time of less than 10 working days. At present, the online passport application service

accommodates adult passport renewal applications and passport card applications. My Department plans to roll out a similar service for the renewal of children's passports by the end of 2018. In addition, the options available to online adult renewal applicants will be expanded, allowing for business passport applications, change of name, and permitting observations to be recorded on passport books.

The online passport application service has made a major contribution to the effective management of high application volumes. As more applications are processed online, staff have been freed up and reallocated to other essential work in the Passport Service such as fraud and integrity.

Human Rights

46. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if his attention has been drawn to the nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh (details supplied); and the steps he is taking to assist these refugees in advance of the monsoons. [21086/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since the latest escalation of violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar, in August 2017, approximately 700,000 members of the Rohingya community have fled across the border to Bangladesh. The people and government of Bangladesh have demonstrated extraordinary generosity in receiving such a large influx of refugees. Cox's Bazar now hosts the largest refugee camp in the world and 1.3 million refugees and host-community members urgently require assistance.

The conditions faced by the displaced members of the Rohingya community in Bangladesh are extremely difficult and likely to deteriorate, as the Deputy has pointed out. To this end, Ireland supports the international humanitarian response to the refugee crisis. Ireland directly provided €1 million in 2017 and an additional €1 million has been allocated for 2018. Our support has focused on food, shelter, water and sanitation. Through the Irish Aid Rapid Response facility, we have provided 37 tonnes of hygiene, sanitation and shelter kits and deployed experts in water and sanitation and humanitarian coordination on the ground. In addition, as the 6th largest donor to the UN-administered Central Emergency Response Fund, Ireland's estimated contribution through UN pooled funding amounted to a further €1 million to deliver life-saving support.

This support helps alleviate the immediate problems. However the solution to the crisis must be a political one. In that regard, Ireland has consistently called for the full implementation of the recommendations of the report of the Kofi Annan-led Advisory Commission on Rakhine State as the basis for a long-term, sustainable solution.

Ireland has also called for an independent and impartial investigation into the serious and credible allegations of human rights violations by the Myanmar security forces. These include reports of widespread killing of civilians, sexual and gender based violence, arbitrary arrests, and the burning of Rohingya villages which have led to the mass exodus of refugees to which the Deputy has referred.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has referred to some of the reported actions committed by the Myanmar Security Forces as a “text book example of ethnic cleansing” while UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee has expressed concerns that these actions “bear the hallmarks of genocide”.

These concerns absolutely reinforce the urgent need for the Government of Myanmar to provide access to the UN Fact Finding Mission so that these human rights violations can be fully investigated.

Passport Applications Data

50. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the turnaround time for passport applications; the number of persons waiting to have passport applications processed through the Passport Office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21111/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The turnaround timeframe for a passport application will depend, in the first instance, on the channel through which the application was submitted. The Passport Service provides a range of channels to Irish citizens wishing to apply for a passport. These include a postal application system, online passport application service, in person counter application facilities in Dublin and Cork and the network of Irish Missions worldwide.

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Passport Applications Data

60. **Deputy John Curran** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the number of passport applications processed through the passport office in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20791/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The number of passports applications processed by the Passport Service in each of the years requested is as follows:

Year Number of passport applications

2015	679,944
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2016	750,833
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2017	789,701
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Jan 1 to April 30 2018	358,572
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Human Rights

65. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if representations will be made at EU level regarding the human rights abuses in Libyan detention centres; and his views on the reports from various NGOs regarding the conditions there. [21106/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am deeply troubled by the abuses perpetrated against refugees and migrants in Libya, as reported by a number of NGOs and other sources. My EU colleagues and I have raised these concerns on a number of occasions at the Foreign Affairs Council, as did the Taoiseach at the European Council in October 2017. I will continue to raise these concerns when appropriate. I reiterate my call on the Libyan Government, and all parties, including those with de facto control of territory, to take steps to eliminate ill-treatment of migrants, and to facilitate access to detention centres by UN agencies and other humanitarian organisations.

The EU has increased its cooperation with UN agencies and the African Union to accelerate voluntary returns by migrants in Libya to their countries of origin, and to establish safe and legal pathways for resettlement of those in need of international protection. As a result of the EU-AU-UN cooperation which began in November 2017, the number of migrants in official Libyan detention centres fell from an estimated 20,000 people in October 2017 to 4,000 people in March 2018. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), with the support of the EU and its Member States, is continuing to assist migrants inside Libyan detention centres, while increasing efforts to reach stranded migrants outside of detention. The EU is also actively supporting alternatives to the detention of migrants in Libya. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recently opened a transit and departure facility in Tripoli to facilitate the transfer of vulnerable refugees to third countries.

At the European Council in October 2017, the Taoiseach announced a doubling of Ireland's support to the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), to help address the root causes of migration. In 2017, Ireland provided core funding to the UNHCR of €7.5 million, and to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) of €9.5 million, funding which supports the work of these organisations in Libya. In 2015, Ireland earmarked €1 million in humanitarian funding specifically to support ICRC's work in Libya, work which includes visiting detention centres to monitor the treatment of migrants.

Ultimately, bringing real improvements to the lives of Libyans and migrants will require restoration of political stability and an end to lawlessness, through the formation of a fully functioning government and a return to order throughout the country. Ireland supports both UN mediation and regional efforts in pursuit of stabilisation in Libya.

Passport Applications Administration

99. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if it is now a legal requirement for Irish citizens to have a public services card to renew a passport; if so, the relevant primary or secondary legislation in which this requirement is stated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20814/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since 29 March 2016, the Passport Service has required all first time passport applicants, aged 18 and above, who are resident in Ireland to hold a valid Public Services card. This requirement also applies to the small number of adult passport applicants, whose passport was issued before 1 January 2005 and has been reported as lost, stolen or damaged and those whose passport expired more than five years ago. If an applicant falls into one of the above mentioned categories of applicant, then their application must include a copy of their PSC.

The Government agreed on 17 July 2017 to extend the requirement for a PSC to all adults in the State accessing a wide range of public services in Ireland, and this includes citizens applying for passports. The Department is a member of a joint working group, with other relevant Departments, which is examining the business process, technical and resource implications on how this requirement can best be met and the schedule for its adoption. There are no plans at present to extend PSC requirements for accessing services, including in relation to passport applications, to Irish citizens not resident in the State.

A key principle behind the concept of the PSC is that the delivery of services is more efficient when a person's identity does not have to be authenticated at every transaction. With specific reference to the issuance of passports, the introduction of the PSC requirement has allowed the Passport Service to dispense with requirements for certain additional documentation and reduces the overall volume of documentation that Irish citizens must submit when applying for a passport and is the most secure form of identity available to adult passport applicants resident in the State. The PSC requirement is now a key resource in the Passport Service's efforts to combat fraud and identity theft and uphold the integrity of the Irish passport.

With reference to the legal basis for the Minister to request a copy of an applicant's PSC, the Passports Act 2008 (as amended) provides for the issue by the Minister of passports to Irish citizens. Section 7(1)(b) of the Passports Act 2008 requires that the Minister be satisfied as to an individual's identity before issuing a passport to that person. Section 7(2) provides as follows: "The Minister may require an applicant for a passport to provide such information as the Minister may require for the purposes of the application and to produce to him or her such documents as he or she considers necessary or expedient to enable him or her to perform the functions of the Minister under this Part." It is on this basis that the Minister requires applicants to produce identity documentation.

Passport Applications Administration

102. **Deputy John Curran** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the reason the number of passport applications has increased in 2018 by 18% to over 800,000 applications; his plans to resource the Passport Office accordingly to address the increase; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20897/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Between Jan 1 and April 30 this year, the Passport Service received 358,572 passport applications. This represents a 9% increase on the same period last year.

The increase in demand is driven by a number of factors including a general increase in the number of Irish residents travelling abroad, a growing population, as well as a significant rise in passport applications from Irish citizens residing in Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

My Department continues to closely monitor the level of passport demand to ensure that all resources are effectively deployed. It is peak season for passport demand and the Passport Service is doing everything possible to reduce processing times for all categories of application, and in particular, those categories that are currently over target turnaround times. In anticipation of increasing application volumes and peak season demands, a number of measures have been taken by the Passport Service to enhance processing capacity. These measures include the recruitment of additional staff and the use of targeted overtime.

The Passport Service received sanction this year for 220 Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs) for appointment to the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork. All TCOs in this intake have been fully trained and placed since March. These TCOs are working together with permanent staff to process passport applications and to deal with the high number of enquiries being made through the Passport Service's various customer service channels.

The number of Full Time Equivalent staff permanently employed by my Department and assigned to the Passport Service stood at 322 at the beginning of the year. This compares to 310 Full Time Equivalent staff assigned to the Passport Service at the same point last year. In addition, over 20 additional permanent staff have been assigned to the Passport Service in 2018.

The continuous implementation of service improvements has been central to my Department's response to increasing application volumes. The Passport Reform Programme is delivering major upgrades to the passport service technology platforms and business processes as well as significant customer service improvements. The award-winning online passport application service, which was launched last year, will continue to make a major contribution to the effective management of high application volumes by allowing existing resources to be more effectively deployed within the Passport Service. At present, the online service accommodates adult renewals and passport card applications. It is planned to further expand the online passport application service to other renewal categories by the end of 2018.

With regard to the anticipated increases in passport applications following the UK Referendum on EU membership in June 2016, the Department commissioned research to try and better understand the potential demand for passports from Irish citizens resident in Great Britain who have not yet applied for a passport. Interim reports have been made available and this study will continue to assist the Passport Service in formulating plans on resource requirements for the future.

Passport Services

111. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if a passport printing machine will be provided to the Cork Passport Office (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21251/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service provides a range of application channels to Irish citizens wishing to apply for a passport. These include a postal application system, an online passport application service and the network of Irish Missions worldwide. In the relatively small number of cases where citizens need to travel very urgently and do not have a valid passport, the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork offer an appointment service. These appointments can be made online at www.passportappointments.ie/.

Passport printing and personalisation requires highly specialised machinery, auxiliary equipment and a temperature-controlled environment. The production equipment and suites need continual engineering support and trained staff to manage the sites. In addition to the purchase cost of a new passport printing machine, there are set up and maintenance costs associated with such equipment.

The printing capacity of production equipment currently employed by the Passport Service is sufficient to meet current and anticipated future demand for passports. There are no plans at this time to commission additional passport production equipment or sites.

There is a facility in the Cork Passport Office that allows for the production of emergency travel documents where strict criteria for the issuance of such documentation has been met.

EU Issues

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the extent to which efforts are ongoing within the European Union to address the issue of Euroscepticism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21475/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Euroscepticism is not new but in recent years it has become more vocal. In the Rome Declaration of March last year, EU Heads of State

and Government pledged ‘to listen and respond to the concerns expressed by our citizens’ and to “address the challenges of a rapidly changing world.”

Having gone through a series of crises in recent years, including the Eurozone crisis, terror attacks, migration and Brexit, the EU is now moving in a more positive direction characterised by economic growth across all member states. To maintain this impetus we need to ensure that the EU is delivering practical improvements to the lives of citizens through policies to promote jobs and growth and **by addressing internal and external challenges such as migration and international terrorism**. Completion of the single market and Digital Single Market – which Ireland has been pushing – are two ways of doing that.

The public launch of the Citizens’ Dialogue on the Future of Europe by the Taoiseach in November marked the formal start of a process designed to engage the Irish public directly in a debate on the kind of Europe they want to see evolve. The aim of this process, which culminated in the National Citizens’ Dialogue on 9 May, has been to raise awareness of the issues involved and to encourage participation in the debate. We have been impressed by the level of engagement at all of the events, and will use this engagement process to formulate Ireland’s contribution to the wider European debate and specifically to President Tusk’s Leaders’ Agenda. Similar public outreach initiatives to engage citizens are taking place in many countries across the EU.

Engaging meaningfully with citizens across the Union; listening and responding to their concerns is the best means of ensuring support for our work on EU issues.

Translation Services Provision

221. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked **the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform** if there are open tenders through the Office of Government Procurement for multi-supplier frameworks for translation and interpretation; if there has been a delay in such tenders; when such competitions will be opened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20804/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) and its sector partners put in place framework agreements through which public sector bodies can buy goods and services. The OGP has established three Framework Agreements to deliver translation and interpretation services to public bodies.

These are for the provision of:

- Interpretation Services (excluding Irish), established in February 2016;
- Translation Services (excluding Irish), established in March 2016; and
- Irish Language Translation Services, established in July 2017.

Draw down from these Frameworks is by way of mini-competitions through supplementary request for tenders (SRFTs) amongst framework suppliers only. The OGP is progressing competitions under these Frameworks. However, there has been a lengthy delay in one mini-competition under the Framework Agreement for the provision of Interpretation Services (excluding Irish) due to a legal challenge.

Work Permits Eligibility

293. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the reason the rules in relation to asylum seekers' access to the workforce have time and employment sector restrictions on them in view of the fact there is shortage of available labour in many sectors and areas of the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20880/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charlie Flanagan): The Supreme Court has acknowledged that it is a matter for the Executive to determine immigration policy. However, it found that in a system where there is no limit on the timeframe within which an application for international protection is determined, the applicants' constitutional rights would be breached. The Government responded to the Supreme Court decision by agreeing to opt in to the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive. This will allow effective labour market access for applicants who have not received a first instance decision within nine months of their application. Opting into the Directive is a very positive development for the entire protection system and for applicants and their families while they await a final decision on their application. In addition to labour market access, the Directive also includes important provisions in relation to children's rights, health, education and material reception conditions for applicants, which includes housing, food, clothing and a daily expenses allowance.

During the opt-in process with the EU which we expect to have completed in June, interim arrangements have been put in place. When the Supreme Court struck down the law prohibiting labour market access, international protection applicants, as a category of non-EEA nationals, came under the terms of the Employment Permits Act 2003 (as amended). Under that Act, third country nationals can apply for an employment permit in certain sectors defined by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. Employment permit fees apply, set by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (these are generally paid by wholly or partly by employers). I also introduced a complementary self-employment scheme for eligible applicants (those in the system for over nine months without a first instance decision) – Ireland being one of very few European countries allowing such access. The total number of Self Employment applications received to date is 584, of which 399 have been granted.

I would stress that this interim scheme is designed to be of very short duration until the opt-in process into the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive is completed. The process of compliance is on course to be completed within the expected timeframe. Once this happens, access to the labour market will be underpinned by EU law and I will have the opportunity to propose to Government a new scheme allowing effective access to the labour market. I expect that this permanent scheme will provide for a broader

access to the labour market for qualified applicants – the details of which are well advanced and will be announced in the coming weeks.

I am confident that this progressive approach by Government, which for the first time will see additional elements of our protection process subject to EU law and verification by the EU Commission, will be a further major effective and reforming step as we seek to improve the standards of our reception conditions and efficient determination of protection applications.

Citizenship Ceremonies

295. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** if the timing of citizenship ceremonies will be examined in cases in which a ceremony takes place after the deadline for the supplementary register; if other options will be made available for persons wishing to take their oath of affirmation prior to the deadline in view of the inability of new citizens to update their citizenship details after the deadline for the supplementary register of electors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20911/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charlie Flanagan): Formal citizenship ceremonies were introduced in June 2011 for the first time since the foundation of the State. The ceremonies, which have been met with universal approval, are held at no extra cost to applicants, allow large numbers of candidates for citizenship make their statutory declaration of fidelity to the Irish nation and loyalty to the State and receive their certificate of naturalisation.

In accordance with the law, the oath of fidelity must be sworn before a judge. Prior to the introduction of the ceremonies, each individual applicant was required to attend their local District Court to swear the oath and this was done as part of the normal business of the court on the day that usually included a range of other business both criminal and civil. Apart from taking up valuable court time, it was considered that a dedicated ceremony would provide a much more meaningful and dignified manner for swearing the oath, befitting the importance and solemnity of the occasion. Accordingly, there are no plans to revert to this practice or to introduce alternatives to the ceremonies.

Citizenship ceremony days take place periodically throughout the year. The organisation of a ceremony day which can involve over 3,500 applicants, together with their family and friends, is a significant logistical exercise usually taking a number of months to organise. To date, 131 such ceremonies have been held at which around 83,000 candidates have become Irish citizens. On 21 May next a further 3,500 persons will be conferred with Irish citizenship.

Extensive coordination is required to establish a date for ceremonies. Not only does a venue have to be sourced and dates agreed, the Presiding Officers and Ministerial speakers need to be available on the day. The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department also liaises closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade with regard to ceremony day dates as there is an inevitable rise in demand for passports following ceremonies. This is a complex logistical exercise and to attempt to

dovetail dates with the closing date of the supplementary register would make the entire process unworkable.

The date for the next ceremony which is scheduled for 21 May was announced on the website www.inis.gov.ie on 5 March 2018, which was prior to the announcement of the date of the upcoming referendum.

16th May 2018

Migration Data

1. [Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett](#) asked the [Taoiseach](#) the current rates of emigration. [19859/18]
2. [Deputy Michael Moynihan](#) asked the [Taoiseach](#) the current rates of immigration. [21098/18]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh):

I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 and 2 together.

I thank both Deputies for their questions. Statistics for migration are included in the CSO's annual Population and Migration Estimates release. The principal source of information for the estimation of annual migration flows, incorporating both emigration and immigration, is the labour force survey, formally the quarterly national household survey. The latest release was published in August 2017 and the latest annual figures available are for the year to April 2017. The release shows that an estimated 84,600 persons migrated to Ireland in the year from April 2016 to April 2017, while an estimated 64,800 left Ireland in the same period, with net inward migration of 19,800 persons. In the previous year to April 2016 there were 82,300 inward and 66,200 outward migrants, giving net inward migration of 16,200 persons.

Dept. Richard Boyd Barrett: It is becoming increasingly apparent that there are shortages of skilled workers in a number of areas. I am forever hearing that the problem in dealing with the housing crisis is capacity, by which we mean the capacity of the local authorities to have skilled workers who can build houses. There are capacity problems in the health service. I am referring to qualified health workers such as nurses and midwives. In education, in providing services for persons with special needs, and the mental health service there is a real deficit which is becoming a problem in the provision of skilled workers. Part of the problem at least is that a lot of younger people who are skilled and whom the State has paid to educate are leaving the country because wages are not sufficient to enable them to put a roof over their heads. They go elsewhere, taking their skills and abilities with them and consequently robbing the State of the ability to deal with the lack of capacity in key public services and the provision of infrastructure. The figures bear it out. The Minister of State will say there is net inward migration. However, it is clear from the further breakdown of the figures he has given that the biggest cohorts

among the 64,800 leaving every year, a big number, are younger people who are educated. The biggest cohort is young people with a third level education, while the next biggest is young people who have completed the leaving certificate programme. It is obvious why they are leaving - they cannot afford to live here. They are moving elsewhere, to places where they will be better paid and can afford to live. It is a real problem which has to be acknowledged. We are going to run into deep trouble if we do not find ways to retain them to use the skills they have developed in a publicly funded education system to actually contribute to and benefit our society.

We have to make it possible for them to stay here. Will the Minister of State comment on who is leaving? From the figures available from the CSO, it is clear who is leaving, namely, the 18 to mid-30s cohort. That is a terrible loss and one we cannot afford if we are going to resolve some of the key challenges facing this country.

Dept. Michael Moynihan: On the other side of it, regarding the people coming into this country, as Deputy Boyd Barrett said, there is a chronic shortage of skilled workers. For example, in the mental health debate both in this House and on the national airwaves, the shortage of clinical psychologists and psychiatrists was raised. There is a problem attracting skilled workers into various sectors.

Has the Government the details of which sectors are affected by skills shortages? There is a whole raft of different issues in the construction industry. Some local authorities tell us their planning offices are short-staffed. Recently, an announcement was made by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Heather Humphreys, on fast-tracking work permits. There are difficulties for people to get work permits validated. This process goes at a snail's pace.

Our health service is running because of a significant number of people from outside the country working in it. While they are doing excellent work, there is a chronic shortage of workers in the health service. We are educating the finest people but they are leaving almost immediately after being educated. Young people are saying the cost of living in Dublin city is beyond them in terms of setting up a home, escalating rents and so forth. We need to ensure that the Government and the State knows where the skills shortages are.

There has been a nonsensical drive for development on the east coast. For the past couple of weeks, there were many debates about people leaving the western seaboard and the significant crisis on the eastern seaboard. Will the Minister of State accept that for young people to live and set up home in the capital city is now simply beyond them?

Dept. Joe McHugh: I thank the Deputies for tabling these questions because this is a space where we do not have enough time as a Parliament to debate and plan for future projections and the country's direction. The idea behind the national development plan is to look at where people will be living and what type of demographics we will be dealing with.

Many of our young highly skilled, highly qualified and highly educated people left over the past ten years. It is complex. From Donegal, I know anecdotally that over the past four years many people were moving back from Australia but not as many from Canada. Reasons included that they were well paid and there

was a good quality of life and long-term opportunities in Canada. That is anecdotal and not definitive to explain the movement.

As a former sociology student, I thank the Deputies for the chance to delve into the figures again. Ten years ago, we had net migration of more than 104,000 people which compares with 19,000 this year. We had net immigration of 151,000 versus net emigration of 46,000. In 2007, 90,000 houses were built which suggests a massive influx of people to pick up the trades and do the work required.

It is important we identify the skills shortages. That is the job the CSO can do. In fairness to the CSO, while it is strict about its independence, it welcomes input from politicians to look at a piece of work. The CSO could be identifying the skills shortages.

In the past year, 64% of inward migrants had third level education qualifications. This is pointing to recruitment in the health and financial services sectors which are looking for highly qualified and highly trained people. Up to 56% of those inward migrants get work straight away.

In planning for the future, we have to be conscious that the birth rate since 2014 has started to decline. Another peak was at the time of the visit of a very famous person in 1979. Maybe in the next month, we might be looking at a peak again.

Dept. Richard Boyd Barrett: I find it hard to get my head around that 1979 peak, given the rather conservative attitudes towards sex the person in question had.

Dept. Joe McHugh: That was tongue in cheek.

Dept. Richard Boyd Barrett: The statistics do not break down those leaving by trade but by whether they are at work, unemployed, students or other. By far the biggest cohort is the “at work” category. Those working, who have come out of college or school, discover, as have the nurses with whom I was protesting outside St. Vincent’s hospital, that they have to leave, although they would like to stay. The reason they cannot stay is because they cannot afford the rents and the health services are a nightmare because there are not enough people. They all know people who are working abroad in far superior conditions and where the cost of living is affordable. We are haemorrhaging these people, whom we badly need, out of education, health and construction. I do not know as much about the agricultural sector but I am sure it is true. Skilled people are leaving and we need them. It is a real problem.

At least we do not have the crazy xenophobes like they have in Britain and the racist far-right groups like they have in Europe who do not seem to understand that Europe needs people. At least, we do not have that horror here. People are leaving because we are not looking after our young people and providing the basics. We need to provide conditions of employment which are decent. Precarious employment is another reason many are leaving. I welcome those workers who are coming in. They are often willing to put up with worse housing conditions, lower pay and more precarious employment conditions because in some cases they are only planning to stay for a short while.

There are other people, however, who want to make a life here. These are people who were born, raised and educated here. They say they cannot do it and that it is simply not possible for them to do it. That is a

bad indictment of our position as the fastest growing economy in Europe. We need to look in detail at who is leaving. We need to address their concerns to enable us to get them to stay. This means providing decent terms and conditions of employment, decent pay and affordable housing.

Dept. Michael Moynihan: The Minister of State mentioned the national development plan, the various debates in the House on the plan, what underpins the plan and so forth. The national development plan must not be only about the physical infrastructure that we are going to build. The physical infrastructure needs to be built to accommodate the people. It has been said that we do not often discuss the future.

Let us consider why the Central Statistics Office does not have the data on shortages in the workforce, in industry and in the health service right across the spectrum. Are the Government and the Department of Health aware of the shortages of staff and the resources needed in the health service to enable it to operate at reasonable capacity? We should ensure it is not only operating on the basis of crisis management. All aspects of the health service must function well.

The Government should take bold steps to provide for the CSO to gather this information. This information should be readily available to any Government embarking on a national development plan. We saw all the bells and whistles associated with Project Ireland 2040. What about the people integrated into that development plan? Surely that development plan was about how we are going to have people living and working in the country.

I am somewhat aghast that the figures are not readily available on the shortages throughout the spectrum. What plans are in place? What programmes are in place for Irish people who have left in the past ten years that will encourage them back to Ireland? What programmes and incentives are under way within Government?

It is not often that Deputy Boyd Barrett and I agree, but I noted the question of conditions of employment and Deputy Boyd Barrett alluded to these as well. Conditions of employment are of great importance. The Minister of State said the national development plan is not only about the physical infrastructure. More important, he said it is about people. What is happening in the country at the moment with unbalanced regional development will have serious knock-on effects in the decades ahead. We need to cater for education now. We have seen the pressures when it comes to catering for education and college places. Indeed, as people grow and live longer there will be major democratic decisions for Government right into the decades ahead.

There is no integration. First, the CSO needs to get all the data on where the shortages and employment opportunities are and make that information available to the Government. We need to use that to sell the island and encourage more people to stay. We also need to ensure that the plans are about people as well as physical infrastructure.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are over time. Perhaps the Minister of State could give a brief reply.

Dept. Joe McHugh: The important thing today is the follow-up. There are two suggestions for separate projects. One relates to the data and analysis of where skills shortages are emerging. The second project

relates to the categories of employees who are leaving. Do they include young doctors or plumbers? The question is who is leaving. That is important because it is complex.

A friend of mine went to London to work as a teacher a year and a half ago. I met him a month ago. He came back home and was getting his CV ready. He wanted to go to the education and training board and the schools. He wanted to put his name out to get a job in a school in Donegal. He was all excited about it. I met his mother last night. His mother said that he had got a promotion in the school in London as head of the biology department. Now, he is faced with a decision. Does he take that promotion and get that good experience? It would help his CV. Does he come back home?

It is complex. I am a former emigrant, having lived in Dubai. I remember spending a year there. I was warned at the time that if I spent more than two years there, the temptation would be to stay. A variety of complex push-pull factors are at play. There is work we can do to analyse them because we have skills shortages in various areas. People are in different parts of the world. How we can try to reach out to them and incentivise them?

I thank both Deputies today for the question. This is an area of work I am keen to pursue as well. I will suggest some follow-up. I met one of the officials from the CSO yesterday. He is from west Cork. I will not name him. He is a pragmatic and interesting person on this subject. Perhaps a meeting with him and the two Deputies might be appropriate. I would be happy to do that.

An Ceann Comhairle: That sounds like a good idea. That brings the morning's business to a conclusion.

Commencement of Legislation

61. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** when sections 14(8) and 14(9) of the Passport Act 2008 will come into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21497/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Sections 14(8) and 14(9) of the Passports Act 2008 have not yet been commenced.

These Sections of the Passports Act, if commenced, would provide that guardians' consent to the issuing of a passport would be considered to be enduring for the child up to the age of 18. The commencement of these provisions, including required technology updates, are under active consideration as part of the passport reform programme which will run until the end of 2018.

Family Reunification

127. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** when the family reunification humanitarian assistance programme will be launched; the reason the programme was not launched in April 2018 as had previously been indicated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21640/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charlie Flanagan): Last Saturday, 12 May, the Minister of State with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration, David Stanton TD, and I launched the first call for nominations under the Irish Humanitarian Admission Programme 2. The scheme referred to by the Deputy is called the IHAP.

I am pleased that the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) has completed its commitment to relocate people from Greece and that, since its inception, the overall programme has also surpassed its original commitments on resettlement. The second phase of the programme has now begun with increased commitments on resettlement and the commencement of the new Humanitarian Admission Programme. Operating under discretionary Ministerial powers, the Programme will provide an opportunity to people in Ireland, who have immediate family members affected by the unprecedented scale of mass displacement to nominate family members under this programme.

Under the IHAP, I wish to prioritise immediate family members in the most vulnerable situations internationally and following consultations with the UNHCR, persons from the following countries will be eligible under the scheme: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Myanmar, Eritrea, and Burundi. These countries comprise the top ten major source countries of refugees listed in the UNHCR Annual Global Trends Report.

The IHAP is a humane and flexible response to the needs of those fleeing high-risk areas, and will facilitate their reunion with family members in Ireland. The Programme reaffirms the Government's commitment and ability to respond positively to humanitarian crises. Persons admitted under this programme will be a key part of the IRPP and will receive a status in their own right rather than a dependency status on their family member. This is important for their long term integration and sense of belonging in our communities.

The first call for proposals runs from 14 May until 30 June 2018 and further open calls will be scheduled in 2018 and throughout 2019. Full details of the programme and the relevant form are available on the INIS website (www.inis.gov.ie) under the 'Asylum' heading.

17th May 2018

Immigration Policy

107. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the position regarding the right to work of non-EEA citizens here who are partners or spouses of Irish citizens. [21737/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charlie Flanagan): I am assuming that the Deputy is referring to non-EEA nationals who have applied to come to Ireland or remain here by virtue of being a spouse or partner of an Irish national and not by any other basis. I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that immediate family members of Irish citizens who apply and are granted immigration status by INIS through the family reunification process have the right to work without employment permits and to establish or manage/operate a business in the State. They should receive a "stamp 4" immigration permission. Further details of the relevant Domestic Residence Schemes can be found on the INIS website under the heading of 'Family, spouses & partners' at <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/immigration-permissions>.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility, which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.