

# PQ Digest | 11.06.18 – 15.06.18

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Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> June

## Passport Services

153. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the status of the €1.5 million allocated to passport service and consular operational costs as outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the €1.5 million allocation that has been spent; the way in which the funds have been spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24322/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The expenditure of the additional allocation to the Passport Service is in line with profile and is expected to be fully expended by the year end.

There has been a strong increase in demand for passports due to a variety of factors including a general increase in the number of Irish residents travelling abroad, a growing population, as well as a significant rise in application numbers from Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Total demand in the first four months of the year was up 8% on last year.

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 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 2018, an increase of 12 compared to 2017. In addition, over 30 additional permanent staff have been assigned to the Passport Service since the beginning of 2018.

## Passport Data

156. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the number of passports issued in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of passport applicants from Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the same years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24343/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):**

The numbers of passports issued in each of the years requested are as follows:

Year	Passports issued
2014	632,156
2015	672,760
2016	733,060
2017	781,375
2018 (January 1st – May 31st)	376,746

The numbers of passport applications received from Northern Ireland and Great Britain for the period requested are as follows:

Year	Passport applications from Great Britain	Passport applications from Northern Ireland
2014	43,449	48,475
2015	46,229	53,715

2016	63,453	67,582
2017	80,752	82,274
2018 (January 1st – May 31st)	44,962	46,898

## Passport Services

157. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the target time for issuing passports across all services; the actual time for issuing passports across services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24344/18]

**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 table below shows target and actual turnaround times for all of the Passport Services application channel.

Type of Passport Application	Target Turnaround Times	Actual turnaround Times
Online Passport Application	10 working days	10 working days with 50% processed in 5 working days

An Post Passport Express Renewal Applications	15 working days	15 working days
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An Post Passport Express First Time Application, and Lost/Stolen/Damaged Replacements	20 working days	35+ working days
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Northern Ireland and Great Britain Passport Express Renewal Applications	15 working days	17 working days
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Northern Ireland and Great Britain Passport Express First Time Applicants and Lost/Stolen/Damaged Replacements	20 working days	35+ working days
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Missions	30 working days	24 working days
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Great Britain Renewals	20 working days	21 working days
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Great Britain First time applicants/renewals with lost/stolen passports	30 working days	44 working days
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Turnaround targets are determined on the basis of available resources and projected demand. Turnaround times are among a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) by which the Passport Service measures its success in delivering a modern and responsive public service.

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.

## Syrian Conflict

162. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the steps being taken at national, EU and international level to ensure that the perpetrators of war crimes in Syria are brought to justice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24355/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The situation in Syria remains of grave concern. The conflict has cost the lives of well over 400,000 people, 13 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance, over 6 million people are displaced within Syria and an additional 5 million have fled to neighbouring countries and the wider region. There have been numerous brutal attacks on civilians by the Assad regime and others, including the use of medieval starve or surrender tactics, the use of chemical weapons and the deliberate targeting of medical facilities and personnel.

Ireland supports a broad range of efforts to ensure full legal accountability for all war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria as part of a sustainable peaceful resolution to the conflict and has consistently called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court. Ireland supports the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry established in August 2011 by the Human Rights Council to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law since March 2011 in Syria.

Furthermore, in December 2016 Ireland and a group of like-minded countries successfully pressed for the adoption of a resolution by the UN General Assembly to establish an International Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in Syria. Last year my predecessor as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Charlie Flanagan T.D. announced a contribution of €100,000 to support the work of this mechanism. Further support for the work of the Mechanism in 2018 is currently under consideration.

Ireland is also a strong and consistent supporter of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) whose Fact Finding Mission (FFM) was set up in 2014 to "establish facts surrounding allegations of the use of toxic chemicals, reportedly chlorine, for hostile purposes in the Syrian Arab Republic". We support their work financially with annual

contributions amounting to nearly €1million since 2014. In addition, Ireland contributed €200,000 specifically to the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mission to eliminate chemical weapons in Syria.

Ireland deeply regrets Russia's veto of the renewal of the mandate of this Joint Investigative Mission last October. It is extremely frustrating that the UN Security Council has not been able to take meaningful action to maintain peace and security in Syria and to ensure accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria. Those who have vetoed effective UN action in this regard bear a heavy responsibility.

Ireland is supporting an initiative to convene a Special Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention with a view to considering the introduction of a mechanism for attributing responsibility for the use of chemical weapons.

Ireland also supports EU sanctions targeting the regime and its supporters, and will continue to do so as long as repression continues. The sanctions currently in place include notably an oil embargo, restrictions on certain investments, a freeze of the assets of the Syrian central bank within the EU, export restrictions on equipment and technology that might be used for internal repression as well as on equipment and technology for monitoring or interception of internet or telephone communications. In addition, over 250 persons and almost 70 entities are targeted by a travel ban and an asset freeze over the violent repression against the civilian population in Syria. Most recently, in March, the Council added an additional 4 persons to the list of those targeted by EU restrictive measures against the Syrian regime for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons against the civilian population. On 28 May 2018, the Council extended EU restrictive measures against the Syrian regime until 1 June 2019. Given the ongoing repression of the civilian population, the EU decided to maintain its restrictive measures against the Syrian regime and its supporters, in line with the EU strategy on Syria.

Ireland has also supported calls for sanctions at UN level also and very much regrets that a draft UN Security Council resolution that would have established a sanctions regime, a committee and an expert panel to hold accountable those using and producing chemical weapons in Syria was not passed in February 2017. Ireland will continue to support all efforts to ensure a lasting peace and full accountability for war crimes in Syria, in the context of bringing peace and stability to the region.

## Foreign Conflicts

170. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the status of the situation in Yemen; the efforts being made by the EU in regard to the conflict and the humanitarian situation there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24676/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):**

I am extremely concerned about the current situation in Yemen, which is the world's largest humanitarian crisis. I, and officials in my Department, have been monitoring the state of affairs in Yemen with growing anxiety, particularly in recent months as the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. After three years of war, three quarters of the population are estimated to require some form of humanitarian assistance. The situation is already untenable. I am particularly troubled by reports of growing tensions around the port of Hodeidah. About 80% of Yemen's humanitarian and commercial aid runs through this port and any interruption of this flow would lead to further suffering for civilians in Yemen.

Humanitarian access is a critical issue, and I have consistently called on all parties to the conflict to ensure that the people of Yemen receive the assistance they urgently need. Commercial access is equally important, since a population of over 20 million people cannot survive on aid alone. Officials from my Department met with the Saudi Embassy in Dublin late last year and again last month and relayed my strong concerns in relation to humanitarian access. The EU has also made representations to Saudi Arabia on this issue.

The EU is the largest humanitarian donor to Yemen and has provided over €170 million in aid since the conflict began, to which Ireland contributes via the EU Development Budget. Ireland has provided €15.5 million in bilateral humanitarian assistance to Yemen since 2015, including €4million in assistance which was announced in March this year. Ireland also provides global funding to a number of organisations which are particularly active in Yemen including the World Food Programme, UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Ireland has also worked in the UN system to raise our grave concerns about human rights in Yemen. At the Human Rights Council in September 2017, Ireland was part of a small core group of countries that drove forward the adoption by consensus of a Resolution on Yemen. The resolution established a group of international experts to examine the facts in relation to violations of human rights and humanitarian law on the ground.

The EU has worked to keep communication channels open with all stakeholders and regional actors in Yemen. At the Foreign Affairs Council in December last year, I urged stronger EU

action on humanitarian access in Yemen, and I will continue to raise these concerns with all appropriate interlocutors whenever possible.

The EU supports the work of Martin Griffiths, the new Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General for Yemen, and his team, and in particular his efforts to prepare a framework for negotiations to present to the UN Security Council in June. We hope that peace negotiations can be re-launched shortly afterwards. I believe that the new envoy will be able to engage all parties to the conflict to come back to the negotiating table, in order to achieve a sustainable solution for the people of Yemen. My EU colleagues and I are committed to supporting his work, and would be happy to meet with him at the Foreign Affairs Council to hear how we can best do that.

I can assure the Deputy that Ireland will continue to take every appropriate opportunity to press for a negotiated settlement to the conflict in Yemen, as well as respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, and improved humanitarian access. I believe that only way to bring about a long-term sustainable improvement in the situation for the Yemeni people is through a negotiated end to this conflict, and the EU stands ready to support this.

## Passport Applications Administration

175. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the guidelines and timeframe for withdrawing an active passport application at an appointment in the Passport Office; the documentation required when submitting the new or duplicate application at the time of appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24974/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Applicants who have submitted a passport renewal application through Passport Express may withdraw their original application and re-apply through the counter application service. This service is designed to accommodate applicants who have upcoming travel plans and have, in error, submitted their passport application through a channel which would not allow the application to be processed before their travel date.

If proof of travel is provided, the counter service allows for applications to be processed in timeframes shorter than those offered by Passport Express and the online passport application. First time passport applications can not avail of this service as the necessary security and identity checks do not allow for expediting of such applications. Full details on eligibility, terms and conditions and timeframes for all individual passport application channels are available on the Passport Service's website [www.dfa.ie/passport](http://www.dfa.ie/passport).

All applicants who wish to resubmit a Passport Express application must book a counter appointment online at [www.passportappointments.ie](http://www.passportappointments.ie).

Resubmission of an application will require the original application to be cancelled. Applicants who are cancelling a Passport Express application must submit a written request to cancel their original application at the time of their counter appointment. This written request must be signed by the applicant (or applicant's parent/guardian in the case of a child's renewal application). All cancellation requests must cite the application number of the original application.

The applicant will be required to submit all necessary documentation at the time of their appointment, including:

A new fully completed application form, suitably witnessed and accompanied by new photographs.

The full relevant passport fee. Application fees in respect of the original application will be refunded to applicants following processing of the cancellation request. Additional processing fees apply for the counter application service depending on the processing timeframe requested. Full details on all applicable fees can be found on the passport Service's website here:

[www.dfa.ie/passports-citizenship/top-passport-questions/passport-fees/](http://www.dfa.ie/passports-citizenship/top-passport-questions/passport-fees/).

Any required documents that were not submitted in respect of the original application must be submitted before the new application can proceed. Submission of incomplete application forms and supporting documentation will result in the passport application being delayed.

[More questions regarding passport applications and administration here](#)

## European Council Meetings

443. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** if immigration will be discussed at the June 2018 European Council meeting in view of events that have occurred in Hungary and Germany. [24563/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The next European Council will take place on 28 and 29 June 2018. Migration is on the agenda and the meeting will likely take stock of progress on foot of the Conclusions of the 19 October 2017 European Council where the twenty-eight heads of state agreed that the EU's "comprehensive, pragmatic and resolute" migration strategy, which aims to restore control of external borders

and to reduce arrivals and the number of deaths at sea, was bringing results and should be consolidated.

Measures to be taken included maintaining vigilance on all migratory routes and readiness to react to any new trends or developments, support for EU Member States directly affected or involved, strengthened cooperation with international partners, as well as countries of origin, transit and destination, adequate financing and an increase in effective returns, to reduce the incentives of irregular migration.

Further actions called for by the October 2017 European Council Conclusions include:

- Full cooperation with Turkey on migration, and the full implementation of the EU - Turkey Statement
- Enhanced returns and the further strengthening of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency
- Applying voluntary resettlement schemes
- Creating and applying the necessary leverage to achieve measurable results in terms of preventing illegal migration and returning irregular migrants.

The upcoming June European Council is expected to discuss the ongoing negotiations to reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The October 2017 Conclusions specifically referenced the CEAS, stating that the European Council would seek to reach a consensus during the first half of 2018 and calling for further convergence towards an agreement which strikes the right balance between responsibility and solidarity and ensures resilience to future crises. At present I am not aware of plans to discuss the migration situation in either Germany or Hungary.

## Refugee Data

486. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the number of cases referred to the International Protection Office that have been granted residency or have had their cases overturned from previous decisions; the number of cases upheld on appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24721/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** On 31 December 2016, the International Protection Act 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.

With the commencement of the International Protection Act, the International Protection Office (IPO) and the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) were established for the processing of applications for international protection at first instance and for adjudicating appeals.

From the establishment of the IPO on 31 December 2016 until 31 May 2018, 1,313 applicants were granted protection status by the IPO. During that same period, some 156 grants were also made in respect of permission to remain by the IPO.

During the same period, the IPAT has issued 941 decisions. Of these 941 decisions, 699 relate to International Protection decisions including decisions issued under the various transition arrangements of the International Protection Act 2015. Of these 699 decisions, 539 were Refused/Affirmed and 160 were granted/set aside.

*Questions Nos. 487 and 488 answered with Question No. 483.*

## Asylum Applications Data

494. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the age profile of asylum seekers currently resident in direct provision by age and gender in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24863/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** There are currently 34 accommodation centres located in 17 counties throughout the state.

Based on the most recently available information, the statistics requested by the Deputy (age profile by gender) are outlined below.

Age	Female	Male
0-4	331	369
5-12	309	333

13-17	102	124
18-25	269	438
26-35	678	1,016
36-45	407	625
46-55	116	203
56-65	43	42
66+	20	13
Total	2,275	3,163

## Asylum Applications Data

506. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** further to Parliamentary Question No. 279 of 29 May 2018, if only 0.5% of residents on direct provision have been in the asylum process for more than three years (details supplied). [25055/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In relation to the response to Parliamentary Question No. 279 of 29 May 2018, it is important to note that the figures provided in that response relate only to those that have applied for international protection that have not yet received a first instance decision.

The report of the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) from December 2017, that is cited by the Deputy for comparison, relates to all persons residing in Direct Provision, regardless of whether they have had a first instance decision or not. Moreover, it is important to note that not all of those who apply for international protection choose to reside in Direct Provision accommodation and that there are also people residing in Direct Provision that are no longer in the protection process (such as those that have received international protection status or have Deportation Orders issued against them and are obliged to remove themselves from the State).

In response to the Deputy's question regarding those in the international protection process and residing in Direct Provision (regardless of whether they have got a first instance decision or at a later stage of the process), the percentage of such applicants resident for more than three years amounts to 8.3%.

## Direct Provision System

519. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** his views on the findings of a report (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25112/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** *The Report of the Working Group to Report to Government on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers*, also known as the Justice McMahon report, was published in June 2015. Its recommendations have implications for a number of Government Departments and services.

My Department has since published three progress reports on the implementation of its 173 recommendations; the first in June 2016, the second in February of 2017 and a third and final report in July of 2017. All three reports are available to view on my Department's website [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie).

The final progress report shows that 133 recommendations have been reported as fully implemented and a further 36 are in progress or partially implemented. This represents a 98% full or partial implementation rate.

The Working Paper dated December 2017, referred to by the Deputy, acknowledges that considerable progress has been made, and in particular highlights as “significant improvements” developments such as the introduction of the Single Procedure in the International Protection Act, 2015; general improvements in living conditions; and the Government’s decision to opt-in to the Reception Conditions Directive.

The improvements to living conditions for applicants for international protection have been significant over recent years. These include the implementation of self or communal catering arrangements in a number of accommodation centres. As a result of this initiative, over 1,500 residents are now able to prepare meals of their own choosing. In addition, there have been improvements to a number of outdoor playgrounds and football pitches to provide for 'all-weather' facilities and the introduction of teenagers rooms in centres to provide social areas for this age group. Friends of the Centre groups have also been established in each centre. This initiative aims to bring residents, community and voluntary groups together with a view to increasing integration opportunities and providing for the development of greater community linkages with the residents and the centre.

Following on from the McMahon Report, a Standards Advisory Group was set up in 2017. The work of this group is to build on the recommendations of McMahon and to develop a set of standards for accommodation provided for those people seeking the protection of the State. The Standards will meet the minimum standards set out in the Recast Reception Conditions Directive and EASO Guidance on Reception Conditions: Operational Standards and Indicators and will also take account of national developments in the provision of services to those in the protection process. They will take due cognisance of the responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by policies and plans as defined by the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. The group is comprised of members from a range of organisations supporting refugees as well as staff from a number of government Departments and will deliver a Working Document in September 2018 following widespread consultation.

The Government approved an opt into the EU (Recast) Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU). The decision to opt-in to the Directive will bring Ireland into line with our EU partners and place the entire system on a legislative basis, which will be subject to EU oversight. This is a significant and positive measure, not only in addressing the issue of labour market access, but also extending to children's rights, rights for unaccompanied minors, vulnerable people, new appeals processes, healthcare and education provision. By opting into the Directive, another important recommendation of the Justice McMahon report will be implemented bringing Ireland into line with the European Union norms.

I remain fully committed to working with all stakeholders, some of whom will have differing views on the extent of implementation of some recommendations, to ensure the continuing implementation of a wide range of reforms in this area, including those recommended by the Justice McMahon report.

## Refugee Resettlement Programme

525. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the measures being taken to accommodate refugees from the Syrian crisis; the way they can be integrated into society and allowed to work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25224/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established by Government Decision on 10th September 2015 as a direct response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe as a consequence of mass migration from areas of conflict in the Middle East and Africa. Under this programme the Government pledged to accept a total of 4,000 persons into the State including through the recently announced IRPP Humanitarian Assistance Programme (IHAP), which will provide for the admission of up to 530 immediate family members of Irish citizens, persons with Convention refugee or subsidiary protection status and persons with programme refugee status.

The implementation of the IRPP for resettling Syrian refugees requires a high level of coordination among service delivery agencies at both national and local level. Service provision is mainstreamed and all the main statutory service providers such as Government departments, the HSE, Tusla and Local Authorities are represented on the national Taskforce which oversees delivery of the programme. In general, coordination is ensured via the IRPP which is part of the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (OPMI) within my Department. OPMI is the primary entity responsible for delivering resettlement via a range of statutory and non-statutory agencies. It has overseen the humanitarian resettlement programmes run by Ireland since they were established in 2000.

My Department is mobilising European Union Funding under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) in support of Ireland's resettlement efforts, including to fund supports provided through local authorities to the refugees. Local authorities play a critical role in ensuring the success of each resettlement through the provision of housing and the implementation of a process carried out by an "implementing partner" with expertise in community integration and relevant supports.

My Department also works closely with the Irish Red Cross which was assigned responsibility by the Government for administering public pledges of support, especially in the area of accommodation. Its case workers and support team work closely with IRPP and refugees to find suitable accommodation options.

Programme refugees have the right to work in Ireland. Supports are provided under the auspices of the programme to enable them to be in a position to secure employment. These include:

- The IRPP liaises with the Department of Education and Skills and the local Education and Training Board in each catchment area to ensure that groups receive a Language Training and Cultural Orientation programme and to facilitate access to education.
- Free childcare is provided wherever possible to allow the adults to attend the Language and Orientation programme in their Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre (EROC).
- Local service providers, volunteers and NGOs visit the EROCs to provide services and information and to support and befriend the asylum seekers or refugees.

Increasingly, the IRPP is focusing on initiatives which assist with labour market activation for refugees and is working with the Irish Red Cross and other bodies to facilitate access to employment. Various initiatives are also developing in the educational sphere.

With regard to integration more generally, the Migrant Integration Strategy, which was published on 7 February 2017, offers a blueprint for Government action to promote the integration of all migrants who are legally in the State, including refugees, for the period to 2020. It sees integration as a two-way process involving action by migrants and non-migrants alike. The Strategy comprises 76 specific actions under a number of themes to be implemented by Government Departments and Agencies, the business sector, employers, local authorities and community and voluntary sector organisations. The Employment and Pathways to Work theme contains actions designed to enable migrants, including refugees, to participate in employment. Among other actions, the Strategy requires Government Departments and agencies to address integration in strategy statements; to ensure appropriate, regular engagement with NGOs representing migrant groups; and to provide intercultural awareness training.

The strategy includes targeted initiatives to promote migrant entrepreneurship, to encourage migrants into the Civil Service and onto State boards and to improve English language provision in education and training. It is accompanied by a Communities Integration Fund which provides funding for 131 initiatives by community organisations aimed at promoting migrant integration and facilitating social inclusion at the local level.

The strategy is available on the website of the Office for Promotion for Migrant Integration at [www.integration.ie](http://www.integration.ie).

It is my firm intention that the model of integration and support is one which will evolve and develop over the coming months and years with a view to offering refugees increasing opportunities to enhance their own lives. It is for this reason I am examining initiatives such as community sponsorship to support the long-term integration process.

## Refugee Resettlement Programme

529. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding refugees in Killarney town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25295/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** There has never been a legal impediment preventing those seeking international protection in Ireland from being involved in voluntary work or activities and many have chosen to do so over the years.

Information provided by the Reception and Integration Agency of my Department would suggest that there are a number of activities available to international protection applicants based in Killarney, some of which are listed below:

- Local athletics club: There is a run every Saturday morning in the Killarney National Park
- Local football club: Soccer balls are available for residents to play on the pitch in the park
- County Kerry Cricket Club in Tralee
- Local musicians group: The group practice almost every afternoon.
- Daily English classes
- Manual Handling Course
- Local Gym: residents can avail of a reduced rate

In addition to the above, the notice board in Linden House regularly provides updates on other seasonal events and activities. Various workshops and courses are also available through Killarney Asylum Seekers Initiative (KASI) who are a local support group.

Any resident of Linden House who would like to volunteer for activities, such as Tidy Towns, should contact KASI or speak to the centre's management to be linked into the various groups and organisations in this area.

## Departmental Agencies Staff Data

530. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** further to Parliamentary Question No. 88 of 7 May 2017, the number of new staff hires engaged in the provision of services in the area of international protection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25424/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Further to the response to the Deputy's previous Parliamentary Question in this regard, the Legal Aid Board

operates a mixed model of service delivery to persons seeking international protection in the State. This incorporates both the use of in-house staff, including solicitor staff, working in law centres and the referral of cases to private solicitors on a panel.

The service provision is split between two units, the Refugee Documentation Centre (RDC), and the International Protection Unit (IPU). Since May 2017, eight new staff have been engaged to increase the provision of these services. The Deputy should note that, while one hire was to cover maternity leave and another was an intern post, these new hires are in addition to the 13 indicated in the response to Parliamentary Question No. 88 of 17 May 2017. These are broken down as below:

Unit	Grade	FTE
Refugee Documentation Centre	Executive Officer	1.0
	Clerical Officer	1.0
	Clerical Officer	1.0
	Intern (for a period of 6 weeks)	1.0
International Protection Unit	Managing Solicitor Grade I	1.0
	Solicitor Grade III	1.0
	Solicitor Grade III	1.0

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The Deputy should also note that the Board provides legal services in relation to a range of important civil issues. While the Board is developing specialisation in its staff, it also wishes to ensure flexibility in order to address areas of particular demand or priority at a point in time. Therefore additional staff covering those broader civil law issues can also be engaged in international protection cases.

## Asylum Applications

531. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the reason the average wait time for first interview for asylum applications has increased from 11 weeks in 2015 to 18 to 20 months in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25425/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the International Protection Act 2015, which introduced a single application procedure, was commenced on 31 December 2016.

Under the single procedure, recommendations at first instance are made by the International Protection Office (IPO), which replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC). Appeals in respect of negative first instance protection recommendations are considered by the statutorily independent International Protection Appeals Tribunal, which replaced the former Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT).

The fact that scheduling times have lengthened in the IPO can be attributed to a number of reasons.

Firstly, as part of the transition arrangements for the new single procedure process, the IPO was required to take responsibility for the processing of over 3,000 cases which were not finalised by the former ORAC or RAT. These applications reverted for processing under the transitional provisions of the 2015 Act and added significantly to the IPO caseload. All of these transitional cases had to be contacted individually by the IPO to inform them of the relevant provisions of the 2015 Act and how the transitional provisions would affect their applications. All applicants received comprehensive documentation including a new Application for International Protection Questionnaire (IPO 2) which, on return, had to be translated and associated with the relevant files. This process meant that the IPO was not fully up and running in terms of interviewing until the second quarter of 2017. The

concentration on the elimination of the inherited backlog, in line with the system of prioritisation agreed with the UNHCR, has also reduced the ability of the IPO to address more current cases.

Secondly, there was a 30% increase in applications for international protection in 2017 (including EU relocation applicants) which has put additional pressure on the processing system. In addition, applications for international protection have also increased in 2018 (to end May) by over 30% as compared with the same period in 2017.

Thirdly, the 2015 Act substantially changed the processing arrangements for the consideration of applications for international protection and for permission to remain decisions by introducing a more comprehensive single procedure. On the one hand, this development has, of course, resulted in a more streamlined system enabling all the grounds for a person to remain in the State to be determined as part of one process in the IPO. However, compared with the jurisdiction at first instance of the former ORAC, which considered applications for refugee status alone, caseworkers in the IPO are required to investigate applications on the basis of three comprehensive elements namely; whether the applicant is a refugee or, if not; whether the applicant is eligible for subsidiary protection or, if not and thirdly, are there grounds to grant a person humanitarian permission to remain in the State. While considering all aspects together does, of course, create economies of scale in investigating applications as part of a more streamlined single procedure process, the level of investigation required is more comprehensive and consequently more time consuming.

In terms of progress to date, I can inform the Deputy that considerable work has been undertaken to get the new process up and running. For example, in terms of scheduling of interviews, the IPO scheduled over 2,400 single procedure interviews (including in respect of EU relocation cases) in 2017. In 2018 (to end May), some 1500 interviews have been scheduled.

In relation to recommendations/decisions, some 1,780 recommendations/decisions in respect of international protection and permission to remain were made by the IPO in 2017. This included some 750 recommendations in respect of the grant of international protection. In addition, some 1,634 recommendations/decisions have been made by the IPO in 2018 (to end May 2018). This includes international protection recommendations (including EU relocation cases), permission to remain decisions and permission to remain reviews. For 2018, there were some 572 international protection grants and over 100 grants of permission to remain made by the IPO. All 2018 figures are provisional.

Based on current predictions, the IPO is in line to make some 3,500 recommendations and decisions in 2018.

Considerable additional resources have and are being allocated to the IPO to assist it in undertaking its statutory functions with a view to processing the volume of cases on hands as soon as possible. As at the beginning of June 2018, the current staffing complement in the IPO is 135. In addition, there are some 55 serving members of the IPO Case Processing Panel. To enable the IPO to carry out their functions to optimum effect and to assist in the reduction of caseloads, the current Case Processing Panel is being further expanded at the present time on the basis of public advertisement.

The resources assigned to the IPO, as well as work processes in that organisation, are being kept under ongoing review and additional resources will be allocated as these become available so that the cases on hand, both those applications preceding the commencement of the 2015 Act and the increased volume of new applications, are dealt with as quickly as possible and waiting times for those applying for international protection are reduced to the greatest possible extent.

It is recognised that currently many applicants for international protection are waiting longer than they should for their first instance interviews in the IPO and to have their cases decided. While the structural causes of delays have been removed with the commencement of the International Protection Act, 2015, the main challenge now faced is the need to quickly eradicate the substantial number of cases carried over from the previous system. As I indicated, these challenges are being addressed by deploying increased resources and a continual assessment and reform of the use of those resources and, having due regard to the requirements of the International Protection Act 2015.

*Question No. 532 answered with Question No. 514.*

## Detention Centres Provision

545. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** when construction works on the new Garda immigration detention facility at Dublin Airport will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25597/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister I have no direct role in the matter.

In relation to the facility at Dublin Airport, I am informed by the OPW that works commenced on site 8 May 2018, with completion expected by the end of 2018.

## Direct Provision Payments

1202. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the **Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection** her plans to increase direct provision payments for adults and children in line with the supplementary welfare allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25266/18]

1203. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the **Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection** the estimated full year cost of doubling the payments made to those that are resident in direct provision. [25706/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 1202 and 1203 together.

Protection seekers are offered accommodation under the system of direct provision operated by the Reception & Integration Agency (RIA) of the Department of Justice and Equality. Those who accept direct provision are provided with accommodation, food and health services together with other facilities and services designed to ensure their needs are met while seeking the protection of the State. All costs for this are borne by the State.

The direct provision allowance (DPA) is a non-statutory payment paid by my Department on behalf of the Department of Justice and Equality to protection applicants living in the direct provision system. The weekly rate of DPA for children and adults is €21.60. The Government has provided over €5.6 million for the allowance in 2018.

There are approximately 3,700 adults and 1,600 children residing in the system of direct provision in respect of whom the direct provision allowance is being paid. The additional full-year cost, based on the current numbers, of doubling the weekly rate to €43.20 per week would cost some €5.95 million.

The supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants and who do not qualify for payment under other State schemes. It is payable at the rate of €196 per week, with increases for qualified adults and children paid at the rates of €131.40 and €31.80 respectively. As protection seekers are provided with accommodation, food and other services, which recipients of SWA do not receive, it would not be appropriate to increase the rate of DPA in line with SWA. The rate of DPA for adults was increased from €19.10 to €21.60 in August 2017 while the rate for children increased from €9.60 to €15.60 in January 2016 and to €21.60 in August 2017.

Any further increases to the rate of direct provision allowance would have to be approved by Government and considered in a budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

## Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> June

### Direct Provision System

36. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the **Minister for Children and Youth Affairs** if she is satisfied that enough supports are in place for children in direct provision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25452/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Child Care Act, 1991 applies to all children resident in the State, regardless of their immigration status. Under the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Tusla has a duty to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care or protection.

The Agency is obliged to provide care for these children for as long as their welfare requires it. It should be noted that children living in direct provision are in the care of their parent(s).

My colleague, the Minister of Justice and Equality has responsibility for the direct provision service, which is provided through a dedicated Reception and Integration Agency. Senior officials from my Department are currently engaged with the Department of Justice and Equality on the development of Standards for Direct Provision Centres, and I look forward to the results of this work.

A senior social worker from Tusla is seconded to the Reception and Integration Agency, providing social work advice to the Agency, and working directly with Direct Provision Centres to develop their child safeguarding practices and links to community supports.

Concerns about the welfare, safety or well-being of a child in direct provision are reported to Tusla, in line with Children First Legislation.

A range of professionals including teachers, nurses, early years educators, gardaí and other health professionals, who see children regularly, are in a good position to identify children where there are welfare or safety issues.

The Children First Act, 2015 places a statutory obligation on key professionals, such as those I have named, to report concerns of harm above a defined threshold, to Tusla without delay.

Direct Provision Centre managers are categorised as Designated Persons under Children First, and so are required to make mandatory reports of concerns relating to children resident in their centres.

Direct Provision Centres are also required to have child safeguarding statements and practices in place.

Unaccompanied, asylum-seeking children who seek the assistance of the State are placed in the statutory care of Tusla. Their needs are assessed by an allocated social worker from a specialist team who work exclusively with unaccompanied minors. They receive appropriate educational, social, medical and counselling support.

## Refugee Resettlement

89. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the policy and timeframe for the resettlement of Syrian refugees; if it is policy to house family members together; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25806/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established by Government Decision on 10th September 2015 as a direct response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe as a consequence of mass migration from areas of conflict in the Middle East and Africa. Under this programme, the Government had pledged to accept a total of 4,000 persons into the State. The bulk of these persons were intended to be UNHCR programme refugees from Lebanon and asylum seekers in Greece arriving in Ireland from Greece and Italy under the EU relocation mechanism. However, the latter mechanism did not deliver the numbers envisaged and the Government has chosen to fill the gap by making additional pledges for programme refugees and through the recently announced IRPP Humanitarian Assistance Programme (IHAP), which will provide for the admission of up to 530 immediate family members of Irish citizens, persons with Convention refugee or subsidiary protection status and persons with programme refugee status.

Ireland had committed to accept 1,040 refugees by the end of 2017 under the resettlement strand of the programme and currently 820 people have arrived. The remaining individuals are due to arrive in the coming months.

I have pledged to take a further 945 refugees from Lebanon between 2018 (345) and 2019 (600). At the present time it is intended to undertake two selection missions in Lebanon in 2018, one in June and one in September, in order to select the 345 refugees who will be part of the 2018 pledge.

To date 1,022 people have arrived from Greece. This completed Ireland's current relocation programme.

In addition, the Government has taken 41 unaccompanied minors from Calais to date and both IRPP and Tusla are in preliminary discussion with officials in Italy and Greece with a view to accepting up to 60 unaccompanied minors before the end of 2019.

The implementation of the IRPP for resettling Syrian refugees requires a high level of coordination among service delivery agencies at both national and local level. Service provision is mainstreamed and all the main statutory service providers are represented on the national Taskforce which oversees delivery of the programme.

As the Deputy will appreciate, a tailored and flexible approach is required to take account of differing family configurations and the availability of housing stock. Given the current difficulties in the housing market it is taking about twelve months to source suitable accommodation that match the needs of refugee families. The Irish Red Cross are also using pledged accommodation from the public to try and meet the needs of single persons as few accommodation options exist within the local authority sector for this cohort. Refugees, once resettled, largely fall under the auspices of the local authority "implementing partner" who provide appropriate services for a period of eighteen months to assist with integration.

## Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> June

### Passport Applications Administration

57. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the number of passport applications being processed at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26040/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):**

The Passport Service is currently in its peak season for passport demand with the vast majority of applications being received between February and August each year. The number of applications received from January to May this year is up by over 5% on the same period last year. The Passport Service is currently processing over 80,000 passport applications. These applications are going through the normal checking, processing and security stages. The Passport Service is meeting its target turnaround times for certain categories of applicants, and I acknowledge that there are delays in other categories. For applicants that have used the Online Passport Application service, the target turnaround timeframe of 10 working days (plus postage) is being met and in 50% of cases, applications are being processed in 5 working days (plus postage). The target timeframe of 15 working days for Passport Express renewals is also currently being met. The Passport Service acknowledges that for certain categories such as first time applicants and applicants with lost or stolen passports, processing is taking longer due to additional security checks. The Passport Service monitors the volume of applications received on an ongoing basis to ensure that resources are available to meet demand. In order to respond to anticipated application increases and to seasonal demands, the Passport Service received sanction for 220 Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs) this year to be appointed to the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork. 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. In addition to the intake of TCOs, staff from other Divisions in the Department have been reassigned to assist with enquiries, and targeted overtime is available.

A central element of my Department's approach to managing increasing application volumes has been the implementation of service improvements in order to minimise the impact unusually high application volumes have on turnaround times. 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 online passport application service, which was launched last year, will continue to make a major contribution to the effective management of exceptionally high volumes by allowing existing resources to be more effectively deployed within the Passport Service. I would encourage all applicants wherever possible to renew their passports using the online renewal service, it is the quickest, easiest and most convenient way to renew your passport.

## Passport Renewal Service

58. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** when it will be possible to renew a child's passport online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26061/18]

### **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 200,000 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. 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 the identification of fraud and the protection of the integrity of the Irish passport.

## Work Permits Eligibility

103. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the sectors in which asylum seekers can apply for work; the number of employment permits that have been applied for to date; the number of permits that have been issued; the way in which the

situation will change after the four month temporary measure, that is, after 9 June 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25936/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** From February 9th 2018, when section 16(3)(b) International Protection Act 2015 was struck down by the Supreme Court, until the date of entry into force of the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive, any eligible International Protection applicants can access the employment permit system on the same basis as other non-EEA nationals. The interim arrangements for the short period prior to the opt-in enables those seeking international protection to access the labour market through the Employment Permit Acts. Employment permits are the remit of the Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation and I have no remit or authority in this area.

The Employment Permits Section of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) inform me that one application for an employment permit has been received from an International Protection applicant, which was subsequently withdrawn. Officials from DBEI have been in direct contact with the International Protection applicant to assist in any new employment permit application that person may make.

Following Government approval, I used my executive powers to introduce an administrative scheme to allow (from the date the Supreme Court struck down the prohibition), for an additional access to the labour market not provided for under the employment permit system. This also allowed eligible applicants to activate their qualification for such access which will continue under any new scheme to be announced. This current interim scheme provides for eligible applicants for international protection (i.e. those in the system for over nine months without a first instance recommendation), to engage in self-employment. As on 12 June 2018, the total number of applications for self-employment received under this scheme is 713, of which 503 have been granted.

The arrangements that are currently in place are interim arrangements pending the completion of the process to opt-in to the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive. The opt-in process has proceeded quickly and, on Tuesday 22 May 2018, the decision of the EU Commission confirming Ireland's opt in to the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive was adopted. The decision was published on the Official Journal the following day. The implementation group, chaired by the Department of Justice and Equality and with representatives from all relevant Departments and Agencies, is finalising the details of the more permanent arrangements, which will include less restrictive access to different categories of work than the employment permits regime which apply in the interim period. It is expected that the more permanent and broader labour market access arrangements will be in place upon the completion of the transposing measures from the end of June this year.

## EU Migration Crisis

104. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** his views on the single largest tragic incident in 2018 in the Mediterranean which saw 112 Tunisian migrants die crossing to Greece on an overloaded smuggler's boat on 5 June 2018; the way in which he will contribute to talks regarding EU migration reform from the viewpoint of the safety and well-being of migrants and refugees coming into the EU; if he will represent the needs of migrants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25941/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The death of 112 migrants from Tunisia, who drowned when the overloaded smuggler's boat carrying them across the Mediterranean Sea to Greece capsized, is a tragedy. While the number of deaths at sea in the Mediterranean has dropped significantly over the past twelve months, any death at sea, particularly in such circumstances, is tragic.

Ireland supports efforts made by the European Union and its Member States to put a stop to unnecessary deaths in the Mediterranean.

Ireland has been active in search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean since 2015, first through Operation Pontus, a bilateral agreement between Ireland and Italy running in parallel to Operation Sophia. Ireland has been a full member of Operation Sophia since 2017. Since 2015, Irish naval vessels have rescued thousands of migrants at sea.

In addition to supporting the rescue of migrants at sea, Ireland supports other measures to address the root causes of irregular migration, such as through the EU efforts to stabilise Libya and neighbouring countries in North and West Africa, both politically and economically. The recently established AU-EU-UN Taskforce on Libya has seen some early successes in its efforts to support migrants in Libya.

Ireland continues to make its own efforts, as well as supporting those of the EU, to improve the socio-economic conditions in countries of origin and transit. In this spirit, Ireland continues to support the EU Trust Fund for Africa and our pledge doubled to six million euro in 2017. The use of awareness-raising campaigns in third countries of origin and transit has been highlighted as an area of particular importance in recent EU discourse, and I understand it will be a priority of the upcoming Austrian EU Presidency. These campaigns seek to warn third country nationals, thinking of travelling to Europe through smuggling channels, of the risks of the crossing.

Ireland supports the opening up of new legal migratory pathways to Europe for third country nationals, as part of efforts to reduce irregular migration and to reduce the numbers of migrants making dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea. Ireland expects to be an active participant in current and future pledges in respect of refugees and other vulnerable



persons in need of protection. In this regard, we have pledged to resettle 600 refugees each year in 2018 and 2019 under the EU-UNHCR pledging exercise for the two-year period.