

# PQ Digest | 28.05.18 – 31.05.18

## Quick Links

<b>29<sup>th</sup> May 2018</b> .....	2
Immigration Controls .....	2
Direct Provision Data .....	3
Human Rights .....	4
Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration.....	5
<b>30<sup>th</sup> May 2018</b> .....	6
Passport Applications Administration .....	6
Passport Applications Administration .....	6

29<sup>th</sup> May 2018

## Immigration Controls

278. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** his plans to review the immigration checks at Dublin Airport in view of frequent complaints; and the actions that are being taken to review the length of time it is taking to process persons at the Airport since the civilianisation of the checks. [23176/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charlie Flanagan):** The empirical evidence available to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department, who operate the front line immigration service at Dublin airport, shows that the vast majority of arriving passengers are immigrated in a matter of minutes. Information supplied by Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) relating to time taken for arriving passengers to be immigrated shows that over 90% of all travellers are processed through immigration control in a matter of minutes. This percentage figure is significantly higher for passengers of EU nationalities. This is in the context of passenger numbers at Dublin Airport reaching record levels last year with almost 30 million passengers using the airport and compares very favourably with other modern airports in other jurisdictions.

I am also advised by INIS that the number of complaints it directly receives in relation to delays is extremely small - on average 60 per annum or to put it another way, 0.0004% of inbound passengers in 2017. It is the case that sometimes social media is used by passengers to raise concerns. On occasions when INIS has examined some of this coverage, it often transpires that passengers measure the time taken to clear all aspects of the arrival process, including embarking from the aircraft, baggage collection, customs, etc. with the immigration process only accounting for a portion of this period.

However, there are specific pressure points outside of the control of the immigration authorities that can create some delay. Typically, this arises when a very high number of flights arrive within a specific time period (which occurs at Terminal 1 in the late evening period) with consequent increases to passenger numbers within these peak times. This situation can be compounded when, in addition to scheduled arrivals, delayed flights also land during these peak periods.

Additional immigration officers have been recruited for the airport and the allocation of personnel is designed to have the maximum number of staff on duty during the peak periods so that all available immigration booths are operational at these times. The number of available booths is a function of the physical infrastructure at each Terminal. Every effort is made by immigration officers to exercise their function as speedily as possible consistent with the requirement to protect our borders and facilitate legitimate travellers.

While the immigration authorities at Dublin Airport have no control over the number of flights, their scheduling or actual arrival times, they have an excellent relationship with the DAA and air carriers. All

parties work closely together across a number of fronts to address capacity and queue management where they arise to alleviate congestion, to maximise passenger throughput, and ensure waiting times are kept to a minimum.

I might add that automatic border control 'eGates' have been operational at Dublin Airport since 30 November last. The eGates are open to Irish and EU e-passport holders over the age of 18 and it is planned that their use will be extended to other categories of passengers as the programme develops. While their purpose is primarily an immigration control facility, they do have the effect of contributing overall to increased immigration processing capacity, particularly during spikes in passenger arrivals.

## Direct Provision Data

279. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the number of direct provision residents over 18 years of age that have been in the asylum process for nine months or more and have not yet received a first instance decision. [23263/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charlie Flanagan):** There are 1,317 Direct Provision residents over 18 years of age that have been in the protection process for nine months or more and have not yet received a first instance decision.

As of 17 May 2018, over half of cases in the International Protection Office awaiting a first instance decision and where the applicant is accommodated under the system of Direct Provision, are less than one year in the system, while 95% are two years or less and 99.5% are three years or less. This is a major improvement from the situation when the McMahon Working Group reported on the matter in June 2015.

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

## Human Rights

293. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the progress made in terms of the implementation of the OPCAT protocol; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23650/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charlie Flanagan):** As the Deputy is probably aware, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission launched research into the implementation of the Optional Protocol against Torture (OPCAT) in Ireland last October. This report outlined the Commission's position on what should be the primary considerations for the State in making progress towards ratification and implementation of the OPCAT, including recommendations in respect of the designation and coordination of a national preventative mechanism (NPM) under OPCAT.

Earlier this year, having considered this research, my Department circulated the IHREC's research to relevant stakeholders for their comments and observations. Observations were sought in particular on the following:

- whether existing sectoral authorities could carry out OPCAT inspections;
- using an expanded office of the Inspector of Prisons to deal with OPCAT inspections in the Justice Sector (Office of Inspection of Places of Detention);
- what role/relationship could such an office have with existing agencies;
- could any existing agencies carry out OPCAT type inspections on behalf of an Office of Inspection of Places of Detention;
- using this expanded Office of Inspection of Places of Detention to act as a co-ordinating NPM;
- any views on how agencies could interact with the co-ordinating NPM for OPCAT.

These stakeholders comprised those organisations with policy or operational responsibility in respect of inspection arrangements across the ambit of the NPM regime provided for in OPCAT as well as advisory and advocacy organisations which have expressed an interest in the ratification of OPCAT.

These stakeholders included:

- Department of Health
- Department of Defence
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- Garda Inspectorate

- Irish Penal Reform Trust
- The Children's Ombudsman
- PRILA (Research project on Prisons: the rule of law, accountability and rights)
- Irish Council for Civil Liberties
- Inspector of Prisons
- SAGE (Support and Advocacy Service for Older People)
- IHREC

The last of these submissions was received in April 2018 and my Department is now in the process of considering them. Following this process which is expected to conclude during the summer, my officials will be meeting with a number of stakeholders including the newly appointed Inspector of Prisons. These meetings will help my Department develop further a policy position for agreement and will ultimately inform the development of legislative proposals to enable ratification of OPCAT.

## Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

305. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the details of the immigration arrangements including visa options for persons in Venezuela that wish to move here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23758/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charlie Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that Venezuelan nationals are required to obtain a visa in order to travel to Ireland. A visa required person, including Venezuelan nationals, must apply for a visa for the particular purpose of their visit.

I am further advised that any person who wishes to come to Ireland must fulfil the relevant criteria for the particular visa application, i.e. study, employment, join family, volunteer, Minister of Religion, etc. The onus rests at all times with the applicant to satisfy the Visa Officer that the visa sought should be granted.

On arrival at an Irish port the visitor must report to an Immigration Officer and demonstrate that they have all the necessary documents required for their visit. The Immigration Officer may give a permission to the visitor to enter the country and to stay for a period up to a maximum of three months. Should the person wish to stay for longer than the period granted at border control they will be required to register for immigration at the relevant Immigration Office for the district in which they intend to reside.

The requirements set-out above are applicable to all visa required States. Full details of visa and immigration requirements are available on the INIS website.

30<sup>th</sup> May 2018

## Passport Applications Administration

84. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if his attention has been drawn to the problem with the passport tracking system (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23852/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** An applicant can track the progress of their passport application by entering the 11 digit application number into the tracker system. The applicant is also required to enter their category of application and the channel through which the application is submitted. The date provided by the tracker is a target date and not a guaranteed date. Information is updated daily and reflects the current target turnaround times. The Passport Service makes every effort to respond to as many customer queries as possible and in recent weeks, has allocated additional resources to the existing Communications Unit to respond to customer queries on phones, email and webchat.

The vast majority of resources is allocated to checking and processing applications so that passports can be issued as quickly as possible. As the Deputy will be aware, this is peak season for the Passport Service and applicants are strongly advised to submit their application in good time before their planned travel date. Applicants are advised to check the Passport Service website, [www.dfa.ie/passport](http://www.dfa.ie/passport) for the most appropriate channel through which to submit their application. Adult applicants renewing their passport are strongly advised to check the online passport application service. The target turnaround time is 10 working days, plus postage time, but in 50% of cases, passports are issued in 5 working days (plus postage time).

## Passport Applications Administration

85. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing delays in the issuing of passports in both the passport express system and the online application system; the measures he is taking to deal with the delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23889/18]

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

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

The Passport Service received sanction this year for 220 Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs) for appointment to the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork. 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 online passport application service 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.

My Department has an extensive communications strategy to promote good practice amongst passport holders when planning to travel abroad. We regularly advise applicants:

- to check the validity of their passport in advance of booking travel;
- to apply at least 6 weeks in advance of their travel plans; and
- if they are eligible adults renewing their passport, to consider the online passport application service.