

PQ Digest | 25.06.18 – 29.06.18

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Tuesday 26th June

Human Rights

86. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if he has made representations with the Italian Government following its announcement to instigate a register for Roma persons in Italy; his view on whether this is a breach of human rights of Roma persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27715/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Last week the Italian Prime Minister's Office issued a statement setting out the position of the Italian Government following remarks made by the Italian Interior Minister that he would create a register of Roma people living in Italy.

The Prime Minister's Office statement said that the Italian Government's position was that it would not be compiling such a register. It noted that compiling a record on an ethnic basis would be unconstitutional. It went on to claim that the Government's goal was to address all "illegal and degrading situations" so as to protect the safety of all citizens.

Ireland is resolutely committed to the principle of non-discrimination as set out in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, signed by Ireland in 1968. I therefore welcome the clarification provided in this case.

Third Level Costs

164. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the **Minister for Education and Skills** the estimated cost of providing 100 higher education places for students of returning emigrants or those that came through the direct provision service. [27515/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The estimated average cost of providing higher education provision is between €10k and €12k per student per annum therefore total cost for 100 places is between €1m and €1.2m.

However, I wish to advise the Deputy that in order to qualify for funding towards tuition fees, students must be first-time undergraduates, hold inter alia EU/EEA/Swiss nationality in their own right, and have been ordinarily resident in an EU/EEA/Swiss state for at least three of the five years preceding their entry to an approved third level course.

Where undergraduate students do not qualify for free fees they are required to pay fees to their higher education institution at either an 'EU rate' or a higher 'Non-EU rate'.

My Department responded previously to concerns about the impact of the free fees eligibility criteria on individuals who have had, for occupational or economic reasons, to move abroad, requiring them to take their children out of the Irish education system in the process.

To this end, in March 2014 my Department requested that the Higher Education Authority (HEA) advise the higher education sector that full-time undergraduate students who:

- Hold EU/EEA/Swiss nationality but do not meet the residency clause of the Free Fees Initiative; and
- have completed five academic years of study (at either primary or post-primary level) in an EU/EEA/Swiss State; and
- commence their first undergraduate course of study in an approved institution here from the following academic year onwards,

should be charged the EU rate of fee rather than the higher non-EU rate by their higher education institution.

This approach was implemented for new students from the commencement of the 2014/15 academic year.

National Traveller-Roma Integration Strategy

223. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the **Minister for Education and Skills** the progress on each action outlined in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 that fall under his Department's remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27976/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality published the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy in June of last year. My department participated in the development of the strategy and is a member of the Steering Group which was established to oversee the implementation of the new strategy. Membership of the Steering Group includes all relevant Government Departments, Agencies and NGOs.

The strategy takes a whole of Government approach to improving the lives of Travellers and Roma in Ireland in practical and tangible ways. There are 149 actions in the strategy covering the themes of Cultural Identity, Education, Employment and Traveller Economy, Children and Youth, Health, Gender Equality, Anti-discrimination and Equality, Public Services, Accommodation and Traveller and Roma Communities.

My department and agencies attached to my department have input into 31 of the 149 actions, six of which are completed and the remaining twenty five are on track. In accordance with Government policy, provision for Travellers has been mainstreamed with previously segregated provision now funded as part of the mainstream system. Access to and participation in all education sectors are seen as major barriers for Travellers and Roma. To improve these and to retain Travellers and Roma in the education system a pilot project is being developed by Tusla, the State body with a statutory remit in relation to school attendance, participation and retention. The pilot initiative will target the participation and retention of Traveller and Roma children in education. My department is working in collaboration with Tusla, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Justice and Equality along with Traveller and Roma representative groups to improve the educational outcomes for this cohort.

Immigration Controls

230. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the criteria required and the process of application for a stamp 4 immigration permission. [27504/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that Stamp 4 indicates permission to stay in Ireland for a specified period, subject to conditions. Full details of the criteria and application process are available on the INIS website - www.inis.gov.ie.

Stamp 4 is reckonable as residence when applying for citizenship by naturalisation. Holders of a Stamp 4 permission may:

- Take up employment and are not required to hold an Employment Permit (although they cannot be employed in the general labour market if they were granted permission under the Investor or Entrepreneur Programmes);
- Work in a profession, subject to conditions of the relevant professional or other bodies;
- Establish and operate a business;
- Access state funds and services as determined by Government departments or agencies.

If an individual wishes to stay in Ireland past the expiry date of their immigration permission, they must apply to renew their permission and registration before they expire.

There are a range of circumstances when a Stamp 4 may issue and the process will differ depending on the type of case. They may be given a Stamp 4 if they have had permission to work in Ireland:

- with a valid Critical Skills employment permit for two years
- with a valid employment permit for five years
- as a researcher (with a valid Hosting Agreement) after two years legal residence in the State on Stamp 1.

They may also be given Stamp 4 if granted permission:

- to join an Irish spouse, partner or de facto partner
- to join an EU/EEA or Swiss family member based on EU Treaty Rights
- to join a family member who has immigration permission based on Stamp 4EUFAM (EU Treaty Rights)
- to join a family member who is a recognised refugee or has been granted subsidiary protection
- to remain with a child who is an Irish citizen
- under the Investor and Entrepreneur Programme (including spouse/partner and family)
- for Long Term Residence
- as a convention or programme refugee, or based on subsidiary protection.

Direct Provision System

231. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** his views on the humaneness or otherwise of the system of direct provision here in which vulnerable refugees are kept for years in cramped and inadequate accommodation, deprived of cooking facilities and provided €21.60 per week to live on in view of his condemnation of the US policy of separating children from their parents at the US border and condemnation of inhumane policies towards vulnerable refugees. [27551/18]

245. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** his plans to replace the system of direct provision with a humane system for persons seeking asylum here (details supplied). [27571/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 231 and 245 together.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Direct Provision system encompasses the range of State services including accommodation, food, health and education directly provided to international protection applicants through all the relevant Government Departments and Agencies. It is a whole-of-government support system for those seeking international protection in Ireland, although the term is more often used to describe the Accommodation Centres provided by the Reception and Integration Agency of my Department.

Notwithstanding the criticisms levelled at the system, particularly in terms of length of stay, it has proven effective in ensuring that those who come to our country seeking international protection receive food and shelter and have immediate access to our state services. Over 60,000 people have been provided with shelter since its inception.

It is not possible to predict how many people may arrive in any given year seeking international protection. However, the system ensures that all applicants can be offered immediate shelter, full board accommodation and a range of services, such as health and education while their applications are being processed. Not every person who seeks international protection chooses to accept this offer, and some choose to live independently or with friends in communities across the country, as they are entirely free to do.

If the system was simply disbanded, as some have been calling for, without a viable alternative, the risks of consigning vulnerable people, who know neither our country, its systems nor our language, to poverty, exploitation and homelessness are multiplied. The Government cannot countenance that. I have not heard a viable alternative put forward as to how a person, who has unestablished needs and turns up here unexpectedly, can be immediately provided with shelter and an acceptable level of care.

In the absence of an alternative, any commitment to abolish a system that offers instant shelter and support would pose a serious risk to the wellbeing of protection applicants and undermine our international obligations.

As the Deputy will be aware, the system has already been subject to a complete review in 2014. Mr. Justice Bryan McMahon chaired a Working Group comprised of advocates and officials and made 173 recommendations for reform of the protection process including

direct provision. The report was accepted by Government and three separate itemised progress reports on these recommendations were published on my Department's website, resulting in change being achieved across 98% of the recommendations.

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.

Of course, individual problems and issues can and do arise when any individual interacts with a service provided by the state but, in such circumstances, where complaints are made and applicants are not happy with how matters are resolved, international protection applicants now have full access to the services of the Ombudsman and Ombudsman for Children.

Following on from the improvements made arising from the recommendations in the McMahon Report, the Government has looked to further consolidate those improvements and build upon them. In particular, the decision to opt into the (recast) Reception Conditions Directive represents another major reform of the process. I am satisfied to report that 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 Directive was adopted. The decision was published in the Official Journal the following day. The opt-in process is continuing and will be concluded shortly. This will allow the European Commission to conduct its assessment of the management and conditions pertaining to our Direct Provision system and present their findings in the future.

I can assure the Deputy that the Government is committed to the on-going reform in relation to Direct Provision or any other aspect of our asylum system that may be required in order

that we have a system in Ireland that reaches or exceeds the standards required by the Reception Conditions Directive and that will compare favourably with the best systems of our EU partners.

EU Directives

248. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the engagement that has taken place between him, his Department and the implementation group with civil society organisations and-or NGOs in relation to the detail of Ireland's opt-in to the EU reception conditions directive; the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27671/18]

[View answer](#)

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Government responded to the views of members of the Houses of the Oireachtas, members of the Justice McMahon Group and from NGOs and civil society organisations by deciding to opt-into the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU). The views of all relevant stakeholders were therefore well-known.

To facilitate the practical arrangements for the opt-in and the compliance process led by the European Commission, the Government established a cross-Departmental Implementation Group. This Group was available to meet with stakeholders throughout the process. An information session on the process and on the interim arrangements for access to the labour market introduced from 9 February 2018 was hosted by my Department officials on 23 January 2018. All NGOs identified as working in this area were invited to attend. Members of the Implementation Group from other Government Departments and services were also in attendance and available to respond to any questions raised.

Residency Permits

249. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** if permissions to reside here will be renewed on a temporary basis for Venezuelan nationals based on their most recent passport even if they are out of date for less than two years and in cases in which the applicant can prove that they have applied to renew their passport, in view of the chaotic situation in that country which means that many passports cannot be renewed at this time even though valid applications for same have been made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27694/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that it considers the renewal of an immigration permission of a person who does not hold a valid passport, if that person can give a satisfactory explanation of any circumstances that may prevent them from producing a valid passport, subject of course to all other aspects being in order. Each case is considered on its individual circumstances.

I am further advised that in practice such a person may be granted a temporary immigration permission for up to six months, subject to them providing evidence that they have applied to their National Authorities for a renewal of their passport.

Naturalisation Applications

254. **Deputy John Brady** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the details of the 42 day rule, that is, being out of the country for more than 42 days, in place for those applying for naturalisation; the rationale for the rule; if this rule is underpinned in legislation; if this rule is made clear to those seeking to apply for naturalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27832/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. I can only make a determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation after an application for naturalisation has been received.

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. The Act provides that I can as Minister, in my absolute discretion, grant an application for naturalisation if satisfied that the statutory conditions set out in the Act, which include residency conditions, are met.

The statutory residence conditions are that, regardless of how long an applicant may have resided in the State, the applicant must have a period of 1 year's continuous residence in the State immediately before the date of application and, during the 8 years immediately preceding that period, have had a further total residence amounting to 4 years (in the case of an application based on being the spouse or civil partner of an Irish citizen the Act reduces this further period to 2 years during the preceding 4 years).

While the Act clearly stipulates the statutory periods of residence required in the State, and that the final year be continuous residence, it has long been recognised that many people may travel abroad for a holiday, or may have some unexpected or unavoidable reason to travel abroad. In this regard it is considered that a reasonable and generous period of up to 6 weeks be allowed to provide for absences from the State for normal holidays and other short term and temporary nature absences, such as for business meetings or a family wedding or bereavement or medical emergency while abroad, and that such short term nature absence from the State would not impact on the statutory residence requirement. I as Minister may allow some further discretion where there are wholly exceptional or unavoidable circumstances.

In the notes attached to the application form it is made clear to applicants that arrangements for assessment of residence are on the basis that the person is physically resident in the State for the required period of time and that where there are significant absences from the State the application may be refused.

Every application for naturalisation is considered on its own merits having regard to the statutory conditions set out in the Act.

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.

National Traveller-Roma Integration Strategy

265. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the progress on each action outlined in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27974/18]

Minister of State for the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) Steering Group has been tasked with the development and oversight of the implementation of the actions contained in the strategy. Since the launch of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy in June 2017, the NTRIS Steering Group has met four times - on 2 August 2017, 18 October 2017, 13 December 2017 and 28 March 2018. The next meeting is planned for 4 July 2018. To date, work has begun on about 130 of the 149 Actions included in the Strategy. The Steering Group will continue to monitor progress on these Actions and to focus on actions where progress has not yet commenced.

Three sub-committees have been set up to report back to the Steering Group on specific issues:

- The sub-committee on the issue of data collection on ethnic grounds has met three times. Departments have been asked to indicate whether or not they are collecting ethnic data and, if so, the categories of such data being collected. Responses are still awaited from some Departments.
- The sub-committee to deal with the issue of the retention of Traveller and Roma children in education has met four times. At the meeting on 8 March 2018 it was agreed that a pilot project would be undertaken in each of the TUSLA Education Welfare Services regions – South/South East – Wexford, West/North West – Galway, North Dublin/North Leinster – North County Dublin and South Dublin/Kildare/West Wicklow – Tallaght, Clondalkin. Each area will have the additional resource of an Educational Welfare Officer (EWO), Home School Liaison Coordinator (HSCL) and 2 Traveller/Roma Education Workers. The team will work together with parents, children and young people, schools, Traveller and Roma communities and service providers to improve Traveller and Roma children's attendance, participation and retention in education.
- The third sub-committee was set up to deal with the problem of feuding in the Traveller Community, and has met three times. A proposal from the Traveller Mediation Service for addressing this issue through an expanded mediation service is currently being examined.

In addition to this information, I have asked my officials to forward a detailed tabular report on progress on all of the actions in the NTRIS to the Deputy.

Work Permits Eligibility

268. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** his plans in relation to allowing persons seeking asylum here the right to meaningful, unrestricted work while their application is being considered; when such plans will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28066/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): From 9 February 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.

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 21 June 2018, the total number of applications for self-employment received under this scheme is 752, of which 523 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 in 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 applies 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.

Work Permits Eligibility

271. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the **Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation** her plans to review employment permit regulations to include the role of health-care assistants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27396/18]

292. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the **Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation** the steps she plans to take to regularise the status of migrant care workers working here that come from outside the EEA and the EU; her plans to change the rules to allow care workers from outside the EU and EEA to work legally here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28011/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 and 292 together.

At my request, my Department is currently conducting a review of economic migration policies underpinning the current employment permits system to ensure that our policies are fully supportive of Ireland's emerging labour market needs, be they skills or labour shortages in certain sectors. A full report on the review is due by end June. Following on from that Report, it is expected that a review of the Lists of Occupations for employment permits will be conducted in the second half of this year.

Where specific skills prove difficult to source within the State and wider EEA, an employment permit may be sought by an employer to hire a non-EEA national. The employment permits system is managed in part through the operation of the highly skilled and ineligible occupation lists for the purpose of grant of employment permits.

Changes to access to the Irish labour market for specific occupations via the employment permits system are made on the basis of research undertaken by the Expert Group of Future Skills Needs and, coordinated by the National Skills Council, the annual National Skills Bulletin and the annual Vacancy Overview Report in tandem with a public consultation process.

Care workers are currently included on the ineligible list of employments. In order to remove a skill from this list, there would need to be a clear demonstration that recruitment difficulties are solely due to shortages and not to other factors such as salary and/or working conditions. Organisations in the relevant sector would need to provide the necessary data to substantiate their claims. A detailed business case for removal of care workers from the ineligible list, based on this detailed data, would then need to be put forward by the Department of Health, as the lead Department for the sector, to my Department.

I am aware that my colleague, Minister of State Daly, with special responsibility for Older People, has had various meetings with the nursing home sector and this matter has been discussed. To date, such detailed evidence has yet to be provided by the sector to his Department. However, I understand Minister Daly is willing to work with the industry on this important issue to ensure continuity of service in the best interests of residents.

Work Permits Data

283. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the **Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation** the number of applications for employment permits from asylum seekers that have been made in the past three months; and the number of successful applications. [27714/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): 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 opt-in process, involving formal discussions with the European Commission to ensure compliance with each aspect of the Directive, is expected to be completed in the near future. 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.

The Employment Permits Section of my Department inform me that two applications for employment permits have been received from International Protection applicants. One application has been withdrawn by the applicant and the other application is currently being processed.

The Department of Justice and Equality advise that on 9th February 2018 it established a self-employment scheme for those who have sought International Protection in Ireland that are waiting more than nine months for a first instance decision on their application.

As of Friday 22nd June 2018, the Department of Justice and Equality had received 754 applications for self-employment and 525 of those applications had been granted.

National Traveller-Roma Integration Strategy

515. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the **Minister for Children and Youth Affairs** to outline the progress on each action outlined in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 that fall under her Department's remit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27977/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are a number of actions in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) which fall fully, or partly, under the remit of my Department. They are under the education, children & youth, gender equality, and public services themes and are as follows:

Action number	Theme
10, 12 – 13 incl., 15, and 17	Education
38 – 40 incl., 47 – 49 incl., and 52 - 54 incl.	Children and Youth
99 – 100 incl., 102 -103 incl., and 106	Gender Equality

143, 145, and 148 - 149 incl.

Public Services

Progress is being made in the implementation of these actions. My Department is currently preparing a progress report on delivery of the various actions and this will be forwarded to the Deputy when completed.

Officials from my Department attend the NTRIS Steering Group, which is chaired by Minister Stanton, Minister of State for Equality, Immigration and Integration. The Steering Group, whose work which is coordinated by the Department of Justice and Equality, meets on a quarterly basis. The Strategy can be found on the Department of Justice and Equality's website at:

<http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf/Files/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf>.

National Traveller-Roma Integration Strategy

559. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the **Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection** the progress on each action outlined in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 that fall under her Department's remit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27975/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Inclusion Strategy referred to by the Deputy is a whole of Government initiative aimed at improving the lives of the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland.

My Department is committed to advancing new employment and economic opportunities for these communities, through effective public employment services, and in partnership with stakeholders on the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy Steering Group, informed by representatives of the Traveller and Roma communities.

Progress on the actions relevant to my Department in the Strategy is set out in the following two tables, covering the two themes of "Employment and the Traveller Economy" and "Public Services".

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Table 1: DEASP progress on actions under theme 3 of the NTRIS: Employment and The Traveller Economy

No.	Action	Progress Made/Planned Progress
24	<p>The Department of Social Protection (DEASP) will promote the availability of existing employment and training services (e.g. those provided by the Education and Training Boards) to the Roma and Traveller communities and continue to ensure promotional and information materials are available and accessible on any of its schemes and services including via the Department's website. The Department of Social Protection will provide tailored supports for the long-term unemployed and for young people to build their confidence and prepare them for the workplace.</p>	<p>The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) is currently planning a series of customer information campaigns for 2018 on how best to promote the availability of existing employment and training services to both the traveller and Roma communities as outlined in the National Traveller/Roma Inclusion Strategy. In the coming months, the Department will seek to engage with a number of Traveller and Roma representative groups to discuss the schemes and services with a view to assessing how best to proceed with the promotion of these schemes and services.</p>
25	<p>The Department of Social Protection will develop targeted initiatives to increase Traveller and Roma engagement with employment and training services.</p>	<p>In order to inform developments on this action, the Department has begun collating statistical information (to the extent that this is available) on current levels of participation by the Traveller and Roma communities in activation programmes.</p>
27	<p>The Department of Social Protection and Department of Rural and Community Development will put in place liaison arrangements between INTREO and the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) to enable Travellers and Roma to access relevant supports, training and opportunities.</p>	<p>DEASP staff in INTREO offices will continue to work in partnership with SICAP officers to enable Travellers and Roma customers to access relevant supports, training and opportunities.</p>
32	<p>The Department of Social Protection, in collaboration where appropriate with the Department of Justice and Equality, will support Traveller MABS.</p>	<p>The DEAPS supports National Traveller MABS (NTMABS), by way of including provision for an onward annual grant from the Citizens Information Board's overall annual funding allocation. In 2018, NTMABS has been allocated €308,576 from CIB's budget</p>

36	<p>The Department of Social Protection will ensure that Travellers and Roma under the age of 25 who register as unemployed claimants of Jobseekers' payments will receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within a period of four months of registering, in line with commitments under the Youth Guarantee.</p>	This is ongoing under the 'Youth Guarantee'.
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Table 2: DEASP progress on actions under theme 10 of the NTRIS: Public Services
Theme: 10. Public Services

Number	Action	Progress Made / Planned Progress
143	<p>All Departments and relevant agencies will ensure that all relevant public service staff members receive anti-racism and cultural awareness training.</p>	<p>The Department continues to provide up-to-date information and training to staff on entitlements for all clients in relation to its schemes and services. Awareness and respect for equality and diversity (including relevant legislation) is an integral component of all our training activity in line with the core values of the Department. A programme framework of a QQI Level 6 Certificate in Social Protection Studies has been developed DEASP in partnership with the National College of Ireland. The framework has been submitted and presented to QQI for formal evaluation and validation and is currently progressing through the governance processes and structures. The DEASP and NCI expect to be a position to commence enrolments in Q4 2018, subject to official QQI validation.</p>

Wednesday 27th June 2018

Passport Applications

32. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** his plans to clear the significant backlog that is delaying persons receiving a passport in a prompt and efficient manner, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the current delays are causing significant hardship and if extra staff are being recruited or allocated to urgently deal with the issue. [27901/18]

67. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the steps being taken to address the increased demand for Irish passports and the long delays in having passports issued. [27895/18]

See [here](#) for full debate.

Humanitarian Aid

34. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if Ireland's concerns will be made known at European level regarding a search and rescue ship (details supplied) and the lack of true humanitarianism within the fortress Europe mentality of certain member states; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28006/18]

39. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** his views on the policy of the Italian Government to refuse ships with refugees; the approach he has taken regarding discussions on European migration policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28024/18]

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Some Members more so than others are in breach of the time. That should be mentioned. Members on this side of the House are very conscious of the time and stick to it. That would make a big difference in delivering the questions in an appropriate time.

This question has unfortunately come back as a topic on the news again, with the vessel having difficulty docking at Malta last night. What are Ireland's views on this issue and what does the Tánaiste intend to do at the European level?

Deputy Simon Coveney: I was at a Foreign Affairs Council meeting on Monday and a General Affairs Council meeting yesterday when I read and heard about the plight of the new vessel, the *MV Lifeline*, which is on its way to Malta. It was unable to dock elsewhere in the Mediterranean. There are 230 migrants on that ship. The conditions on the ship are not good. I felt that Ireland should show some solidarity with Malta but, more importantly, with the refugees on board that ship. Having spoken to the Taoiseach and Minister for Justice and Equality to make sure that we were all on the same page, which we were, I offered that Ireland would take 10% of those migrants in order to process their asylum applications here.

Other countries are also making offers and I felt that, by making an early offer in this regard, Ireland would trigger other countries to do the same. Malta has been negotiating with many other EU member states to try to share the burden. Malta is a very small member state. It fears that it might be asked to do too much, particularly in view of the resources it has available to it. We will accept in the region of 25 migrants here and go through the process to ensure it is done properly. Other countries have also made offers to try to deal with this particular case. This is the symptom of a much bigger problem that really needs a resolution in the next few days when the European leaders meet.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: It is a symptom of a much bigger problem; that is certainly true. While the offer Ireland has made is very welcome, I would be concerned in light of the previous offer we made to take in 4,000 refugees from Italy and Greece. We have taken in less than one third of that number at this stage, approximately 1,400. It is an offer but does it actually mean anything? That is what I am getting at. I would like to see that it does actually mean something and that we will not be sitting here in two years asking if we are actually going to reach those numbers, even though they are very small. It is extremely important. Only when countries like Ireland step up to the mark and actually do something rather than just saying it can we show that fortress Europe does not exist. Then we can show other countries that everybody has to play their part. There is no doubt the Europe can handle the numbers.

We also have to look at what Europe is doing in causing the flow of migrants as well. Europe plays an active part in causing that flow through the deprivation visited upon and destruction of African countries and the Middle East. We have recently seen the destruction of Libya, which is where most of these people are coming from now.

Deputy Simon Coveney: There is an intensive political debate going on in Europe right now about how we can put together a collective and comprehensive response to the migration challenges that we have. I do not agree with the Deputy when he says that our decision yesterday does not really mean anything. I was Minister for Defence when we agreed to send a ship to the Mediterranean, which was the first time we did something like that. Since then, Irish ships have rescued more than 16,000 people from the Mediterranean. Yesterday, one of our member states and friends asked for help and we gave it, there and then, by means of a practical response. We have offered to take 4,000 migrants in the context of the pressures that Italy, primarily, faces. We have taken nearly 2,000 so far. The actual figure is 1,842 and by the end of the year it will certainly be 2,000. We will take our 4,000. That is well above the figure that the quotas would have assigned to Ireland on a country-by-country, *pro rata* basis. We made a conscious decision, which I remember because I was involved with it, to go well beyond the quota figure that would have been proportionate to Ireland's population. I am not pretending that Ireland is doing something extraordinary; it is not. Ireland is simply offering some modest generosity and also recognising the humanitarian crisis that faces many people in desperate circumstances. That approach will continue.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: We should continue to do that but we should be doing so in a proactive way rather than waiting for countries like Malta to say that they have a problem before we step in. That is a way to send a message to the countries that are saying we cannot have this and that are pursuing a right-wing agenda and blaming immigrants for everything. We also should be calling into question Europe's involvement in the causes of this. We will never deal with the flow of refugees without dealing with what makes them into refugees and Europe's part in that. It was England and France that bombed the hell out of Libya and now Libya is a staging point for all these refugees. Bad and all as Libya might have been before, it was not a source of refugees to Europe. We have to question that as well. We should be proactive and mature and should not be waiting for a call from another country.

Deputy Simon Coveney: We have been proactive but it is not enough yet. There are substantial new schemes to try to ensure that we stem the flow of migrants coming from many African

countries - Nigeria, Mali and many others - via what is essentially a trafficking route through Libya. We are working with governments in countries where the migration begins. We are also trying to deal robustly with traffickers and ensure that conditions in camps on the shores of Libya are improving through UN structures and engagement. The numbers that are trying to cross the Mediterranean are significantly down this year. Having said that, they are still significant; approximately 16,000 have so far arrived in Italian ports this year. We cannot continue to allow a small number of Mediterranean countries to carry the entire burden in the context of the migration pressures that exist. There must be a collective response from the European Union. We need to show some flexibility in respect of how that collective response works in practical terms. That is what leaders, including the Taoiseach, will be discussing and advocating in the next few days.

Human Rights

38. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** his views on the increased repression in Spain, in particular the increased state repression against migrants and their supporters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28060/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The humane approach of Spain to migration was evident in the recent decision of its Government to allow the *Aquarius* to dock at Valencia port and to permit over 600 migrants to disembark. There has been an increase in migration into Spain in recent months. So far this year over 10,000 migrants have arrived via the so-called Western Mediterranean Route. This represents an increase of over 50% compared with the same period last year. We are not aware of any reports of repression of migrants and their supporters.

There were reports in some Spanish media of a specific case which arose in 2010 involving a national from a South American country. As this case is the subject of ongoing judicial proceedings, it would not be appropriate for me to comment.

Passport Applications Administration

40. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if he is satisfied that the appropriate staffing is in place in the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork to meet demand; his views on the turnaround times for the issue and renewal of all passport applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27642/18]

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 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, an online passport application service and in person counter application facilities in Dublin and Cork. The quickest and easiest way for an adult to renew a passport is to apply using the online passport application service. Over 50% of the 100,000 applicants who have used this channel this year have got their passport back within a week and all have their passport issued within the

advertised 2 week timeframe. The Passport Service plans to further extend this service to child 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. These applications must undergo additional processes including security checks, robust identity verification & entitlement checking and, as a result, take longer to process.

The Passport Service is working hard to reduce turnaround times where they currently exceed our targets. Measures taken by the Passport Service include the recruitment of additional staff; the reallocation of staff from support services towards processing applications; and the use of targeted overtime for all Passport Offices.

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.

The number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff permanently employed by my Department and assigned to the Passport Service stood at 322 at the beginning of the year. This compares to 301 FTE staff assigned to the Passport Service at the same point last year. This year, since these figures were released, over 30 permanent staff have started with the Passport Service.

I wish to reassure the Deputy the Passport Service monitors passport demand on an ongoing basis to ensure that appropriate staff resources are available.

Question No. 41 answered with Question No. 33.

EU Enlargement

42. Deputy Seán Haughey asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on EU enlargement. [22603/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland is a strong supporter of EU enlargement. As such, we have been pleased to see the renewed focus on enlargement that has been provided by the Bulgarian Presidency's prioritising of the European perspective of the Western Balkans. We are glad to see that this is set to continue under the Austrian Presidency.

We believe that enlargement is a transformative driver for stability and peace, and that it will enhance stability and economic growth in the while also shoring up security on the borders of Europe. Providing the countries of the Western Balkans with a credible membership perspective, which the EU has done this year in its Strategy on the Western Balkans, is therefore essential. We should welcome those countries that are ready to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership.

I welcome yesterday's General Affairs Council Conclusions which set out the progress in relation to Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Turkey. These Conclusions reaffirmed the EU's commitment to enlargement, and its continued belief that it represent a strategic investment in peace, democracy, prosperity, security and stability in Europe.

Ireland has been a strong supporter of opening negotiations and we are pleased that the General Affairs Council which took place yesterday was able to reach agreement regarding setting out the path towards opening accession negotiations in June 2019 with both Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The Taoiseach and Minister McEntee engaged with our EU and Western Balkan counterparts at the EU-Western Balkans Summit on 17 May and I was pleased to host my Albanian counterpart here last month. From this engagement, it is clear that while challenges remain to be tackled in all countries, the accession process is the best tool to promote reform in the region, while also consolidating democracy and regional stability in the interest of Europe as a whole.

We share the EU's view that considerable work remains to be done in all countries before accession can occur. Conditionality cannot be compromised and all criteria must be met. Comprehensive reforms are needed in crucial areas in each country, most notably on the rule of law, fundamental rights and good governance. Economic reform also requires progress.

This is why the EU-Western Balkans Summit was important. In the Summit Declaration, the EU pledged unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans, promising to strengthen and intensify its engagement at all levels to support the region's political, economic and social transformation.

The Summit Declaration and associated Priority Agenda set out six flagship initiatives in the areas of rule of law, security and migration, socio-economic development, connectivity, Digital Agenda, and good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans. It is our hope that implementation of the initiatives in the Summit Declaration will lead to deeper continued engagement with the Western Balkans.

Human Rights

53. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if it is possible through the aegis of the EU or the UN to motivate the global community into treating refugee, whether political or economic, in a manner which is respectful of their status and dignity and in keeping with international human rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28029/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciaran Cannon):The UN Refugee Agency reported on 19 June that the number of refugees and displaced persons worldwide reached in excess of 65 million in 2017, increasing at a rate of one person every two seconds. Most of these people are hosted in developing countries, such as Uganda or Ethiopia. Many also try to come to Europe. The European Union has been striving to put in

place a better-managed migration system. While joint EU efforts have continued to show results, the situation remains fragile.

Ireland plays an important role in efforts to bring the international community together behind a more humane and coordinated response to migration.

In 2016 we co-facilitated the unanimous adoption of the New York Declaration by the Member States of the United Nations. This committed the world community to putting in place two Global Compacts by the end of this year – one on refugees and one on migration. Ireland is actively engaged in the negotiations for both these Compacts, advocating strongly - including within the EU - for an approach which places the dignity and human rights of all people on the move at the centre of our response. Any approach or solution needs to be comprehensive, addressing all aspects of the issue, from the causes of mass exodus to the responses necessary to cover the range of refugee situations.

Ireland also provides significant support through our aid programme to, amongst others, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which is charged with upholding the rights of refugees and asylum seekers under international law and with providing essential humanitarian assistance. In addition, the Irish Naval Service helps save lives through its actions to assist those who get into difficulty trying to cross the Mediterranean.

Middle East Issues

56. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if his attention has been drawn to a report (details supplied); his views on the calls for the International Criminal Court to open a formal investigation into Israel's actions in Palestine; and his further views on the demand for third countries to impose targeted sanctions against officials responsible for Israel's ongoing serious human rights violations. [27899/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The report issued by Human Rights Watch is a careful and sober account of the violence on the Gaza border in recent months. It is largely in line with the analysis I received at the time from my Department, on which I based my public statements and my contributions in the Dáil on this awful situation. I stated clearly that the lethal force used by Israeli forces was not justified by the actions of the protestors, that many of those shot had been well away from the border fence and posing no obvious threat, including identifiable medical workers and journalists. I stated that this level of violence seemed clearly to be in breach of international law applicable to a conflict, even if one considered this a conflict situation, which itself is a contested assertion. I also said that an independent international investigation of these events was needed. All of these points are echoed in this report. The report urges Governments to support moves at the United Nations General Assembly to explore mechanisms for the protection of the Palestinian people. Ireland voted in favour of Resolution 12028 which was adopted by the General Assembly on 13 June, which included such a provision.

The report also urges Governments to support an international investigation. Ireland supported the calling of a Special Session of the UN Human Rights Council on 18 May, and co-

sponsored a resolution adopted at that session which provided for the establishment of an international commission of inquiry into these events. The commission is now being established.

The report discusses the question of accountability for the use of unjustified force. This would be an issue to be considered after the commission has examined the events.

The call in the report for an investigation by the International Criminal Court is referring to broader continuing issues in the Occupied Territory. I understand that the Office of the ICC Prosecutor is already reflecting on this question.

Middle East Issues

57. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the efforts being made to address the crisis in Yemen which is considered to be one of the world's worst humanitarian crises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27997/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As I have previously stated, in this House and elsewhere, I am extremely concerned about the current situation in Yemen, which is the world's largest humanitarian crisis. Three years of war have had devastating consequences for civilians, with allegations of violations of human rights, international humanitarian law, and significant loss of life. Three quarters of the population are estimated to require some form of humanitarian assistance. I, and officials in my Department, have been monitoring the state of affairs in Yemen with growing anxiety, particularly in recent days as the military operations around the port and city of Hodeidah have escalated. According to the United Nations, a majority of humanitarian supplies and the vast majority of commercial supplies entered Yemen through Hodeidah and the nearby port of Saleef. 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 consistently relay my strong concerns on humanitarian access to the Saudi and UAE Embassies in Dublin, including most recently this month, when they specifically raised the importance of ensuring respect for international humanitarian law, and also a consistent flow of essential goods, even as military operations are ongoing in Hodeidah.

Ireland has provided €15.5 million in bilateral humanitarian assistance to Yemen since the conflict began in 2015. Of this, €4 million was contributed in March this year alone. 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).

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. Ireland fully supports the work of Martin Griffiths, the new Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General for Yemen, and his team, in particular his efforts to engage all parties to the conflict to come back to the

negotiating table. I hope that peace negotiations can be re-launched soon. On Monday, the UN Special Envoy, who is working intensively in the region, spoke with the Foreign Affairs Council via video link, to brief us on his efforts. My EU colleagues and I are committed to supporting his work, we were happy to hear from him to discuss how best we can do that.

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.

I would like to assure the Deputy that Ireland will continue to take every appropriate opportunity to urge stronger international action, and will 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.

Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 45.

EU Treaties

60. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** his views on the anti-democratic actions of the Prime Minister of Hungary Mr Victor Orbán; his further views on the actions that should be taken against Mr Orbán; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27998/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Respect for the fundamental values on which the European Union is founded and which are set out in the Treaty, including respect for the rule of law and freedom of expression, are crucial underpinnings for all the EU Member States. There have been concerns over the civic space available for NGOs to continue to operate in Hungary.

The Taoiseach, when he met with Prime Minister Orbán on 4 January last, raised concerns over the rule of law situation in Hungary and the concerns raised by the European Commission and other international organisations and NGOs regarding freedoms of the press and judiciary and migration – concerns which I share.

The Taoiseach also raised the Hungarian NGO law, and the law on Higher Education which threatens the Central European University in Budapest, for which Hungary has been referred to the European Court of Justice.

These concerns have been exacerbated by the passage of legislation recently by the Hungarian Parliament aimed at individuals and organisations providing lawful assistance to migrants and asylum seekers.

The strength of our common European Union depends on robust civic and democratic spaces, an active, strong and diverse civil society, and meaningful consultation between governments

and civil society to promote peace, prosperity, national development and the well-being of all people.

The European Commission is, in the first instance, charged with ensuring the application of the treaties and is responsible for promoting the general interest of the Union.

Last December, the Commission announced that it was referring Hungary to the Court of Justice of the European Union in relation to inter-alia, the laws on higher education (the “Lex CEU”) and on NGOs adopted in 2017. In the case of these two issues, Hungary is considered to have failed to address EU concerns about these laws or amend the legislation to bring it in line with EU standards. These cases are likely to be heard by the Court later this year.

The European Commission has also announced that it will examine the legislation, popularly known as the “Stop Soros” legislation, adopted by the Hungarian Parliament on 20 June to determine if it complies fully with EU law. In doing so, the Commission will also take account of the report and recommendations of the Council of Europe Venice Commission which issued on 22 June and which criticised the new legislation as not meeting EU and international legal standards.

Human Rights

69. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the efforts being made to protect the Rohingya, particularly women that are in danger of or are experiencing sexual violence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27996/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since the most recent 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 where they now reside in precarious conditions in refugee camps. The exodus of refugees has been accompanied by credible claims of serious 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. While any instances of sexual or gender based violence are to be condemned, the accounts emerging from Rakhine State are particularly harrowing.

Ireland, both through bilateral and multilateral contacts, has repeatedly called for an end to disproportionate security operations in Myanmar and for the protection of human rights of those who have remained in Rakhine State. Ireland has actively participated in efforts by the international community to press for accountability for crimes and other violations of human rights abuses that have occurred. In that regard, we have strongly supported the extension of the mandates of the UN Fact Finding Mission and UN Special Rapporteur to Myanmar Yanghee Lee, and have asked the Government of Myanmar to cooperate with them and allow them access to the country. Their work in investigating and recording survivor testimony and gathering other evidence, so that it can be preserved for further criminal proceedings, is crucial to ensuring full accountability.

There is also a critical need for a coherent humanitarian response to the extremely difficult conditions faced by the huge numbers of displaced members of the Rohingya community now mainly in Bangladesh. This includes treatment and support for those women and girls who have survived sexual and gender based violence. Ireland has actively supported the international humanitarian response to the refugee crisis and we provided direct funding of €1 million in 2017 with an additional €1 million allocated for 2018. 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.

Ireland also contributes to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, the lead UN agency on addressing gender-based violence in emergencies), which currently operates nine women-friendly spaces in Cox's Bazar District, where women and girls can safely receive a range of services, including referrals to health care and counselling. Ireland contributes to the UNFPA both through core funding and pooled funds.

My Department will continue to liaise closely with EU and other international partners to press for progress in resolving this crisis including through our Embassy in Thailand who are closely monitoring the situation. Ireland will be active on this issue at the 38th Session of the Human Rights Council.

Human Rights

54. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if he has raised concerns with the Government of the United States of America regarding the separation of children from their parents and the detention of vulnerable children in cages at the US-Mexican border; his views on whether this violates child and human rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27900/18]

74. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the representations he has made with the Government of the United States of America in relation to its policy to separate minors from their immigrant parents; his views on whether this is a breach of human rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28023/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 54 and 74 together.

I was appalled by the images which recently emerged of immigrant children being separated from their parents at the southern US border and held in detention by the US authorities.

I made my, and the Government's, view of this policy very clear when I spoke on June 20 last week in the course of the Dáil debate on this issue.

I stated in the course of that debate that the policy of separating children from their parents was inhumane and simply wrong, and I urged the US Government to immediately reverse the policy.

Ireland, in common with all member States of the European Union, has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which establishes clear universal standards for protecting all children. The Convention states that signatories shall ensure that children shall not be separated from their parents against their will, unless such a separation is necessary for the best interests of the child.

As I stated in my contribution to the Dáil debate, I cannot see any way in which a policy of separating children from their parents in such circumstances could be said to be in the best interests of children.

In advance of the June 20th Dáil debate, I spoke that afternoon with the Chargée d’Affaires in the US Embassy in Dublin, Mr. Reece Smyth, and conveyed to him the Government’s strong views on the issue. He undertook to convey those views without delay to the relevant authorities in Washington, D.C.

I was pleased to see that, following the grave concerns which were expressed both domestically and internationally about this policy, President Trump signed an Executive Order on the afternoon of June 20th, Washington, D.C., time, aimed at ending the practice of separation. I welcome this move towards a more humane practice of border protection and immigration control.

I very much hope that we have seen the last of this practice and the priority now must be reuniting all of the affected children with their parents, without delay.

Human Rights

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the extent to which he can unilaterally or in conjunction with his EU and UN colleagues focus attention on the manner in which refugees continue to be mistreated at various locations throughout the globe with a view to achieving an international minimum standard for all refugees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28341/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciaran Cannon):

According to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN agency charged with upholding the rights of refugees and asylum seekers under international law and with providing essential humanitarian assistance to displaced persons globally, there were almost 70 million refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons worldwide at the end of 2017. One person is forcibly displaced every two seconds. Most displaced persons still live within the borders of their own countries but over 25 million are refugees, forced to seek protection in countries other than their own. 85% of displaced people globally are hosted in developing countries, such as Irish Aid partner countries Uganda and Ethiopia. At the global level, the Member States of the United Nations came together in 2016 and unanimously adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which expressed a shared political will to address large movements of refugees and migrants in a more coordinated and humane manner. Ireland played a leading role in co-facilitating this landmark Declaration, and we are continuing on our efforts in its follow up.

Central in this is the commitment in the New York Declaration to putting in place two Global Compacts by the end of this year – one on refugees and one on migration. Ireland is actively engaged in the negotiations for both these Compacts, advocating strongly - including within the EU - for an approach which places the dignity and human rights of all people on the move at the centre of our response. Any approach or solution needs to be comprehensive, addressing all aspects of the issue, from the causes of mass exodus to the responses necessary to cover the range of refugee situations.

Meanwhile, there is a well-established body of international law, notably the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, with protections and minimum standards. Ireland believes strongly that these must be respected and is consistent in advocating for this with our partners at the global and EU levels.

Ireland also provides significant support through our aid programme to, amongst others, UNHCR and UNRWA, which is responsible for Palestinian refugees. In addition, the Irish Naval Service helps save lives through its actions to assist those who get into difficulty trying to cross the Mediterranean.

Passport Applications Data

96. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the number of Irish passports issued on a monthly basis in each of the past five years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28342/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The number of passports issued per month for the period requested are as follows:

2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
Jan	32652	Jan	32,083	Jan	33,275	Jan	34,931	Jan	51172
Feb	47754	Feb	55,904	Feb	62,884	Feb	67,724	Feb	59235
Mar	59956	Mar	71,402	Mar	64,015	Mar	84,589	Mar	79248
Apr	69357	Apr	72,130	Apr	79,991	Apr	87,447	Apr	88261
May	82802	May	78,303	May	91,767	May	103,410	May	98841

Jun	76632	Jun	80,516	Jun	94,378	Jun	96,207	Jun
Jul	75118	Jul	85,718	Jul	82,985	Jul	78,307	Jul
Aug	52007	Aug	58,770	Aug	67,518	Aug	67,371	Aug
Sep	37506	Sep	48,106	Sep	52,535	Sep	52,349	Sep
Oct	41751	Oct	30,279	Oct	42,355	Oct	41,474	Oct
Nov	29417	Nov	31,199	Nov	37,974	Nov	37,053	Nov
Dec	27401	Dec	28,350	Dec	23,383	Dec	30,513	Dec

Middle East Peace Process

102. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** the structures operational in the context of a peace process in the Arab-Israeli situation with particular reference to the need to establish a respected body capable of dealing with complaints from both sides; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28349/18]

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the **Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade** if efforts are being made by the international community to encourage the restoration of a peace process in the Middle East with a view to addressing the concerns of the Palestinian authorities, Hamas and Fatah, pursuit of the two state solution and the need to establish dialogue with the Israeli authorities rather than allow a war to develop which will have serious consequences for all involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28350/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 102 and 103 together.

The Government's policy on the Middle East has always been based on the belief that the two sides would need a degree of international assistance and pressure to reach a peace agreement. This is not dissimilar from our own peace process.

The structures operational in the context of the Middle East Peace Process are numerous and varied. From an international perspective there are a number of special envoys to the peace process, including a UN special coordinator, an EU Special Representative, a US special envoy, a Chinese special envoy, to name but a few. The Office of the Quartet also works as a bridge between the parties supporting Palestinian economic and institutional development and empowerment, a key factor in achieving a two-state solution. Despite the stagnation in the political process and worsening developments on the ground in recent months, there are a number of areas where the Israelis and Palestinians continue to cooperate, including on security.

For over a year the United States administration has been actively exploring the possibilities for re-launching the process to reach a comprehensive peace agreement. This is welcome and I have met with and spoken to the US team on a number of occasions to encourage their work, and to underline the key parameters for an agreement which the EU has long espoused.

I have urged the EU to encourage and engage with an appropriate US initiative. But I have also emphasized the need for the EU to continue our own work to help preserve and create the political and physical space in which the two-state solution can be achieved.

We expect to see a proposal from the US team in the coming months. In that regard it is important that any parameters which are advanced actually provide a basis on which both parties could agree. It remains to be seen what the US peace plan will propose.

I understand the concerns of the Palestinian leadership in relation to a US proposal. And I have made clear to the US that no peace plan can work without Palestinian acceptance. In that regard I have also urged President Abbas to keep an open mind on the US plans.

I am not convinced of the need to establish another body at this time capable of dealing with complaints from both sides. What is needed now is the resumption of direct talks, which are ultimately the only way to achieve peace. I am hopeful that the US peace plan, when it emerges, will provide a fair and workable basis for such talks to resume.

Direct Provision Data

157. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the number of adults and children in direct provision in each of the past four years; the country of origin; the status of the implementation of the recommendations of the McMahon Report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28098/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): 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.

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 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.

Number of people in Direct Provision accommodation as of 22.06.2018 broken down by Nationality and Adult/Child:

Nationality	Adult	Child	Total
Nigeria	422	278	700
Pakistan	502	167	669
Zimbabwe	488	177	665
Albania	323	134	457
Congo, The Democratic Republic Of The	228	123	351
Others	2003	668	2671
Total	3966	1547	5513

The historical information provided in relation to the years 2014 – 2016 below is taken from the Annual Reports of the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department which are available on their website www.ria.gov.ie under the ‘publications’ heading. The 2017 Annual Report of RIA has not been published yet and, therefore, the figures provided for that year have been taken from the monthly report for December 2017 which is also publicly available on the RIA website.

As described in the published RIA reports, the statistics with regards to numbers and demographics of those in RIA accommodation are primarily drawn from two sources. The first source is from centre weekly returns, based on a ‘snapshot’ of occupancy each Sunday evening. In other cases, in order to get a demographic breakdown of RIA residents, statistics are produced from the RIA database. As a matter of course, there is usually a slight discrepancy between the numbers sourced by both methods, as the daily numbers “on the ground” in centres, as per the centre returns, has to be processed by RIA staff and subsequently reflected “live on system” on the database.

At the end of 2017, RIA was accommodating 5,096 persons and 5,344 (3,924 Adults and 1,420 Children) were recorded as live on the database. The top five nationalities for RIA residents that year were: Pakistan, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Albania.

At the end of 2016, RIA was accommodating 4,425 persons and 4,465 (3,334 Adults and 1,131 Children) were recorded as live on the database. The top five nationalities for RIA residents that year were: Pakistan Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Albania and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

At the end of 2015, RIA was accommodating 4,696 persons and 4,885 (3,673 Adults and 1,212 Children) were recorded as live on the database. The top five nationalities for RIA residents that year were: Pakistan, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and Bangladesh.

At the end of 2014, RIA was accommodating 4,364 persons, and 4,275 (2,823 Adults and 1,452 Children) were recorded as live on the database. The top five nationalities for RIA residents that year were: Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

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).

Immigration Controls

158. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the number of persons that have attempted to gain illegal entry to the State in each of the past four years; the actions taken in response to such attempts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28112/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, every State has a duty to protect its borders and to refuse entry to those persons not entitled to enter the State. This is a fundamental exercise of State sovereignty necessary to protect the security of the State and to prevent illegal immigration.

The exercise of powers in this area is subject to the law and respect for individual rights. In enforcing the law in this respect, Ireland is no different from other countries who also remove individuals who have no lawful right to enter or remain in their territory.

Over the last four years the number of persons refused permission to enter the State is as follows:

2017: 3,746 2016: 3,951 2015: 3,450 2014: 2,473

In general, a person may be refused permission to enter the State on one or more of the twelve grounds set out in Section 4 (3) of the Immigration Act 2004, as amended by the International Protection Act 2015. Every person refused permission to enter the State is served with a notice in which the reason, or reasons, for refusing an application for permission to enter the State is set out.

A person refused a permission to enter the State may be removed from the State. Section 5 of the Immigration Act 2003 (as amended by the International Protection Act 2015), contains the main provisions dealing with the removal from the State of persons refused permission to enter the State. It specifies that a person to whom this section applies may be arrested by an immigration officer or a member of An Garda Síochána and detained in a prescribed place of detention for the purpose of facilitating their removal from the State, which must be as soon as is practicable. In the vast majority of cases persons are returned on the next available flight or vessel within a short period of time. Others are granted a temporary permission to enter the State pending removal usually on the condition they report to their nearest Garda station. Removals are generally operational matters for the Garda National Immigration Bureau, who work closely with officials of my Department in arranging the necessary travel documents and other papers required.

See also: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/oireachtas/t%C3%A1naiste-proud-of-ireland-s-record-in-never-using-migration-to-create-political-division-1.3547336>

EU Directives

159. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** when the terms of the opt-in to the EU receptions directive, including the conditions of asylum seekers' access to work will be announced; if provisions will be made to reduce restrictions to the right to work as the policy stands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28120/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Together with Minister of State with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration, and Integration, I made an announcement today in regard to these matters. The Government has approved a broad and generous access to the labour market for qualified applicants amongst a number of other important reforms in a range of areas covered by the Directive including reception conditions for applicants, improved identification of vulnerability and children's rights. These measures are a further step on the road we have pursued in recent years to significantly reform our protection process.

Under the Directive, asylum seekers will have access to the labour market nine months from the date when their protection application was lodged, if they have yet to receive a first instance recommendation from the International Protection Office, and if they have cooperated with the process.

Eligible applicants may apply for a labour market permission, which covers both employment and self-employment. The Labour Market Access Unit (LMAU) of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS), on my behalf, will process applications. The permission will be granted to eligible applicants for six months and will be renewable until there is a final decision on their protection application. Eligible applicants will have access to almost all sectors of employment.

The Directive also includes important provisions in relation to health, education, children's rights, and material reception conditions for applicants, which include housing, food, clothing

and a daily expense allowance. These other benefits will apply to all applicants in the protection process regardless of when they made their application.

The Directive will bring the State into line with standards across the EU Member States for reception conditions for international protection applicants, including standards in accommodation centres. This continues the recent and ongoing positive work carried out to enhance living arrangements for applicants and their families, and to further provide a wide range of supports and services to asylum seekers. Participation in the Directive is another important step in the reform of our international protection and reception systems.

An information campaign is being launched to ensure that applicants, employers, trade unions, NGOs and all other relevant bodies are fully informed of the labour market access and eligibility arrangements that will apply. Full details and an application form will also be available on the INIS website (www.inis.gov.ie).

Thursday 28th June 2018

Direct Provision System

88. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the **Minister for Health** the physical and mental health supports which have been put in place for those in direct provision (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27850/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.