



An Roinn Gnóthaí
Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of
Foreign Affairs and Trade

Our Ref: FOI/Req/21/106

Ken Foxe

Right to Know

1 July 2021

Dear Mr. Foxe,

I refer to your recently submitted request for information, made under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2014, in which you requested the following:

Copies of any briefings, reports, memos, audits, submissions, or other such review/overview documents prepared with regard to dealing with a backlog of passport applications. This request to cover the period 1 March 2021 to date of receipt of the request. I would prefer to receive this information electronically, ideally in its original electronic format.

I also refer to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 13th May 2021.

I would like to apologise for the delay in dealing with the request. This was due to the closure of the Passport Service due to COVID-19 and the subsequent delays in dealing with requests.

I wish to inform you that I have undertaken a search for records associated with Passport Office Backlog. I have identified 18 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to grant 2 of the records, part-grant 11 records and refuse 11 documents.

The majority of records which are part-granted is to remove the personal information of individuals under Section 37 (1). Nine of the records have been refused under Section 28 (1) (a) as the documents has been, or is proposed to be, submitted to the Government. Two of the records have been refused under Section 31 (1) (a) as they relate to legal advice.

It is useful at this point to place the records within their context. The Passport Service has scaled up and scaled down our services in line with the restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Passport Service paused operations from March 2020 until June 2020 then resumed and cleared all applications on hand within 4 weeks. Passport Services paused again from October to December 2020 and on resumption nearly all applications on hand were dealt with. The pausing of operations between December 2020 and May 2021 was the longest sustained period of reduced services. In this time, the Passport Service continued to deliver an urgent service for applicants who had a reasonable excuse for non-essential travel as defined in the Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (Covid-19).

The Passport Service began to scale up our services in April 2021. Staff returned to the office on 4 May with full attendance from 17 May 2021. This allowed the Passport Service to ensure that the health and safety measures which have been implemented to combat the spread of COVID-19 were effective.

The application numbers, the passports approved and the passports dispatched to June 2021 are available here: <https://www.dfa.ie/about-us/accountability/how-we-are-accountable/foi-publication-scheme/about-dfat/passportofficestatistics/>

Right of Appeal

Should you wish to appeal this decision, you may do so in writing to the Freedom of Information Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 76 – 78 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2 or by email to foi@dfa.ie.

You should make your appeal within 4 weeks (20 working days) from the date of this notification. However, the making of a late appeal may be permitted in appropriate circumstances. The appeal will involve a complete reconsideration of the matter by a more senior member of staff of this Department.

Yours sincerely,

Fergal O'Flaherty
Passport Service

Glossary of terms

OL

Online Passport applications

Renewals

The renewal of a previously held Irish passport

FTA

First Time Application

2005 babies/05 babies/babies

This refers to applications for children born in Ireland since 2005 where they do not have a clear entitlement through a parent born on the island of Ireland or in Great Britain. This change is due to the 2004 27th amendment to the Constitution of Ireland.

These applications are more complex to process because the reckonable residency of the parent must be determined. An experienced team of checkers review these applications to ensure that the applicant is correctly advised on the required documentation to support the application.

Paper applications/PX/NIPX

Paper based application received via An Post's Passport Express Service or the Northern Ireland Passport Express Service.

TL/Team Lead

A team lead is normally an Executive Officer who oversees the work of a team of Clerical Officers

Registration

The registration of the received documents

Scanning

The scanning of the documents to the Passport Online system

DVO

Document verification officers are highly trained staff who verify that the documents submitted in support of a passport application are genuine documents.

FBR

Foreign Birth Registration