



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

TravelWise: Staying safe and informed while travelling abroad

Ireland's Consular Strategy 2019-2022



Foreword

Ireland and the Irish have long been associated with travel. The experiences we gain abroad have enriched our lives, and even defined us as a nation. Reflecting the international outlook of Irish citizens, in 2018 the Government launched 'Global Ireland 2025' which sets out how we will take Ireland's global engagement to the next level in the coming years. For most, time spent overseas is without difficulty or tragedy. However, when citizens do encounter difficulty, it is the job of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to assist. Our help can range from replacing a lost passport, or offering travel advice, to supporting citizens who have been the victims of serious crime abroad or who are dealing with the death overseas of a loved one.

Ireland is fortunate to have so many communities of Irish people living overseas, and we will work to provide them with the services they need. We also now travel in greater numbers, and to further and farther locations. With this in mind, this first Consular Strategy sets out how we will meet the growing



demand for assistance abroad, ensuring the best service for our citizens. We will raise awareness around safe travel, improve our capacity to offer assistance to those most in need, collaborate further with our partners, and continue to professionalise our service. We will prioritise modernising and improving the service provided to ensure the best experience for our citizens.

I want to thank all those who were involved in the development and consultation process that developed this strategy. In particular, I am grateful to those partners from civil society and the voluntary sector, who work with us to provide a service that citizens abroad need and deserve.

Simon Coveney TD

An Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Supporting Irish people to be TravelWise while abroad through the provision of excellent travel advice and consular assistance

A NATION WHO LOVE TO TRAVEL

Irish people love to travel. In 2018, people in Ireland took over 8.2 million trips abroad. In 2019, this is likely to grow to about 8.7 million trips. We travel abroad for a whole range of reasons including holidays, for business, to visit friends and family, or to live in a new country. Whatever the reason, Irish people's love for travel is set to continue. As Irish people travel more, the need for assistance should lessen as we become more familiar and more self-reliant abroad.

With proper preparation, most trips go smoothly, but we can help when things go wrong. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with Embassies, Consulates and Honorary Consuls around the world, are there to provide information, advice and support to help those in need to get back on track.

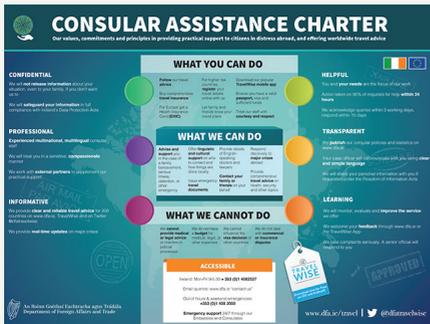
HOW WE CAN HELP

Embassies abroad provide an important safety net for Irish people. We give advice and assistance across the world. We are also able to call on the help of our European Union partners and others if needed. Through resources abroad and at home, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade deals with thousands of requests for support every year. These include serious cases of Irish people injured, in hospital, the victim of a serious crime, or dying abroad.

Often, we can help quickly and easily by using our contacts and local supports. In European Union countries, our citizens should generally be able to rely on the host country authorities for the kind of help the Irish authorities would provide at home. We ensure that our advice and information is updated often to ensure we can help people requesting support to access local services and knowledge.

THE CONSULAR ASSISTANCE CHARTER: OUR VALUES, COMMITMENTS AND PRINCIPLES

In 2017, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade published a Consular Assistance Charter, which explains how we can assist Irish citizens abroad, and the limits of that assistance. We're committed to assisting Irish citizens in need with a range of supports in a confidential, professional, informative and transparent manner, and our staff are available to respond to emergency requests for assistance 24/7.



EXPANDING OUR GLOBAL FOOTPRINT

Assisting Irish citizens abroad is a vital part of the work of Ireland's diplomatic network. The Government of Ireland has

promised to expand this network, under the Global Ireland 2025 initiative, in key regions including North and West Africa, Asia-Pacific and the Middle East. Continuing to support Irish citizens abroad is at the heart of this initiative, delivering continuous improvements to the service available to citizens worldwide.

PROVIDING SUPPORT

As Irish people's journeys abroad increase, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is looking at how we can best support Irish people when travelling. We have up-to-date and helpful advice for countries people travel to and hope to ensure that Irish people can make "TravelWise" decisions about their trips.

As people travel more often and to more remote places, providing support can be more difficult. We promise to make sure that those who need our help most get it. Prioritising our assistance on those who need it most will allow us to help and support those who are most in distress, and in situations that cannot be resolved by people themselves. We will ensure that we are well prepared to provide this assistance, and we will work with our partners to ensure we are giving the best possible advice and assistance.

Specifically, we provide direct assistance and support to a number of people with mental health issues every year, and we are seeing an increase in these cases. Within the lifetime of this strategy, we will commit to making sure our staff are equipped and supported to provide help in these particular cases.

A CHANGING CONSULAR LANDSCAPE

We face a new and more complex consular landscape. As well as citizens travelling to remote and sometimes dangerous locations, there is a growth in difficult cases like international parental child abduction, and growing numbers of dual Irish citizens. There are legal limits to the direct assistance we can provide in these cases, but we will ensure that we have the necessary information to hand to help people as much as we can.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has developed this strategy in broad consultation with our stakeholders and partners, staff of the Department, Irish citizens who have previously received assistance, and in looking to international best practice.

During consultations, the Department sought to capture the perspectives of our stakeholders who influence and contribute to the delivery of consular assistance to Irish citizens. A Consular Forum was also held in May 2018, which brought together a broad range of stakeholders' views through thematic discussions on a range of topics.

Staff of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Ireland, and working at our missions abroad, were also consulted to capture the views of those providing direct assistance to citizens in difficulty. In addition, consultations were held with comparable like-minded Foreign Ministries to gain an understanding of a best practice approach to providing consular assistance to citizens abroad.

Through this extensive consultation, a range of themes and views were set out across a number of areas. Views shared included supports and training for staff, the need for more proactive and professional communications, that we harness the benefits and potential of technology and the continued investment in achieved successes such as the TravelWise app.

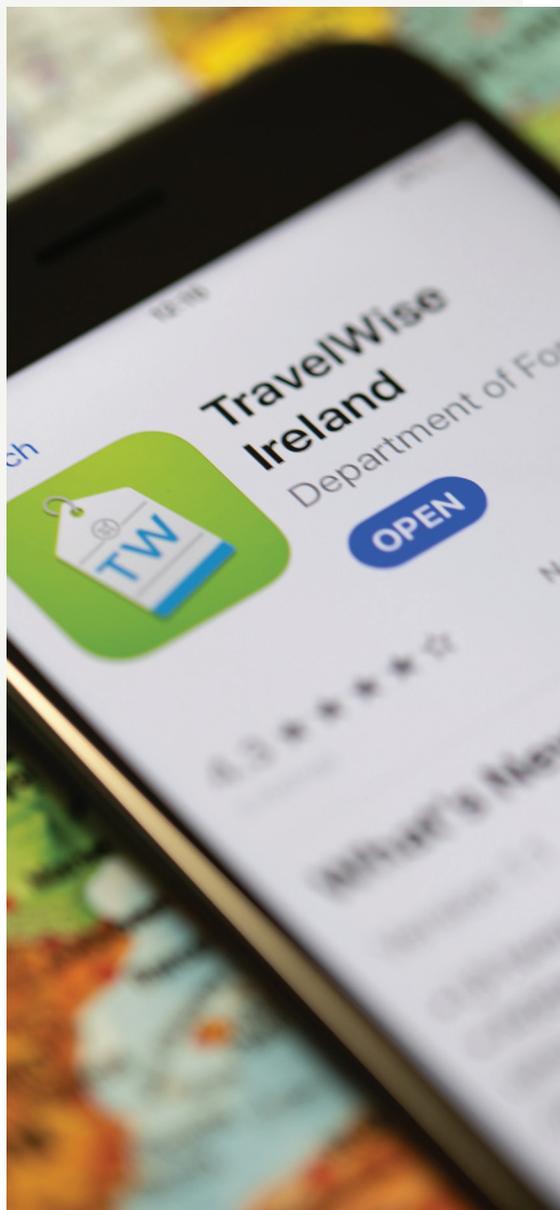
COMMITMENT

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is committing to ensuring that up-to-date informative travel advice is available to encourage Irish citizens to make “TravelWise” plans when travelling abroad, and in assisting and supporting Irish citizens most in need of support while abroad.

This strategy sets our four key priorities in adapting our service to ensure we reach this commitment:

1. Public Outreach & Communications
2. Professionalism
3. Partnership
4. Prioritisation

By 2022, we will provide consular assistance through modernised and innovative means, prioritising the promotion of a TravelWise approach to travel abroad, and providing direct assistance to those who need it most.



Public Outreach & Communications: Fostering a “TravelWise” approach

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade publishes informative Travel Advice for over 200 countries on its website (www.dfat.ie/travel) and on the TravelWise app. This advice is based on reports from local Irish Embassies and Consulates, and from EU and like-minded partners and local authorities.

It provides practical information on safety, security and local customs, and is designed to enable Irish citizens to make informed, “TravelWise” decisions before travelling.

TravelWise

TravelWise is an award-winning smartphone app designed to help Irish citizens to stay safe and informed while travelling, living or working overseas. With TravelWise, you get our user-friendly, trusted and comprehensive travel advice and consular information for 200 different countries – straight to your phone. We are committed to continuously updating TravelWise to ensure it provides useful and informative advice to allow Irish citizens make “TravelWise” decisions while abroad.

We also publish topical articles providing advice for people travelling abroad for events such as the World Cup and Olympic Games. We actively promote our travel advice through online and social media promotion and through tailored public outreach.

Travel advice is only effective if our citizens read it and listen to it. As Irish citizens are travelling at a younger age, travel advice needs to be more accessible to all age groups to create greater awareness and understanding of the scope, limits and extent of consular assistance.

During the lifetime of this strategy, we will focus on expanding our TravelWise public outreach with a view to maximising our communications’ reach and effectiveness. Our aim is to build a “TravelWise” brand, informing Irish people travelling abroad of necessary precautions and the need for comprehensive travel insurance. We will look to develop deeper partnerships with the travel industry, to ensure our messaging is effective in reaching its target audience.



By 2022, we will have developed a coherent and recognisable TravelWise brand, which encourages Irish people to prepare for travel abroad, and to have comprehensive travel insurance for every trip.

Our Priorities:

- » Further develop a communications approach that advises Irish people to take a “TravelWise” approach to travel.
- » Continue to improve the TravelWise smartphone app as a primary means of communication with Irish people travelling abroad.
- » Expand our public outreach to ensure key demographics are targeted with “TravelWise” messages.
- » Engage with the travel industry & other industry partners to promote a “TravelWise” approach to travel.
- » Continue to provide accurate and relevant information, allowing Irish people to make “TravelWise” decisions in advance of their trip.

Professionalism: Equipping and informing our approach to consular assistance

Consular assistance provided to Irish citizens in distress abroad is provided by staff of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as well as by our closest partners, on our behalf. Our staff includes diplomatic staff assigned to Embassies and Consulates worldwide, locally engaged staff at these offices, and by consular assistance officers based in Dublin.

Our staff regularly undergo specialised training to meet our commitment to best practice, and to raise awareness of new contexts and emerging trends that inform our work. We will continue to review the learning and development programmes provided to all staff assigned to Irish Embassies and Consulates, ensuring that our programmes take advantages of innovative technologies, external expertise, and modernised approaches to learning and regional structures to the greatest extent possible.

Consular assistance requests and support can vary greatly depending on the location of the individual involved. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is moving towards a reinforced regional structure to its work, and we will implement this structure within our



consular assistance service to ensure best practice is rolled out across our mission network, supporting our staff, and improving our service.

The Department deals with over 800,000 consular, passport and visa queries and applications annually. At present, if an individual requires emergency assistance abroad, they can make contact with Irish Embassies and Consulates locally through country-specific out-of-hours services. We will review these structures to ensure we are providing a world class service to Irish citizens requiring our assistance.

Regional Training

We recently piloted a Regional Training programme to encourage all staff at Embassies and Consulates to approach consular assistance collaboratively. This model offered advantages like cost effectiveness, encouraged a regional perspective and mutual reliance amongst staff. It also strengthened regional crisis preparedness.

Based on a positive evaluation of this pilot, this training will be rolled out to all regions on an ongoing basis, and will be regularly updated to meet staff training requirements.

Providing consular assistance can be rewarding but also challenging. The Department has a range of supports available to staff when they find themselves in need of additional guidance and advice, and we will continue to ensure these supports are suitable and sufficient in meeting the specific nature of consular assistance work.

By 2022, all staff who provide consular assistance will be trained, equipped and supported to provide Irish people abroad with the necessary assistance.

Our Priorities:

- » Review regional structures and how these can support a more coherent approach to supporting Irish people abroad, piloting a “Regional Consular Manager” position.
- » Review “Out-of-Hours” services to ensure we are providing the best and most efficient service to people in need of our assistance.
- » Review training and preparations for all colleagues providing consular assistance, utilising new technologies to provide best-in-class learning and development programmes.
- » Ensure appropriate staff welfare supports are in place for all staff assisting Irish people in distress.
- » Review and replace the Case and Crisis Management System, and Citizens Registration System and allow for a continued review of our work and approach.

Partnership: Growing a Citizen Support network

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade relies on a wide range of partners to provide specialised supports to Irish citizens in need of assistance, information, and guidance. Our partners provide expert assistance where we cannot, and inform our approach to providing assistance where we can.

We work with a range of partners from Irish civil society including the Kevin Bell Repatriation Trust, and the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas, as well as other government departments to provide the most appropriate assistance in a coherent approach. We also have local partners around the globe including NGOs assisting victims of domestic violence and specialist organisations assisting persons with mental health difficulties. Without these partners, the assistance we could provide to Irish citizens abroad would be limited. Other partners include An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces, ensuring a unified approach in preparation for the most challenging of circumstances, and we will continue to foster a joined up approach to Crisis Planning, Preparedness and Response.

EU Consular Protection Directive

Under the EU Consular Protection Directive, which came into effect on 1st May 2018, Irish citizens now have the right to request assistance from the Embassy or Consulate of any other EU Member State in a country where there is no Irish resident Embassy or permanent representation.

The Directive is one of the benefits of travelling as a citizen of an EU Member State, as it facilitates Irish citizens in countries where there is no Irish Embassy, in seeking consular protection.

In delivering help to Irish citizens abroad, we often work with and through local Irish community and welfare organisations, many of which are supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Emigrant Support Programme. We will continue to seek to align the assistance we provide, with the activities of these organisations, seeking new and deepened partnerships that support our work.

To ensure the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is providing a professional and fit-for-purpose service, we will continue to work closely and actively engage with, learn from and support our partners. In order to maximise this partnership, we need to actively, and proactively, align our approach to consular assistance and ensure a deepened and strengthened partnership going forward.

We also work closely with our EU partners, and like-minded Foreign Ministries to ensure a coherent and informed approach to consular assistance. Within networks such as the EU Working Party on Consular Affairs, and the Global Consular Forum, we can learn from our partners on challenges, trends and innovations in consular assistance delivery. Within these networks, we are committed to engaging actively and substantively, taking a leading role in ensuring best practice in consular assistance.

By 2022, the Department will have further developed and strengthened domestic and international partnerships to inform and enable support and assistance provided to Irish people abroad.

Our Priorities:

- » Work closely with stakeholders to ensure a consistent approach to providing support to Irish people abroad.
- » Foster a network of stakeholders to ensure ongoing-shared learning and evaluation of support provided to Irish people.
- » Support and engage with our partners abroad through funding mechanisms such as the Emigrant Support Programme.
- » Foster domestic and international partnerships to inform how we assist Irish people abroad.
- » Continue to engage and lead internationally on Consular matters, including at the EU Working Party on Consular Affairs (COCON), and with like-minded foreign ministries.

Prioritisation: Targeting our resources better towards those who need our help most

Irish people love to travel. We estimate that people will make 9 million journeys abroad in 2020. People are travelling to locations that are more distant and sometimes to places with a greater potential for danger. As a result, more requests for consular assistance are made to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade every year. In 2017, we provided consular assistance in over 2,500 instances. Sadly, this included assisting family and relatives of 320 Irish citizens who died abroad, a 28% increase on the previous year.

Our resources limit the assistance we can give, and over the coming years we will commit to assisting those most in need first. We will provide relevant and up-to-date information to enable Irish citizens to resolve straightforward problems themselves by providing guidance on local contacts, local information and local regulations. We will provide as much information and support as possible. However, with more requests, and limited resources, prioritisation of requests for direct assistance and support is becoming more crucial to ensure we are helping those most in need first.

Increasing Numbers

In 2017, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade assisted Irish citizens in distress in over 2,500 cases, representing a 61% increase since 2015.

With growth in travel abroad set to continue, with a forecasted 9 million trips abroad in 2020, it is likely that requests for consular assistance are likely to continue for the near future.

Prioritisation will be based on a number of factors, such as the capacity of the individual asking for assistance, their location, whether we have an Embassy or Consulate in the area, and local conditions.

We are also seeing more requests for assistance where mental health concerns are a factor and between 2015 and 2017, the number of these types of requests doubled. At times, these situations can be complicated. We will ensure we have the appropriate information and knowledge to look at how we can best assist those with mental health problems while abroad. We will also ensure that our citizens are aware of the risks of travelling with mental health issues.



According to the last census, the number of people in Ireland who hold dual Irish nationality increased by almost 90% between 2011 and 2016. Under international law, there is no obligation on countries to legally recognise dual citizenship. This often has an impact on our ability to assist dual citizens in their country of second citizenship. The passport used to enter a country will normally decide which state can provide consular assistance. To this end, Irish dual citizens travelling on the passport of their second citizenship and requiring consular assistance must approach the state of their other citizenship.

By 2022, the Department will be assisting Irish people abroad in distress, who require assistance most and will be helping those to seek solutions themselves, where possible.

Our Priorities:

- » Ensure that information is available to allow Irish people to make “TravelWise” decisions when abroad.
- » Ensure appropriate assistance is provided to those who need our support most, first.
- » Develop our network and supports to signpost those requesting assistance to appropriate local or personal supports, when possible.
- » Inform our approach to cases where mental health is a factor, to ensure we provide the right supports, in the right manner.
- » Publish statistics and consider all feedback, using these inputs to evaluate the assistance we provide.

COMMITMENT

Supporting Irish people to be TravelWise while abroad through the provision of excellent travel advice and consular assistance

GOALS	<p>Public Outreach & Communications</p> <p><i>Fostering a “TravelWise” approach</i></p>	<p>Professionalism</p> <p><i>Equipping and informing our approach to Consular Assistance</i></p>
OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	Further develop a communications approach that advises Irish people to take a “TravelWise” approach to travel.	Review regional structures and how these can support a more coherent approach to supporting Irish people abroad, piloting a “Regional Consular Manager” position.
	Continue to improve the TravelWise smartphone app as a primary means of communication with Irish people travelling abroad.	Review “Out-of-Hours” services to ensure we are providing the best and most efficient service to people in need of our assistance.
	Expand our public outreach to ensure key demographics are targeted with “TravelWise” messages.	Review training and preparations for all colleagues providing consular assistance, utilising new technologies to provide best-in-class learning and development programmes.
	Engage with the travel industry & other industry partners to promote a “TravelWise” approach to travel.	Ensure appropriate staff welfare supports are in place for all staff assisting Irish people in distress.
	Continue to provide accurate and relevant information, allowing Irish people to make “TravelWise” decisions in advance of their trip.	Review and replace the Case and Crisis Management System, and Citizens Registration System and allow for a continued review of our work and approach.
OUTCOME	<p><i>By 2022, we will have developed a coherent and recognisable TravelWise brand, which encourages Irish people to prepare for travel abroad, and to have comprehensive travel insurance for every trip.</i></p>	<p><i>By 2022, the Department’s staff who provide Consular Assistance will be trained, equipped and supported to provide Irish people abroad with the necessary assistance.</i></p>

<p>Partnership</p> <p><i>Growing a Citizen Support network</i></p>	<p>Prioritisation</p> <p><i>Targeting our resources better towards those who need our help most</i></p>
<p>Work closely with stakeholders to ensure a consistent approach to providing support to Irish people abroad.</p>	<p>Ensure that information is available to allow Irish people to make “TravelWise” decisions when abroad.</p>
<p>Foster a network of stakeholders to ensure ongoing-shared learning and evaluation of support provided to Irish people.</p>	<p>Ensure appropriate assistance is provided to those who need our support most, first.</p>
<p>Support and engage with our partners abroad through funding mechanisms such as the Emigrant Support Programme.</p>	<p>Develop our network and supports to signpost those requesting assistance to appropriate local or personal supports, when possible.</p>
<p>Foster domestic and international partnerships to inform how we assist Irish people abroad.</p>	<p>Inform our approach to cases where Mental Health is a factor, to ensure we provide the right supports, in the right manner.</p>
<p>Continue to engage and lead internationally on Consular matters, including at COCON, the Global Consular Forum, and with like-minded foreign ministries.</p>	<p>Publish statistics and consider all feedback, using these inputs to evaluate the assistance we provide.</p>
<p><i>By 2022, the Department will have further developed and strengthened domestic and international partnerships to inform and enable support and assistance provided to Irish people abroad.</i></p>	<p><i>By 2022, the Department will be assisting Irish people abroad in distress, who require assistance most and will be helping those to seek solutions themselves, where possible.</i></p>



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