

## Written Answers.

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**The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received on the day from the Departments [unrevised].**

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 6, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 7 to 26, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 27 to 35, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Passport Applications Data**

36. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the turnaround time for passport applications; the number of persons waiting to have passport applications processed through the Passport Office; the number of persons awaiting a passport in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27993/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The turnaround timeframe for a passport application will depend, in the first instance, on the channel through which the application was submitted. The Passport Service provides a range of channels to Irish citizens wishing to apply for a passport. These include a postal application system, an online passport application service, in person counter application facilities in Dublin and Cork and the network of Irish Missions worldwide. The target turnaround time for applications made via the online passport application service is 10 working days plus postage. Over 50% of the 100,000 applicants who have used this channel this year have had their application processed within a week. The online service currently accommodates adult renewals and passport card applications and it is planned 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 require additional security measures including robust identity verification and entitlement checking and take longer to process.

The Passport Service is currently in its peak season for passport demand with the vast majority of applications being received between February and August each year. The Passport Service is currently processing over 63,000 passport applications. These applications are going through the normal checking, processing and security stages.

The Passport Service is doing everything possible to ensure that passports are processed as quickly as possible. Measures taken to enhance processing capacity include the recruitment of additional Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs); the use of targeted overtime and the redeployment of experienced staff from across the Department to processing applications and respond to customer queries

The Passport Service does not classify or differentiate passports applications based on the county of residence of the applicant. All applications are processed in accordance with the application channel through which they were submitted.

### **Northern Ireland**

37. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has expressed his concerns to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in relation to the fact that a number of prisoners in the republican segregated unit of HMP Maghaberry are a long time on remand awaiting trial, which amounts to a form of internment; the response from the Secretary of State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28004/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am aware that the Deputy has raised concerns about the length of the time some prisoners in the separated regime spend on remand prior to facing trial. My officials have engaged with the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Justice in relation to the concerns raised by the Deputy. A recent NI Audit Office report showed that there are significant delays in delivering justice in Northern Ireland; for example the average length of time from the reporting of a crime to completion of Crown Court proceedings is 515 days (over 17 months) which is twice as long as in England and Wales. In such a context, the time spent on remand is considered to be unacceptably high. The report found that the progress of cases through the system is punctuated by practices and processes that are not efficient and that work against the timely delivery of justice. The report made a number of recommendations which would shorten the time spent on remand, including the removal of the committal process; implementing such reforms would require a locally elected Justice Minister to be in place. With regards to the number of prisoners currently on remand awaiting trial in the separated regime at Maghaberry prison, I understand that there are currently two such prisoners.

### **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.

*Question No. 39 answered with Question No. 34.*

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.

## **Northern Ireland**

43. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on recent efforts to restart the Executive in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28000/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Over the course of many months, the Irish and British Governments, as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, have worked tirelessly to support and facilitate the parties in their efforts to form an Executive. The devolved, power-sharing institutions are at the heart of the Good Friday

Agreement and are the best means for achieving accountable, representative decision-making for all the people of Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, to date, it has not proved possible to reach an agreement on the formation of an Executive, despite intensive engagement. In light of this, the Government has been working with the British Government to consider means by which we can support the political process, in accordance with the Agreement, in the period ahead.

The Taoiseach has spoken with Prime Minister May and emphasised the Government's full commitment to the Good Friday Agreement, and our continuing determination to secure the effective operation of all of its institutions.

I am in very regular contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, as we seek a way beyond the current impasse. The Secretary of State and I have each conducted contacts with the Northern Ireland political parties to hear their views on how, at this stage, the two Governments can support the political process, in accordance with the Agreement.

All parties have re-affirmed their commitment to operating the devolved institutions and provided views on their key concerns and issues to be addressed in seeking a way forward.

In light of this, the Secretary of State and I will consider how best the two Governments, as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, can chart a way forward that will give the best prospects for getting the devolved institutions operating again without delay.

I will continue to engage intensively, working with Secretary of State Bradley and the leaders of all of the political parties, until that is achieved.

The Good Friday Agreement is the indispensable framework for providing stable, inclusive, power-sharing government for all the people of Northern Ireland and for sustaining our interlocking relationships – within Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland, and between the UK and Ireland.

### **Middle East Peace Process**

44. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the new initiatives the EU plans to pursue; if the EU will take a stronger role in seeking resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict following the announcement made by the United States of America that its embassy would be moved to Jerusalem. [28058/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The United States administration has been working for over a year on developing an initiative to restart direct negotiations to reach a final peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. The details of the plan have been kept closely confidential, but there are some indications that it may be unveiled soon. The resolution of this conflict remains a high foreign policy priority for the EU, as it is for the Government and for myself. There is no intention at EU level to launch a separate initiative at this time, which could cut across the efforts by the United States. We recognise that the US is in a position to play a potentially valuable role on this issue. In EU discussions and statements we have sought to encourage the US in its efforts, and to encourage both parties to be open to any helpful initiative. In particular, the EU has sought constructively to help shape the US initiative, by underlining that a successful peace plan, and one that can be supported by the international community, must address the needs of both sides, and the basic parameters for a settlement which have been endorsed by the international community on many occasions. I have argued at EU level in favour of this engagement with the US, and have myself discussed and exchanged ideas with the US team on a number of occasions, including on my

visits to the region and to the United States.

I am fully aware of the difficulties facing the US initiative, and I am of the strong view – which I have expressed directly to US interlocutors and outlined previously to this House - that the regrettable move of the US Embassy to Jerusalem has been detrimental to their efforts. But I believe it would be misguided not to try to support and influence the US's planning for an initiative, as long as there is a chance that it can bring about a lasting peace.

### **Brexit Negotiations**

45. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the response in relation to the December 2017 agreement on Brexit. [22611/18]

52. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the latest position with regard to an all weather agreement on the Brexit backstop; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27640/18]

58. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the details of the backstop agreement between the EU and the UK Government with regard to ensuring no hard border on the island of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27760/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose taking questions 45, 52 and 58 together.

The EU's objective remains that the full legal text of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement, as well as a detailed political declaration on the framework for the future relationship, be agreed by the October meeting of the European Council.

With a view to achieving this goal, negotiations have been continuing between the EU and the UK to close the remaining gaps on the draft Withdrawal Agreement, including through detailed discussions on the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The draft Protocol, which is an integral part of the Withdrawal Agreement, reflects the principles and commitments set out in the Joint Report from the EU and UK negotiators published on 8 December 2017 with regard to the unique Irish issues. The Protocol seeks to maintain full alignment with those rules of the Single Market and Customs Union that are necessary to protect North South cooperation, the all-island economy and the Good Friday Agreement, as well as avoiding a hard border. This is the backstop and the draft Protocol makes clear that this must be in place unless and until another solution is found. In other words, it must be an 'all-weather' solution.

The UK has accepted that a legally operative version of the 'backstop' for the border will be included in the Withdrawal Agreement, in line with paragraph 49 of the Joint Progress Report agreed last December, and that all the issues identified in the draft Protocol reflect those that must be addressed.

The draft Protocol includes elements on the rights of the Good Friday Agreement in Article 1 and provisions on wider North-South cooperation in Article 8 which are important for the normal daily life of people on this island. Agreement has already been reached between EU and UK negotiators regarding the Common Travel Area in Article 2, which will allow free movement of Irish and UK citizens between Ireland and the UK to continue.

Last week, the EU and UK negotiating teams published a Joint Statement, which set out the progress made since the March European Council. Disappointingly, the progress reported on the Protocol falls very far short of the EU's, and the Government's, expectations.

This is a message the Taoiseach conveyed very clearly to President Juncker when they met last week and the Members of this House also had the opportunity to raise their concerns with President Juncker later that same day.

I welcome that, in response, President Juncker reiterated the EU's support for Ireland, and that the Protocol, including the backstop, is an integral and indispensable part of the Withdrawal Agreement. This is fully consistent with the strong message of solidarity I received from my EU counterparts, as well as Michel Barnier, when I met with them in Luxembourg yesterday.

On Friday, the Taoiseach will meet with his EU27 counterparts to take stock of developments in the negotiations and discuss the way forward. Ireland will seek to ensure that the EU sends a clear message to the UK that it must respect the commitments it has made and that, in the absence of agreement on a backstop, it will not be possible to finalise the Withdrawal Agreement as a whole, including the transition arrangements.

The overriding priority now is to proceed in the manner that is most likely to achieve agreement on all withdrawal issues, including the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. While this will ultimately be a matter for the European Council (Article 50) on Friday, the widespread view, which I share, is that stalling the negotiating process would not serve this aim and that talks should intensify with a view to making the necessary progress.

### **Brexit Issues**

**46. Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the details of his engagement with the EU Brexit negotiating team and the UK Government with a view to ensuring regulatory alignment on agriculture matters post the UK leaving the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27759/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My officials and I maintain intensive contact with the EU Taskforce. My most recent meeting with Michel Barnier took place yesterday, immediately in advance of the General Affairs Council (Art. 50). Such meetings provide an opportunity to take stock of progress in the negotiations and to communicate Ireland's priorities, including in relation to agriculture, with a view to shaping the EU's negotiating position with regard to the draft Withdrawal Agreement, including its Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, as well as the EU's approach to the framework for the future EU-UK relationship. My Government colleagues and I also engage frequently with our UK counterparts. I have spoken with the Minister for the Cabinet Office, David Lidington, on a number of occasions in recent weeks. The Minister for Agriculture, Food and The Marine, Michael Creed TD, recently met his UK counterpart, Michael Gove. Such engagement provides an opportunity to underline the importance of finalizing the Protocol as an integral and indispensable part of the Withdrawal Agreement.

The draft Protocol includes provisions which foresee full alignment with those rules of the EU's internal market and the customs union which, now or in the future, support North-South cooperation, the all-island economy and the protection of the Good Friday Agreement. As set out in Article 5 of the draft Protocol, this arrangement would include alignment with the provisions of Union law on sanitary and phytosanitary rules as well as provisions of Union law on the production and marketing of agricultural and fisheries products.

As concerns the framework for the future relationship, I welcome that the Guidelines on the future EU-UK relationship adopted by the European Council last March confirm the EU's readiness to initiate work towards a balanced, ambitious and wide-ranging free trade agreement (FTA) insofar as there are sufficient guarantees for a level playing field. The EU proposes that such an agreement should cover all sectors, including agriculture, and should address, *inter alia*, disciplines on technical barriers to trade (TBT) and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures and a framework for voluntary regulatory cooperation.

Last week, the EU and UK negotiating teams published a Joint Statement, which set out the progress made since the March European Council. Disappointingly, the progress reported on the Protocol falls very far short of the EU's, and the Government's, expectations.

On Friday, the Taoiseach will meet with his EU27 counterparts to take stock of developments in the negotiations and discuss the way forward. Ireland will seek to ensure that the EU sends a clear message to the UK that it must respect the commitments it has made and that, in the absence of agreement on a backstop, it will not be possible to finalise the Withdrawal Agreement as a whole, including the transition arrangements.

At the same time, progress should also be made on the future relationship and in this respect I look forward to seeing the UK's white paper which they have promised to publish around 9 July.

Everything, including all elements of the Withdrawal Agreement and the framework for the future relationship should be wrapped up by October.

### **Brexit Issues**

47. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which he continues to find support for the Irish position on Brexit and mindful of the need to maintain a common position throughout the EU with a view to achieving a borderless market and taxation economy on the island of Ireland respecting the needs of both communities in Northern Ireland and recognising the importance of a good relationship between the EU and the UK post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28030/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Maintaining frequent contact with EU partners has been a priority for Ireland throughout the Article 50 negotiations process. I discuss Brexit collectively with my EU27 counterparts on a monthly basis at the General Affairs Council (Article 50), most recently yesterday. Since the last meeting of the European Council in March, I have met with my counterparts from Sweden, Croatia, Cyprus, Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany France, and this week with the new Foreign Ministers of Italy and Spain. In addition to my own contacts, Minister of State for European Affairs, Helen McEntee TD, has met with her Greek, Estonian, Swedish, Norwegian and Portuguese counterparts. The Taoiseach has met with the Prime Ministers of Belgium and Spain, and also met with other EU leaders at the Western Balkans Summit in May. The Taoiseach and I met with both the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker and the EU's Chief Negotiator for the Article 50 negotiations, Michel Barnier, when they visited Ireland last week. I met with Michel Barnier again in Luxembourg on 26 June in the margins of the General Affairs Council. Further to my own engagement with Mr Barnier, officials from my Department, and in particular from the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU in Brussels, continue to have very regular, almost daily engagement with Mr Barnier and his team. In all of these contacts, the Government continues to be assured of the continued support of our EU partners in addressing the unique issues posed by Brexit for the island of Ireland. The solidarity of the



EU27 has been crucial in securing commitments and guarantees from the UK on the protection of the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and the gains of the peace process, including avoiding a hard border.

Mr Juncker confirmed the Commission's support for the Irish position in his address to the Oireachtas last week. Michel Barnier has also been firm in his support and has consistently made clear that without a backstop, there can be no Withdrawal Agreement. He has also made clear that *"this is an EU issue, not only an Irish issue"*.

As concerns the future EU-UK relationship, I welcome that the Guidelines adopted by EU leaders last March which reaffirmed EU's desire to establish a close partnership with the UK. At the same time, the Guidelines also place an important emphasis on the need to ensure a level playing field, stressing that any future agreement must be based on a balance of rights and obligations. The commitment that the EU is willing to revisit its position should the UK's approach evolve is also of particular importance to Ireland.

### **Dublin-Monaghan Bombings**

48. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress made to date with his British counterparts regarding release of files concerning the Dublin and Monaghan bombings and other legacy issues; and if the setting up of an historic investigation unit here will receive support. [28008/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The implementation of the All-Party Dáil motions relating to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings is a priority for the Government, as highlighted in the Programme for a Partnership Government. The All-Party motion on the 1974 Dublin Monaghan bombings that was adopted by the Dáil on 25 May 2016 has, like those adopted in 2008 and 2011, been conveyed to the British Government. These motions call on the British Government to allow access by an independent, international judicial figure to all original documents relating to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, as well as the Dublin bombings of 1972 and 1973, the bombing of Kay's Tavern in Dundalk and the murder of Seamus Ludlow. I met with Justice for the Forgotten in April to hear their views and update them on the Government's continuing engagement on legacy issues, including with the British Government on the Dáil motions.

The Government is committed to actively pursuing the implementation of these all-Party Dáil motions, and has consistently raised the issue with the British Government.

I am actively engaged with the British Government on an ongoing basis on this issue, as are officials from my Department. I have consistently underlined to the British Government that the Dáil motions represent the consensus political view in Ireland that an independent, international judicial review of all the relevant documents is required to establish the full facts of the Dublin and Monaghan atrocities. I have also underlined that the absence of a response from the British Government is of deep concern to the Government and indeed this House, and I have emphasised the urgent need for such a response.

The Government will continue to engage with the British Government on the request in relation to the Dublin-Monaghan bombings, and pursue all possible avenues to achieve progress on this issue, consistent with the request made by this House.

In relation to the Historical Investigation Unit (HIU), the HIU is one of the institutions provided for as part of the legacy framework of the 2014 Stormont House Agreement, the prompt establishment of which is supported by the Government. The Government has welcomed the

launch of the UK Government's consultation on Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past on 11 May, which includes draft legislative provisions for the establishment of the HIU.

The Stormont House Agreement sets out that the HIU will take forward outstanding investigations into Troubles-related deaths in Northern Ireland, from the Historical Enquiries Team process and the historical investigations of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

The HIU is being established in response to concerns about shortcomings with the investigation of outstanding Troubles-related deaths, which are unique to Northern Ireland. There is no provision under the Stormont House Agreement for a similar body in this jurisdiction. The investigation of crime, including unresolved, Troubles-related crimes, is a matter for An Garda Síochána and the Garda Authorities will fully pursue any new or additional evidence or information presented to them in respect of such crimes.

The Government has committed to putting in place the necessary additional provisions for the HIU to co-operate with relevant authorities in this jurisdiction. The drafting of legislative proposals for consideration by the Government and Oireachtas in this regard is advancing, led by my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Officials from my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality are meeting with Justice for the Forgotten on 4 July to hear their further views on the implementation of the legacy framework provided for under the Stormont House Agreement.

The Government remains determined to see progress on the establishment of the Stormont House Agreement institutions, on legacy inquests in Northern Ireland and on all outstanding legacy issues, including the three all-Party Motions adopted by this House on the Dublin and Monaghan bombings.

Progress on these issues is crucial in order to meet the legitimate needs and expectations of victims and survivors and to contribute to broader societal reconciliation as an integral part of the Peace Process.

## **Economic Sanctions**

49. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to support a boycott (details supplied) which specifically targets illegal Israeli settlement goods under international law in view of the recent killings in Gaza by Israeli state forces. [28009/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The question of boycotts and sanctions has been discussed on many occasions in the Oireachtas. The Government does not support boycotts on Israel. I believe that such actions would be ineffective and counterproductive. They would impact indiscriminately on Israelis, including those who agree with our views on the resolution of the conflict, as well as potentially isolating Israelis from the kinds of interactions where diverse views on these issues are expressed. Successive Ministers for Foreign Affairs have taken this view. The question of products made or grown in settlements, which are not a part of Israel, is a separate issue. Ireland and the international community regard the establishment and growth of these settlements as illegal under international law, and the EU has taken action to make a distinction between settlement goods, and goods from Israel. In the past, the EU has reached agreement on measures on labelling of settlement products, exclusion of settlements from access to EU research grants, and non-acceptance of Israeli certification for some settlement products. Since Ireland is part of the single market of the European Union, all action in relation to how trade with settlement goods is managed is

governed by such actions at EU level. Regrettably, there is at present no political consensus in the EU on stronger action in this area.

These issues were discussed in the Seanad earlier this year in the debate on the Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill, a debate which I expect to be resumed next month. In my contribution to that debate, I stated that I respect the motives of those supporting the Bill, but I also explained why the Government opposes it. First and foremost among these reasons is the fact that external trade is an exclusive EU competence. I also set out in that debate my belief that, even if it were possible under EU law to take unilateral action on settlement goods, taking such a step at this moment would not be helpful to the objective we all share, that is, the end of the Israeli occupation and the achievement of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

It is important also not to over-emphasise the issue of settlement products, which are of limited economic significance in themselves. Settlements are a political, not an economic project. Most settlements do not export anything, and the volume of settlement goods arriving in Ireland is thought to be extremely small.

I have made very clear the Government's strong views on the recent actions of Israeli forces in Gaza – in public statements, here in the Oireachtas, and directly to Israeli authorities. Ireland has also supported appropriate responses at the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

## Northern Ireland

50. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had recently with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in relation to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28003/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers and my officials in the Belfast Secretariat monitor this and other cases as part of their ongoing work on prison issues generally in Northern Ireland. Senior officials from the Secretariat have twice visited the person in custody in Maghaberry prison, at his request. I have previously raised the case with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, during our meetings. On 3 May of this year, I wrote to her outlining the concerns which have been aired by Deputy Ó Cuív and others. In my correspondence, I emphasised the negative impact that the detention was having on the individual's family and on the local community. In her response to my letter, which I received on 28 May, Secretary of State Bradley acknowledged the issues raised and underlined that the responsibility for the continued detention or release of the individual concerned resides with the Northern Ireland Parole Commissioners, which is an independent body.

The Parole Commissioners carried out a full review of the case in June 2017 and made a decision to uphold the revocation of this person's licence. My understanding is that a further parole hearing on the continued detention is due shortly.

The Parole Commissioners are charged with taking into account the obligations on the State of the European Convention on Human Rights in making their recommendation. This includes assessing the risk to the public should the person remain at liberty. Those whose licence is revoked under this process are provided with a copy of the independent Parole Commissioners recommendation, which sets out the reasons the licence was revoked.

My officials will continue to actively monitor the case and remain in contact with the NIO

on this issue.

### **Papal Visit**

51. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the level of engagement his Department has held with the Vatican regarding the forthcoming Papal visit. [26474/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government has warmly welcomed the Pope's forthcoming visit to Ireland, which it regards as a major event with a high degree of public participation and a strong international profile. As the primary focus of the Papal visit will be to attend the World Meeting of Families, the Catholic Church, together with the World Meeting of Families, are the key stakeholders and in this capacity are working closely with the Vatican on the programme of events for the visit. As is usual with such visits, there has been engagement by my Department with the Vatican through the Irish Embassy to the Holy See. The Embassy has liaised with appropriate Vatican officials and has facilitated visits to the Holy See by relevant Irish officials. There have also been a number of advance preparatory visits by Vatican officials to Ireland.

Officials from my Department participate on a steering group, headed by the Department of the Taoiseach, which meets regularly to coordinate key aspects of the visit, including security, media/communications, public safety and transport.

*Question No. 52 answered with Question No. 45.*

### **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 Ciarán 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.

### **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.

### **Passport Applications Administration**

55. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if consideration has been given to an improved passport renewal reminder system at which there is an automatic renewal reminder opt-in with an optional opt-out in view of the recent delays at the Passport Office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27905/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Passport Service already has a system for reminding passport holders that their passport is due for renewal. Passport holders must first enter their passport details on <https://www.eforms.gov.ie/en/reminder/passport/> and they will be sent a reminder three months prior to the expiry date of the passport. Passport renewals for all categories of applicants seeking to renew a passport in Ireland are currently being processed within targeted processing times. Applicants using the online renewal service are currently being processed within 10 working days, with 50% of applications processed within 5 working days. Renewal applications submitted through Passport Express or the Northern Ireland Passport Express service are processed within the target turn-around period of 15 working days.

Other categories of applicants, such as first time applicants and applicants whose previous passport was reported as lost or stolen are currently taking longer as these require additional security checks, including robust identity verification and entitlement checking and as a result take longer to process.

### **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.*

### **Passport Applications Data**

59. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of applications received for the online passport renewal system since it was established; the way in which it can improve waiting times for those seeking passport renewals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27984/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Online Passport Application service is the cheapest and most convenient way for an adult to renew a passport as it can be done online anywhere in the world, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week and removes the requirement for forms, witnesses or printed photos. Since its launch, over 200,000 applications for passport renewals have been received online. For online applicants, the target turnaround timeframe of 10 working days (plus postage) is being met and in 50% of cases, applications are being processed in 5 working days (plus postage). I would urge adult applicants wishing to renew their passports, whether residing in Ireland or overseas, to avail of the online passport application service where possible. The Online Passport Application service is part of a wider Passport Reform Programme (2016 – 2021). This programme is informed by a customer engagement survey undertaken in 2015, the results of which indicated a very high level of interest in an online passport application service.

With this in mind, the Passport Reform Programme aims to roll out further online application services for children by 2018, with plans to extend this for other adult renewal categories.

The continued uptake of the Online Passport Application service, along with the rollout of online application options for further categories of applicants, has benefits for all applicants. As more applications are processed online, resources within the Passport Office can be reallocated towards reducing the turnaround times for other categories of applicants.

### **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 Orban 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.

## **Trade Relations**

61. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which trade and co-operation between Ireland and Cuba will be progressed following on from the 2017 memorandum of bilateral co-operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28010/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The bilateral relationship between Ireland and Cuba has been a historically warm one and the very successful visit of President Higgins to Cuba in February 2017 marked a new high point in the relationship. The Memorandum of Cooperation to which the Deputy refers was signed in the sidelines of that visit and it provides a solid foundation upon which to expand our relations with Cuba. The primary aim of the memorandum is to open channels of dialogue and cooperation between Ireland and Cuba across various areas of interest, particularly in trade and cultural engagement.

The Agreement commits both countries to promoting cooperation in economic, commercial, industrial, agricultural, academic, cultural, scientific and tourism relations. Since the signing of the agreement, officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in conjunction with other Government departments and State agencies, have continued to work on growing the relationship across that range of areas.

Total bilateral trade in goods with Cuba has increased significantly in recent years, including by 43% in 2016. Goods trade in 2017 amounted to the more modest sum of €2.2 million, and Cuba is now Ireland's 23rd largest goods trading partner in Latin America. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will continue to support growth in this area.

Furthermore, the recently announced '*Global Ireland – Ireland's Global Footprint to 2025*', the Government's initiative to double the scope and impact of Ireland's global footprint in the period to 2025, is a clear indication of our intention to work more closely and intensively with partners across the globe.

This initiative identifies Latin America and Caribbean as a key region for Ireland to expand its influence, trade, and visibility, and the development of our relationship with Cuba will be an important part of this work.

The forthcoming whole-of-government strategy for the Americas and the Caribbean will also reflect the priority which the Government attaches to developing relationships with that part of the world.

## EU Presidency

62. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his Department's priorities for the forthcoming Austrian EU Presidency. [25361/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Austrian Presidency takes place at an important time for our Union as we continue to face key challenges. We will work with the Austrian Presidency to address these challenges including in relation to securing economic prosperity and competitiveness, the negotiations on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework post 2020, political challenges particularly in relation to the EU as a global actor, trade, security, migration and enlargement. The Irish Government's priorities are well known. On Brexit, we will work to secure our core objectives: protecting the peace process, including avoiding a hard border and seeking the closest possible relationship between the EU and UK.

The Austrian Presidency will lead on an intensive negotiation process to decide on the shape and scale of next budget for the Union, known as the multiannual financial framework, or MFF. The negotiations promise to be particularly challenging – in addition to the UK's exit, this will be the first MFF where Ireland will be a net contributor from the outset of the financial period.

While we have made considerable progress in recent years on the Digital Single Market, there is more work to be done. It is vital to deliver on the remaining legislative proposals concerning the Digital Single Market before the end of the current legislative cycle.

We will also support the Austrian Presidency efforts in strengthening the EU as a global actor and in presenting a resolute, coherent European approach on foreign policy priorities.

I would like to wish the Austrian Presidency well in the coming period and look forward to

achieving meaningful progress across the range of policy areas.

### **Passport Services**

63. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he will take to ensure that those that applied for passports are kept up to date in relation to their application status (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27641/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Passport Service has a dedicated Communications Units to respond to queries from passport applicants. This Unit can be contacted by telephone, email or by web chat. The Passport Service is currently in its peak season for passport demand with the vast majority of applications being received between February and August each year. Accordingly, the Communications Unit has been dealing with a very high volume of queries from applicants in recent weeks. The Passport Service makes every effort to respond to as many applicant queries as possible. In recent weeks, the Passport Service has allocated additional resources to the existing Communications Unit. The Communications Unit is a dedicated customer service team that processes applicant queries received via its phone, email and webchat communication channels. Measures taken to improve responsiveness include the assignment of TCOs and the redeployment of experienced staff from across the Department to this unit and the use of targeted overtime.

Many queries received by the Communications Unit can be answered with information readily available on the Passport Service's website [www.DFA.ie/passport](http://www.DFA.ie/passport). Detailed and regularly updated information on passport services; current average turnaround times and comprehensive guides to the various application processes can be consulted here.

With particular reference to individuals seeking updates, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight that applicants can track the status of existing applications at any time through the Passport Service's online tracker which can also be found on the Passport Service's website. Information on this tracker is updated daily and reflects the current target turnaround times.

The Passport Service also has a Customer Care desk in the public offices (Mount Street, Dublin and Cork) where applicants can visit without an appointment for an update on their application.

### **Brexit Issues**

64. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if work has been undertaken in relation to putting in place new formal structures for dialogue between Britain and Ireland in the post Brexit era in view of the fact that they are our nearest neighbours and co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27999/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** While the UK's decision to leave the EU has serious implications for Ireland, we maintain a strong and constructive bilateral relationship with the UK. We are fully committed to developing and enhancing this relationship over the coming years. Additionally, we will work to secure the closest possible positive relationship between the UK and the European Union. The Good Friday Agreement, of which the Irish Government is a co-guarantor, is the indispensable framework for providing stable, inclusive, power-sharing government for all the people of Northern

Ireland and for sustaining our interlocking relationships on and between these islands – within Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland and, indeed, between the UK and Ireland. A number of channels for ongoing dialogue and cooperation between the Irish and British Governments exist, and will continue after the UK leaves the European Union. The Good Friday Agreement provides for important institutional cooperation on an east-west basis through the British-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference (BIIGC) and the British Irish Council (BIC).

In addition, the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) brings together elected representatives from the Oireachtas, Westminster, the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the Scottish and Welsh devolved assemblies.

The British Irish Council continues to work on areas of shared importance, with the Taoiseach and Minister Murphy attending the most recent British Irish Council Summit meeting in Guernsey last week. Three of the four British Irish Parliamentary Assembly Committees carried out inquiries into the consequences of the UK exit from the EU for various sectors across this island in the last year, meeting with practitioners and stakeholders to hear evidence and further the discourse around this issue of primary importance.

Other channels of contact and cooperation have developed over the years as the relationship between these islands has grown closer. For example, in 2012, a process was established involving summits between the Taoiseach and the UK Prime Minister, supported by a Joint Work Programme managed at official level by the heads of all Government departments in Dublin and London.

These structures have shown their value and will continue to evolve in response to the changing circumstances. In addition, we will also explore other avenues to maintain the “habit of cooperation” that currently exists where Irish and UK Government Ministers regularly meet their counterparts and work together in Brussels on a range of EU matters. This deeper working relationship should allow for cooperation across a broad range of issues of shared interest.

## **Human Rights**

65. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has made representations to the Russian Government in relation to the situation faced by LGBT persons there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28025/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government closely follows developments in relation to the treatment of members of the LGBTI community in Russia and, in particular, the widespread reports of the persecution of gay men in Chechnya. Senior officials of my Department met the Russian Ambassador last year to convey the grave concerns of the Government, and of the Irish public, at these reports. During the meeting, officials urged the Russian authorities to fully investigate these allegations, to ensure that any such persecution is ended immediately, to provide all affected persons with the assistance they require, and to ensure the safety of activists and journalists investigating the reports of abuse in Chechnya. Ireland continues to raise its concerns over the treatment of the LGBTI community in Russia, and especially in Chechnya, through international fora such as the Council of Europe. The issue of persecution against the LGBTI community in Chechnya is due to be discussed at the Parliamentary Assembly later this month, which will be attended by several Members of the Oireachtas.

The European Union continues to press the Russian authorities to ensure that the allegations are fully investigated and that those fleeing persecution are given full protection. In meet-

ings with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, High Representative Mogherini has highlighted the serious concerns of the European Union and its Member States over the allegations and urged the Russian government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the rights of the gay community in Chechnya and elsewhere in the country are respected, in line with Russia's international human rights commitments.

*Question No. 66 answered with Question No. 33.*

*Question No. 67 answered with Question No. 32.*

### **Brexit Issues**

68. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department has carried out an analysis of the potential impact of Brexit on County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27994/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Co-ordination of the whole-of-Government response to Brexit is being taken forward through the cross-Departmental coordination structures chaired by my Department. Contingency planning for a no-deal or worst-case outcome, bringing together the detailed work being undertaken by individual Ministers and their Departments on issues within their policy remit, is now well advanced. Its focus is on the immediate regulatory and operational challenges which would result from such an outcome. It assumes a trading relationship based on the default WTO rules, but also examines the possible effects on many other areas of concern. This work is therefore providing baseline scenarios for the impact of Brexit across all sectors, which can then be adapted as appropriate in light of developments in the EU-UK negotiations, including in regard to transition arrangements and the future relationship. This approach is also enabling the modelling of potential responses under different scenarios, such as one where a withdrawal agreement is concluded and where a Free Trade Agreement is the basis for the future relationship between the EU and the UK. This planning, as appropriate, includes any specific responses necessary according to regional needs and at the county level, including those of Cork, of which I am, of course, acutely aware.

It also takes account of the planning being undertaken at EU level by the Commission Preparedness Unit, which is issuing information notes aimed at different business sectors and examining legislative actions which may be needed at EU level.

The Government is already acting in order to get Ireland Brexit ready. Dedicated measures were announced in Budget 2018, including a new €300m Brexit Loan Scheme for Business and a €25m Brexit Response Loan Scheme for the agri-food sector as well as additional supports for capital investment in the food industry and Bord Bia marketing and promotion activities, amounting to over €50m in total. Capital expenditure of €116 billion under Project Ireland 2040 will also allow the State and its agencies to properly plan major infrastructure projects while ensuring that communities and businesses can plan ahead. There was also increased funding provided to my Department in Budget 2018 for the opening of six new diplomatic missions. A further seven new Missions will be opened as part of the next phase of expanding Ireland's global footprint. These thirteen new Missions will be located in Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, North America, and Oceania and will contribute to helping our exporters find new markets.

Our Government's enterprise agencies continue to work with companies, helping them to deal with Brexit – making them more competitive, diversifying market exposure, and up-skill-

ing teams. The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation published last November ‘*Building Stronger Business: Responding to Brexit by competing, innovating and training*’ . In total 34 reports analyzing the effects of Brexit across a broad range of sectors and in some cases setting out responses have been published to date by Government Departments. All these reports are available on a dedicated Brexit webpage on my Department’s website.

## **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.

## Passport Services

70. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the public information campaigns his Department is running to advise of the current backlog regarding passport applications; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that many are currently unaware of the significant backlog and that many are complaining that they are unable to contact the Passport Office; and his plans to update the current communications systems in place in the Passport Office. [27902/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Passport Service is currently in its peak season for passport demand with the vast majority of applications being received between February and August each year. So far this year, the Passport Service has received over 500,000 applications. Applications received in the first 5 months of this year have increased by over 8% compared with the same time period last year. The Passport Service is currently processing over 63,000 passport applications. These applications are going through the normal checking, processing and security stages. My Department has an extensive communication strategy to promote good practice amongst passport holders when planning to travel abroad. We regularly advise applicants of 3 golden rules: - to check the validity of the passports in advance of booking travel;

- to apply at least 6 weeks in advance of their travel plans; and

- for eligible adults renewing their passport to consider the Online Passport Renewal Service passport application online facility, which is a fast, secure way for adults renewing their passport.

We promote these and any other relevant messages through various means - the Passport Service website, social media platforms, press releases, posters and leaflets, video material, radio interviews with the Director or staff of the Passport Service and attendance at numerous promotional events.

Regularly updated information on current average turnaround times can be consulted my Department's website [www.dfa.ie/passport](http://www.dfa.ie/passport). Links to website information on turnaround time are regularly posted on the Passport Service's various social media channels. Information on available passport services; comprehensive guides to the various application processes and an online tracker that allows applicants to track the status of existing applications at any time can also be found on this website.

In addition, the Passport Service continues to work closely with Communications Unit of An Post to ensure that information on turnaround times disseminated by An Post staff is accurate and up-to-date.

The Passport Service makes every effort to respond to as many applicant queries as possible. In recent weeks, the Passport Service has allocated additional resources to the existing Communications Unit. The Communications Unit is a dedicated customer service team that processes applicant queries received via its phone, email and webchat communication channels. Measures take to improve responsiveness include the assignment of TCOs and the redeployment of experienced staff from across the Department to this unit and the use of targeted overtime.

My Department will continue to work hard to promote important messages relating to passports. I am satisfied that the promotional strategies currently used are the most cost-effective way to reach a wide audience. I am grateful to Deputies for their continued assistance in advising constituents to submit their application in good time before their planned travel date and to

consult the Passport Service's webpage on my Department's website before applying.

### **Passport Services**

71. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the staffing levels dealing with passports has increased in the past two years to deal with the high demand. [27896/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In 2017 the Passport Service issued over 780,000 passports. This represents an increase of over 6% compared to 2016 when over 730,000 passports were issued. Over 500,000 passport applications have been received by the Passport Service so far this year. Applications received in the first 5 months of this year have increased by over 8% compared with the same time period last year. The Passport Service closely monitors the volume of applications on an ongoing basis to ensure that resources are available to meet demand. Among the measures taken by the Passport Service to facilitate the management of overall demand and seasonal applications increases are: the recruitment of additional staff; targeted overtime; reorganization of production processes and administrative arrangements and the continuous implementation of service improvements through the Passport Reform Programme.

With particular reference to staff, additional staff have been employed by the Passport Service both on a permanent basis to manage overall demand and on a temporary basis to manage seasonal demand.

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 and 268 at the same point in 2016. This year, since these figures were released, over 30 additional permanent staff have started with the Passport Service.

The Passport Service received sanction this year for 220 Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs) for appointment 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.

### **Brexit Issues**

72. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has concerns regarding the discussions on the slow progress in the British Houses of Parliament on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill 2017-19. [27697/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill 2017-2019 has been under consideration from the British Houses of Parliament since July 2017. It is a significant element of the UK's legislative preparation in advance of its withdrawal from the European Union. While this is first and foremost a domestic matter for the UK, it is very much in Ireland's interests that the necessary preparations proceed in the UK in a manner that will ensure that the UK's withdrawal from the EU is orderly. The parliamentary process in regard to the Bill was completed last week and on 20 June Royal Assent was sought. A number of related Bills remain under consideration in the Houses of Parliament, or await introduction. The House of Commons will have to approve the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement, once completed.



My officials, in particular in our Embassy in London, are continuing to monitor developments with regard to the UK's legislative process related to its withdrawal from the EU.

### **Election Monitoring Missions**

73. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has made representations to the Chinese Government in relation to the ongoing attacks on democratic rights in Hong Kong which include the prosecution of opposition members of the Legislative Council, the banning of candidates in elections, prosecution of pro-democracy protesters and the preparation of repressive national security legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28027/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government is closely following the political developments in Hong Kong, and I had an opportunity to discuss these issues directly with Chief Executive Carrie Lam during my visit to Hong Kong on 12 March. Ireland fully supports the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle, which provides the basis for the high degree of autonomy which Hong Kong enjoys. The Basic Law provides the basis for the independent judiciary, rule of law, democratic separation of powers, and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, which have been central to Hong Kong's standing as an open society and an international business centre. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region: Annual Report 2017, which was submitted to the European Parliament and Council by HRVP Mogherini and the European Commission, reflected the EU's position that despite a number of challenges, judicial independence and respect for the rule of law have overall been maintained in Hong Kong. The EU has nevertheless issued statements expressing concerns about developments in Hong Kong on a number of occasions through local or spokesperson's statements, including on the decision to bar Agnes Chow from running for a Legislative Council by-election in January 2018.

Along with our EU partners, Ireland fully supports the upholding of the framework of the Basic Law and the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle and will continue to call for its full implementation. We will continue to stress the importance of delivering electoral reform in a manner that is democratic, fair, open and transparent.

*Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 54.*

### **Northern Ireland**

75. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of discussions he has had with the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland regarding the way in which legacy issues in Northern Ireland are to be dealt with. [27698/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Dealing with outstanding issues relating to the legacy of the Troubles is of the utmost importance to the Government. The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to building on the progress made to establish the comprehensive institutional framework for dealing with the past that is provided for under the 2014 Stormont House Agreement. Victims and survivors have had to wait for far too long for a suitable and effective system in Northern Ireland to deal with the legacy of the Troubles. Over the last 12 months, I have engaged extensively with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and with all of the political parties to support a way forward on the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement legacy framework. Secretary of State Bradley and I are agreed on the imperative of now moving ahead with the establishment of the

Stormont House Agreement legacy framework. On 11 May, I welcomed the launch of a public consultation by the British Government on their draft legislation to establish the legacy bodies provided for in the Stormont House Agreement. This is an important step in the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement, the full implementation of which will help to provide families with a means of accessing whatever truth and justice is possible in their case and will be an important step towards achieving a truly reconciled society in Northern Ireland.

While this consultation is about UK legislation to establish the institutions, legislation will also be required in this jurisdiction to provide for cooperation with the Stormont House Agreement legacy bodies. The drafting of legislative proposals for consideration by the Government and Oireachtas is advancing, led by my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Regarding legacy inquests in Northern Ireland, I have consistently emphasised in my discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and with the political parties the need to ensure proper resourcing of these inquests, and I will continue to raise this matter with the Secretary of State. I have also urged all those with responsibilities in relation to legacy inquests to move forward as quickly as possible with the implementation of the proposals made by the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland in this regard.

The Government remains determined to see progress on the establishment of the Stormont House Agreement institutions, on legacy inquests in Northern Ireland and on other outstanding legacy issues, including the three all-Party Motions adopted by this House on the Dublin and Monaghan bombings.

Progress on these issues is crucial in order to meet the legitimate needs and expectations of victims and survivors and to contribute to broader societal reconciliation as an integral part of the Peace Process.

### Human Rights Cases

76. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will voice concerns at EU and international level to request the government of Honduras to release all political prisoners and to demonstrate a commitment to ensure the safety and human rights of those detained for exercising their right to peaceful protest. [28007/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am aware of the difficult situation which human rights defenders continue to face in Honduras. The loss of life and violence which has occurred since elections took place in Honduras in November 2017 is particularly worrying. Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are the cornerstones of any functioning democracy and those rights must be guaranteed. While Ireland does not have diplomatic representation in Honduras, officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade do raise issues relating to human rights in Honduras both at EU and UN level. Officials also engage with the European External Action Service through its EU delegation in Tegucigalpa and meet regularly with human rights defenders and civil society organisations active in Honduras.

Most recently, officials met in April with representatives of Trócaire, the Latin America Solidarity Committee and a Honduran NGO, the *Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice*, to hear first-hand accounts of the challenges which are being faced on a daily basis by those working directly on these issues .

These different interactions play an important part in shaping our insight into the challenging conditions faced by human rights defenders on the ground in Honduras and inform our

interventions on the matter at international level.

Honduras was last reviewed under the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review mechanism in May 2015. Ireland intervened on that occasion to express its concern at the climate of violence and insecurity in which human rights defenders operate in Honduras, and asked that adequate financial and human resources be allocated by the Honduran authorities to ensure the implementation of legislation protecting human rights defenders and journalists.

I can assure the Deputy that, in keeping with Ireland's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, we will continue to closely monitor developments in Honduras in the period ahead and will stay in touch with our various contacts.

I can also assure the Deputy that we will continue to raise concerns regarding threats to the work of human rights defenders in discussions on Honduras at both EU and international level, as necessary.

### **British-Irish Council**

77. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the British-Irish Council meeting on 22 June 2018. [28273/18]

78. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he had a bilateral meeting with Ms. Nicola Sturgeon while attending the British-Irish Council meeting; and if so, the issues that were discussed. [28274/18]

80. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach the issues discussed at the recent British-Irish Council; and the outcome of such discussions. [28328/18]

81. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach if he discussed with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at the recent British-Irish Council meeting the need to have the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly restored. [28329/18]

**The Taoiseach:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 77, 78, 80 and 81 together.

I attended the 30th British Irish Council (BIC) Summit in Guernsey on Friday 22 June, hosted by Chief Minister Gavin St. Pier. I was accompanied by Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Eoghan Murphy TD.

The discussion at the summit covered key political developments for Administrations since the last summit in November. The discussion focused largely on the implications of Brexit, particularly for relationships across the islands. The Council also discussed the current political situation in Northern Ireland and I reiterated my regret that Northern Ireland, until the Executive is restored, remains without political representation in this important forum.

The Council also endorsed plans for a future programme of work proposed by the Environment Ministers and agreed to a new area of work on social enterprises.

Minister Murphy took part in a thematic discussion on the issues that collectively impact the marine environment of these islands.

David Lidington MP, Cabinet Office Minister, and Karen Bradley MP, SOSNI, attended the summit meeting along with Heads of Administration from Scotland, Wales and the Channel Islands. I took the opportunity to have bilateral discussions with First Minister Carwyn Jones and First Minister Nicola Sturgeon; in both meetings we exchanged views on issues of mutual

interest and continued co-operation with discussions focusing mainly on Brexit and its impacts on business and citizens and on developments in Westminster and Brussels.

I also held brief discussions with David Lidington and Karen Bradley on Brexit and on the absence of an agreement between the parties on re-establishing the Northern Ireland Executive. I underlined the importance of the restoration of the institutions in the context of full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, and undertook to continue to work with the British government to support the northern parties to achieve this outcome.

### **Cabinet Committee Meetings**

79. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach when the last Cabinet committee on Brexit was held. [28276/18]

**The Taoiseach:** Cabinet Committee C assists the Government in its ongoing consideration of Brexit. It also covers other EU and international issues and supports my participation as a member of the European Council. It last met on Thursday 21 June, in advance of the European Council on 28/29 June.

Given their significance, matters relating to Brexit and other EU issues are frequently discussed by the full Cabinet. I also meet regularly with Ministers to focus on particular issues, including those relating to the European Union and Brexit, with a view to seeing how Government can best support delivery of priorities and commitments.

Preparation for Brexit at official level in regard to the negotiations and in preparing for the potential consequences of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, is intensive, with a range of inter-departmental and senior official groups meeting very regularly.

*Questions Nos. 80 and 81 answered with Question No. 77.*

### **Electric Vehicles**

82. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Taoiseach if e-car charging points are provided at his Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations. [28402/18]

**The Taoiseach:** My Department is located in one building - Government Buildings on Merrion Street - which is managed by the Office of Public Works. There are no e-car charging points provided in Government Buildings. No property is owned, part-owned or under the control of my Department.

### **Overseas Missions**

83. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the military exercises that Irish troops have been involved in in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28119/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible to enable the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service to carry out their roles as assigned by the Government. Participation in military

exercises enhances capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements both at home and overseas.

The Defence Forces have participated in the following military exercises in 2018:

### **Overseas Military Exercises**

- In January 2018 the Naval Service participated in a Passing exercise with the Netherlands Naval Service designed to enhance and maintain maritime skills, core competencies and interoperability between Naval Services.

- The Defence Forces participated in Exercise Viking in April 2018. This was a multinational and multidimensional civil-military exercise facilitated by the Swedish Armed Forces and Folke Bernadotte Academy.

- The Combined Joint European Exercise (CJEX) was conducted in May 2018. This multinational exercise took place in Portugal, the Netherlands and at various locations in Ireland.

- Exercise Arduous Serpent was conducted in the UK in June 2018. This multinational medical exercise involved the participation of fourteen Defence Forces personnel.

### **Domestic Military Exercises**

- A Mission Readiness Exercise for UNDOF was completed in March 2018 and for UNFIL in April 2018.

- A Company Deliberate Attack exercise was conducted in May 2018.

- An Aid to The Civil Power (ATCP) Exercise was also conducted in May 2018. It featured a Company Group being exercised in conventional tactics in a variety of scenarios. This exercise transitioned to an ATCP Exercise with An Garda Síochána at Knock Airport where Defence Forces personnel were exercised in Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear defence (CBRN), Army/Garda Checkpoints and also included a cordon of Knock Airport.

- A Crowd Riot Control (CRC) exercise, followed by a Peace Support Operation (PSO) exercise leading to a Fighting in Built Up Areas (FIBUA) exercise, was conducted in June 2018.

## **Electric Vehicles**

84. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if e-car charging points are provided at his Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28392/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** There are currently no e-car charging points provided at any of my Department's locations. However, the options and benefits of providing such a facility is currently under consideration.

## **Brexit Issues**

85. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his departmental officials' file in scenario planning for Brexit. [28275/18]

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

ordination of the whole-of-Government response to Brexit is being taken forward through the cross-Departmental coordination structures chaired by my Department. Contingency planning for a no-deal or worst-case outcome, bringing together the detailed work being undertaken by individual Ministers and their Departments on issues within their policy remit, is now well advanced. Its focus is on the immediate economic, regulatory and operational challenges which would result from such an outcome. It assumes a trading relationship based on the default WTO rules, but also examines the possible effects on many other areas of concern. This work is therefore providing baseline scenarios for the impact of Brexit across all sectors, which can then be adapted as appropriate in light of developments in the EU-UK negotiations, including in regard to transition arrangements and the future relationship. This approach is also enabling the modelling of potential responses under different scenarios, such as one where a withdrawal agreement is concluded and where a Free Trade Agreement is the basis for the future relationship between the EU and the UK.

It also takes account of the planning being undertaken at EU level by the Commission Preparedness Unit, which is issuing information notes aimed at different business sectors and examining legislative actions which may be needed at EU level.

However, the Government is already acting in order to get Ireland Brexit ready. Dedicated measures were announced in Budget 2018, including a new €300m Brexit Loan Scheme for Business and a €25m Brexit Response Loan Scheme for the agri-food sector. Capital expenditure of €116bn over the coming decade will also allow the State and its agencies to properly plan major infrastructure projects while ensuring that communities and businesses can plan ahead. There was also increased funding provided to my Department in Budget 2018 for the opening of six new diplomatic missions. A further seven new Missions will be opened as part of the next phase of expanding Ireland's global footprint. These thirteen new Missions will be located in Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, North America, and Oceania and will contribute to helping our exporters find new markets.

Our Government's enterprise agencies continue to work with companies, helping them to deal with Brexit – making them more competitive, diversifying market exposure, and up-skilling teams. In total 34 reports analyzing the effects of Brexit across a broad range of sectors and in some cases setting out responses have been published to date by Government Departments. All these reports are available on a dedicated Brexit webpage on my Department's website: <https://www.dfa.ie/brexit/>

Longer-term economic strategies will also be critically important in addressing the challenges of Brexit, notably Ireland 2040 –the National Development Plan. The Enterprise Strategy 2025 Renewed was recently launched and we are in active discussions with the European Investment Bank on a potential increase in investment in the country.

### **Ministerial Correspondence**

86. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has written to the Secretary of State of the United States of America to outline Ireland's concerns in relation to the recent policy to remove children from their parents that are immigrants. [27690/18]

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

I was pleased to see that, following the grave concerns which were expressed both domestically and internationally about the use of this policy, President Trump signed an Executive Order on the afternoon of June 20th, Washington DC 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 inhumane and unwarranted practice and the priority now must be reuniting all of the affected children with their parents, without delay.

### **UN Security Council**

87. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of Ireland's efforts to obtain a seat at the UN Security Council. [27691/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland is seeking election to a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the 2021-2022 term. We are one of three candidates for the two available seats in the Western Europe and Others Group regional group. The other two candidates are Canada and Norway which, like Ireland, have strong records of engagement at the UN. In order to be elected to the Security Council, Ireland will need to obtain the support of two-thirds of the membership of the United Nations General Assembly – approximately 129 votes of the 193 Member States – at the election that will take place in June 2020. Our candidature was first announced in 2005 and the campaign has been building since then under successive Governments. I am taking every opportunity to raise our candidature with representatives of Member States and to press the value of Ireland playing our role on the Council. The official launch of Ireland's campaign for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council will take place at UN Headquarters in New York on 2 July. I will join the Taoiseach at this event.

Although Ireland has been making its case for election for some time already, the official launch is an important point in a Security Council election campaign and marks the beginning of an even more intensive period of lobbying. I, along with all my Cabinet colleagues, will be intensifying efforts to make Ireland's case. This political engagement is being supported by my Department's diplomatic personnel.

In addition to the direct lobbying of Member State representatives by members of the Government, Irish diplomats and others, an important dimension of a Security Council election campaign is how a candidature is communicated. Campaign messaging will focus on Ireland's contribution to the UN since we joined in 1955. It will aim to contextualise Ireland's UN engagement as part of how Ireland sees itself in the world – a global island which wants to share our culture and values.

If Ireland were to be elected to a non-permanent seat on the Security Council our fundamental approach to any agenda item would be to advocate for the core values of our foreign policy – peace and security, justice, equality and sustainability.

### **State Visits**

88. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans for the visit of Prince Harry to Dublin in July 2018. [27696/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I look forward to welcoming the Duke and Duchess of Sussex to Ireland on 10th and 11th July this year, for what will be their first official trip overseas. Although the finer details of the trip remain to be finalised, the Royal couple's programme will encompass visits to Croke Park, Trinity College, DogPatch Labs, the Famine Memorial, and EPIC - the Irish Emigration Museum, all of which will allow them to learn about Ireland's rich history and culture. During their visit they will have meetings with the President and the Taoiseach. They will also have an opportunity to engage with members of the public, and people from across many areas of Irish life and culture and meet with those young leaders who will shape the future of this country. Their Royal Highnesses' visit to Ireland will highlight the continued partnership and friendship between the two countries, as well as our shared history and heritage. It builds upon Queen Elizabeth's visit to Ireland in 2011 and President Higgins' reciprocal visit in 2014, both of which augmented the historic and ongoing process of engagement between our countries and peoples.

Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall have visited Ireland four times in as many years and I had the pleasure of welcoming them to Kerry and my home county of Cork during their most recent visit two weeks ago. I am delighted to now also welcome the next generation of the Royal family as we continue to work together to enhance the British-Irish relationship.

### **Brexit Negotiations**

89. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the implications of the decision to defer the need for agreement on the Brexit backstop to the EU Council meeting in October 2018 on preparations to ensure the protection of cross-Border workers' rights post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22628/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The EU's objective remains that the full legal text of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement, as well as a detailed political declaration on the framework for the future relationship, be agreed by the October meeting of the European Council. With a view to achieving this goal, negotiations have been continuing between the EU and the UK to close the remaining gaps on the draft Withdrawal Agreement, including through detailed discussions on the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. The draft Protocol is an integral part of the Withdrawal Agreement and addresses issues unique to the island of Ireland. Agreement has already been reached between EU and UK negotiators regarding the Common Travel Area in Article 2, which will allow free



movement of Irish and UK citizens between Ireland and the UK to continue.

Agreement has also been reached at negotiator level on Part II of the draft Withdrawal Agreement. This relates to Citizens' Rights and includes a chapter (Chapter 2) on protecting the rights of EU workers and self-employed persons, including frontier workers, currently in the UK. This will address the situation of non-Irish citizens.

Last week, the EU and UK negotiating teams published a Joint Statement, which set out the progress made since the March European Council. Disappointingly, the progress reported on the Protocol falls very far short of the EU's, and the Government's, expectations.

This is a message the Taoiseach conveyed very clearly to President Juncker when they met last week and the Members of this House also had the opportunity to raise their concerns with President Juncker later that same day.

I welcome that, in response, President Juncker reiterated the EU's support for Ireland, and that the Protocol, including the backstop, is an integral and indispensable part of the Withdrawal Agreement. This is fully consistent with the strong message of solidarity I received from my EU counterparts, as well as Michel Barnier, when I met with them in Luxembourg earlier this week.

On Friday, the Taoiseach will meet with his EU27 counterparts to take stock of developments in the negotiations and discuss the way forward. Ireland will seek to ensure that the EU sends a clear message to the UK that it must respect the commitments it has made and that, in the absence of agreement on a backstop, it will not be possible to finalise the Withdrawal Agreement as a whole, including the transition arrangements.

The overriding priority now is to proceed in the manner that is most likely to achieve agreement on all withdrawal issues, including the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. While this will ultimately be a matter for the European Council (Article 50) EU leaders on Friday, the widespread view, which I share, is that stalling the negotiating process would not serve this aim and that talks should intensify with a view to making the necessary progress.

## **Diplomatic Representation**

90. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to establish an embassy or a consulate in Kuwait; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28267/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Embassy of Ireland in Abu Dhabi is accredited on a non-residential basis to Kuwait. Ireland has a strong and positive relationship with Kuwait. The Ambassador of Ireland in Abu Dhabi travels regularly to Kuwait in support of our broad policy objectives, including the development of political relations, trade relations and supporting the needs of Irish businesses operating or hoping to operate there. With the launch of 'Global Ireland: Ireland's Global Footprint to 2025', the Government is committed to doubling the scope and impact of Ireland's global footprint in the period ahead, while also continuously reviewing the scale of Ireland's overseas network. In considering expanding our diplomatic representation overseas, a range of factors is taken into account including our national political, economic and trade priorities, as well as the availability of resources. The Government is conscious of the factors that might warrant the opening of a resident diplomatic mission in Kuwait, as in a number of other countries. This will be taken fully into account in ongoing work on the 'Global Ireland' initiative.

## Trade Relations

91. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of Ireland-Cuba relations; the efforts being made to increase engagement and trade with the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28269/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The bilateral relationship between Ireland and Cuba has been a historically warm one and the hugely successful visit of President Higgins to Cuba in February 2017 marked a new high point in the relationship. A Memorandum of Cooperation between Ireland and Cuba was signed in the sidelines of that visit and it provides a solid foundation upon which to expand our relations with Cuba. The primary aim of the memorandum is to open channels of dialogue and cooperation between Ireland and Cuba across various areas of interest, particularly in trade and cultural engagement.

The Agreement commits both countries to promoting cooperation in economic, commercial, industrial, agricultural, academic, cultural, scientific and tourism relations. Since the signing of the agreement, officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in conjunction with other Government departments and State agencies, have continued to work on growing the relationship across that whole range of areas.

The trade figures speak for themselves in terms of the growth of that aspect of the relationship.

Total bilateral trade in goods with Cuba has increased significantly in recent years, including by 43% in 2016. Goods trade in 2017 amounted to the more modest sum of €2.2 million, and Cuba is now Ireland's 23rd largest goods trading partner in Latin America. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will continue to support growth in this area.

Furthermore, the recently announced '*Global Ireland – Ireland's Global Footprint to 2025*', the Government's initiative to double the scope and impact of Ireland's global footprint in the period to 2025, is a clear indication of our intention to work more closely and intensely with partners across the globe.

This initiative identifies Latin America and Caribbean as a key region for Ireland to expand its influence, trade, and visibility, and the development of our relationship with Cuba will be an important part of this work.

The forthcoming whole-of-government strategy for the Americas and the Caribbean will also reflect the priority which the Government attaches to developing relationships with that part of the world.

## Death Penalty

92. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the issue of countries that apply the death penalty has been discussed at EU Foreign Affairs Council meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28270/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The EU opposes the death penalty in all circumstances and considers that the death penalty constitutes a serious violation of human rights and human dignity. Abolition of the death penalty is a prerequisite to membership of the EU which has long committed to campaign against its use worldwide with a view to its universal abolition, as reaffirmed in the *EU Human Rights and*

*Democracy Action Plan 2015 – 2019.*

Within the framework of the Action Plan, the Foreign Affairs Council adopts Conclusions each year agreeing an annual Strategic Work Plan setting out the EU's human rights priorities at the United Nations.

The most recent Work Plan, adopted by the Council on 26 February 2018, committed the EU to continue to support the work of the UN towards global abolition of the death penalty in 2018, particularly at the UN Human Rights Council and the 73rd meeting of the UN General Assembly in November 2018. The Conclusions recommended that countries who have abolished the death penalty should enshrine this protection in their Constitutions and consider ratification of the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The EU also called on countries where the death penalty is still in use to work towards its progressive abolition. More recently, on 28 May 2018, the Council adopted the EU's "*Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World in 2017*", which confirmed that throughout 2017, the EU continued to voice its strong opposition to the death penalty as a cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment which violates the right to life, while not deterring crime more effectively than imprisonment.

### Consular Services Provision

93. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if an honorary consul to the island of Ibiza will be appointed in view of the increasing number of visitors from here that travel there on holiday that may require consular assistance during their visit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28287/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Spain is a hugely popular destination for Irish holiday-makers and it is a priority focus in terms of the consular work of my Department. In addition to the Embassy of Ireland in Madrid, and operating under the supervision of the Ambassador there, we currently have a network of ten Honorary Consulates across Spain providing services and support to Irish citizens. These are located in Malaga, Barcelona, Bilbao, Galicia, Alicante, Mallorca, Seville, Gran Canaria, Lanzarote and Tenerife. The scale of this representation allows the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to provide timely and high-quality consular assistance and services to Irish citizens over a wide geographic area both on the peninsula and throughout the Balearic and Canary islands. Our Honorary Consul in Mallorca has jurisdiction for the Balearic Islands, including Ibiza, and regularly provides consular assistance to Irish citizens who require advice or encounter difficulties while visiting Ibiza.

My Department keeps the network of Honorary Consuls under constant and ongoing review and, in the context of making recommendations for new appointments, the primary focus is on the welfare and interests of Irish citizens.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department will continue to monitor the situation in relation to Ibiza. If the deputy has any specific concerns or queries about any individual cases of citizens requiring assistance, I would invite him to make contact with my Department's Consular Assistance team.

As we move into the peak holiday season, I would also take this opportunity to urge all Deputies to do everything they can to support my Department's efforts to promote safe travel overseas for members of the public this summer. We are encouraging anyone going on a foreign holiday to familiarise themselves with our Travel Advice for their chosen destination; to

download and use our free smartphone app TravelWise; to ensure that they have appropriate travel and medical insurance; and, for those travelling in Europe, that they make sure to obtain and carry a European Health Insurance Card, EGIC. I would also encourage all Irish passport-holders to apply for and carry a Passport Card.

### **Undocumented Irish in the USA**

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which his Department continues to monitor the situation in respect of the undocumented Irish in the US with particular reference to the need to ensure their safety from exploitation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28338/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** First of all, I have to say that I am not aware of any particular incidences of Irish citizens being exploited due to their undocumented status but I would ask the Deputy to furnish me with the details of any such incidences for follow-up. As regards the broader question of relief for the undocumented Irish living in the US, the Government has consistently pursued two key objectives with regard to supporting Irish communities in the United States: increased pathways for legal migration by Irish citizens to the US and relief for the plight of undocumented Irish citizens living in the US. In that regard, the Taoiseach discussed the issue with President Trump in the Oval Office last March and also in his meetings on Capitol Hill during this year's St. Patrick's Day visit.

In addition to the exchanges over the St. Patrick's Day period, I had previously raised the issue with then-Secretary of State Tillerson when I visited Washington DC in February, and with senior Congressional figures.

The Government's Special Envoy to the United States Congress on the Undocumented, Deputy John Deasy, has also been very active on the issue, and is due to travel to Washington D.C. again shortly for meetings with key contacts.

In addition, our Embassy in Washington DC continues to engage on an ongoing basis with the Administration and with contacts on Capitol Hill.

The Embassy, as well as our six Consulates across the United States, also works very closely with Irish immigration centres which support the needs of Irish citizens in the United States. Our Ambassador in Washington hosted a meeting last month with representatives of the Coalition of Irish Immigration Centers at the Embassy in Washington, DC, where there was a very good exchange of views on the challenges facing Irish immigrants in the US, both documented and undocumented, and on the prospects for relief for the undocumented Irish.

Through these many high-level contacts and discussions, the Government has been exploring a number of different options, including the possibility of a reciprocal agreement covering the undocumented Irish in the US, on the one hand, and US citizens looking to move to Ireland, on the other.

However, this remains a very challenging issue and I do not want to raise expectations unduly. Immigration reform has been a sensitive and indeed divisive issue within the US political system for decades, with pronounced disagreement, even within the same political parties, on the best way to deal with an issue which directly affects over 11 million people. The recent controversy around the separation of undocumented children from their parents served to illustrate how divisive an issue this has become and how challenging it will be for us to find a solution for the undocumented Irish.

That said, I can assure the House that the Government, its Special Envoy and our Embassy in Washington DC are continuing to give top priority to this issue, mindful of its importance to the thousands of undocumented and to their families in Ireland, and that we will spare no effort in seeking a solution.

### **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 Ciarán 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	

### Overseas Development Aid

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he and his colleagues in the EU and UN continue to focus on locations for the distribution of Irish aid with particular reference to the need to ensure that aid goes to those for whom it is intended with minimum delay and maximum impact; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28344/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. Funding is kept under regular review by the Department, to ensure that it is well targeted and channelled through partners which can contribute most effectively to delivering the priorities of our foreign policy and our international development policy, as set out in the Global Island and in One World, One Future, and to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. The recently launched Global Ireland: Ireland's Global Footprint to 2025, commits Government to publishing a White Paper on Ireland's international development and to making progress towards the United Nations target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) in Official Development Assistance by 2030. Through the generous support of Irish taxpayers, and in close collaboration with the UN, EU and other partners, this funding is making a difference in alleviating the suffering caused by humanitarian crises and hunger, and supporting improvements in access to health, education, agriculture and social protection services for some of the world's most vulnerable and marginalised people. During my recent visits to Africa and other locations,

I witnessed at first hand the impact of Ireland's international development programmes across these priority areas, ensuring on behalf of the Irish people that our aid programme is delivering results for those it is intended.

The Government's plan to double Ireland's worldwide scope and impact by 2025 will build on our strengths in current priority locations, including but not exclusively in sub Saharan Africa. This plan opens potential to expand our development cooperation in West Africa and to strengthen our relationship with Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The latter have been significantly impacted by climate change. Our ambition in the White Paper on international development will be to continue to lead the achievement of collective global aspirations for a better world expressed in the SDGs. We also aim to strengthen our collaboration with EU, UN, and other partners.

My Department is committed to ensuring that Irish assistance is delivered effectively and efficiently to those most in need. Our Embassy network, especially in Sub Saharan Africa and other locations such as Vietnam and Palestine, continue to play a key role in the planning, management and oversight of all Ireland's partners – including the EU and UN - on the ground.

### **Overseas Development Aid Oversight**

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which aid is distributed bilaterally or multilaterally to various locations throughout the globe; if he remains satisfied that Irish aid does not find its way to locations in which other jurisdictions only provide aid for trade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28345/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas assistance programme, and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. Ireland's assistance programme is sharply focused on delivering our goals of reducing poverty and hunger, promoting inclusive and sustainable growth and building more equitable and better systems of governance. My Department provides development assistance to over eighty of the world's least developed countries, supporting their development needs and responding to emergencies and protracted crises with humanitarian assistance. We work through a wide range of partners and channels, including partner government systems, Irish and international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and missionary organisations, and UN and other multilateral agencies and organisations.

Funding for multilateral organisations is kept under regular review by my Department, to ensure that it is targeted effectively, and channeled through partners who can contribute most effectively to delivering agreed priorities. In this way, Ireland is playing a strong role in supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Multilateral partnerships allow us to reach the poorest and most fragile countries and regions in the world, and deliver real results on the ground: also, through leveraging these partnerships we able to amplify Ireland's advocacy on our priority issues.

Sub-Saharan Africa is our priority region, where we focus in particular on a number of countries. This engagement is at strategic level, in addition to support for their long-term development. These countries are Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Sierra Leone. Smaller more focused programs are delivered in countries and territories such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, Liberia and Kenya. We also have programmes in Vietnam and Palestine.

The total Bilateral ODA provided by my Department to ODA eligible countries in 2016 was €386 million, 53% of the total amount of Irish ODA. The total Multilateral ODA in 2016 was €337 million, 47% of the total. Some of this was channeled through other Departments. The 2017 figures are being finalised. The full list of ODA eligible countries is published annually by the OECD Development Assistance Committee.

A key principle is that Ireland's official aid should remain untied - that is, not conditional on acquiring goods and services from Ireland. This is regularly remarked upon by the OECD Development Assistance Committee in their assessments of Ireland's international cooperation.

### **Disaster Response**

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps that can be taken to ensure that the victims of various natural disasters, whether from storm, earthquake or disease, continue to receive international aid commensurate to their situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28346/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** Natural disasters can spark off a new crisis or worsen an existing one. According to the UN, in 2016 445 million people were affected by disasters linked to natural hazards worldwide including floods, storms, earthquakes and drought; 8,000 people directly lost their lives; and immediate economic losses from major disaster events were estimated at almost \$140 billion. Climate change, together with poverty and poor environmental management, means that an increasing number of countries, poor countries in particular, are becoming increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters.

A priority for Ireland in responding to humanitarian crises is ensuring that life-saving assistance reaches those most in need, as quickly as possible. Ireland works with our UN, EU, Red Cross and NGO partners to reach those in most urgent need of assistance when crises hit. For example, in response to the eruption of the Fuego Volcano in Guatemala on 3 June 2018, Ireland provided €75,000 to Plan International to assist with shelter for those affected. Similarly, in 2017, in response to flooding and mudslides in Sierra Leone, Ireland deployed emergency relief supplies via the Rapid Response Initiative to our partner NGOs to help people affected.

In addition, Ireland provides core support to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction worth €0.5m to help them build capacity in Ireland's key partner countries to prepare for and manage the impact of disasters.

Ireland remains committed to providing humanitarian assistance where it is needed most, working with partners who can ensure that such assistance is delivered in a coordinated and effective manner.

### **Disaster Response**

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the ten most sensitive recognised disaster areas globally to which the international community have promised or are delivering aid and which have received support as promised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28347/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** The scale and number of humanitarian crises globally continues to increase. The UN



estimates that 134.1 million people are now in need of urgent humanitarian assistance and protection, mainly as a result of conflict but also natural disaster. The annual Global Humanitarian Overview, published by the UN system last week details the current financial requirements to respond to humanitarian needs in 2018. It estimates that \$25.4 billion is needed this year to respond effectively to urgent humanitarian needs.

The ten largest appeals set out in this UN document are:

Country	Financial Requirements	% of appeal funded	People in Need
Syria	\$3.51 B	27.1%	13.1 M
Yemen	\$2.96 B	51.0%	22.2 M
South Sudan	\$1.72 B	39.1%	7.0 M
Democratic Republic of the Congo	\$1.68 B	17.8%	13.1 M
Ethiopia	\$1.62 B	14.6%	7.9 M
Somalia	\$1.54 B	33.1%	5.4 M
Nigeria	\$1.05 B	45.8%	7.7 M
Sudan	\$1.01 B	28.3%	7.1 M
Iraq	\$568.7 M	49.7%	8.7 M
Afghanistan	\$546.6 M	28.4%	5.5m

In 2017, despite some not insignificant shortfalls, the international community provided record levels of funding and humanitarian assistance, reaching tens of millions of people in need, more than ever before, saving millions of lives.

Ireland's humanitarian assistance prioritises the most vulnerable and hard to reach people at risk from, or experiencing, disasters and emergencies. Ireland provided humanitarian assistance to each of these top ten appeals in 2017, and plans to continue doing so in 2018. In total, Irish humanitarian funding amounted to some €180 million in 2017 and a similar level of assistance is envisaged in 2018.

Humanitarian crises worldwide are monitored, with decisions on funding informed by an assessment of need which prioritises the allocation of humanitarian resources.

In partnership with the UN, EU, Red Cross and NGOs, every day Ireland helps save lives and rebuild the livelihoods of those who have endured disaster and crisis. For example, in 2017, humanitarian funding to Irish NGOs helped to save and improve the lives of over 1.5 million people affected by emergencies in 28 countries.

Ireland will continue to closely monitor humanitarian need worldwide and provide its humanitarian assistance on the basis of need to ensure that assistance reaches those who need it most.

### Human Trafficking

101. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which the EU or UN continue to address the issues of trafficking throughout the globe with particular reference to women and children and the use of child soldiers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28348/18]

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

trafficking is abhorrent abuse of people, particularly those most vulnerable, and I condemn it in its entirety. The Government of Ireland recognises that trafficking in human beings undermines the fundamental principles of human rights law and that it can only be tackled through global cooperation, partnership and a victim centered approach. At EU level, human trafficking is prohibited by Article 5.3 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Human Rights. EU Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims was agreed in 2011 and has been transposed into domestic law by all EU Member States, including Ireland. Article 20 of the Directive outlines the role of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator who is responsible for improving coordination and coherence among EU institutions, EU agencies, Member States and international actors in addressing human trafficking. She is also responsible for developing existing and new EU policies to address human trafficking. In 2017, the EU adopted a new Communication to address human trafficking and committed to implement a new set of priorities, building on the 2012-2016 EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings. The Communication's cross cutting priorities aim to provide a stronger response to trafficking through coordinated and consolidated actions by relevant authorities and organisations. The two cross cutting priorities are: the establishment of a sound knowledge base – understanding the nature, scale and costs of trafficking is key to ensuring appropriate action; and supporting anti-trafficking priorities in the EU and non-EU countries.

At an international level, the United Nations continues to lead on combating human trafficking across the globe. The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children was the first international treaty aimed at comprehensively defining and addressing human trafficking and was ratified by Ireland in 2010. The Protocol has a threefold purpose: to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, paying particular attention to women and children; to protect and assist victims of trafficking; and to promote cooperation among States Parties in order to meet those objectives.

The Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2010. It includes concrete actions to prevent trafficking in persons, protect and assist victims, prosecute related crimes and strengthen partnerships among Governments, civil society organisations and the private sector, including the media. The Action Plan provided for the establishment of a United Nations voluntary trust fund for victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, managed by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

During the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2017, a high level meeting took place on 27 and 28 September to review progress on implementation of the Plan. The General Assembly adopted, by consensus, a political declaration aimed at combating human trafficking with member states, including Ireland, reaffirming their commitment to the Plan.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has also worked towards integrating a human rights based approach into the fight against human trafficking. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has developed Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking that aim to assist those involved in anti-trafficking to integrate a human rights based approach into their responses. The Human Rights Council also addresses human trafficking through resolutions that address the issue both directly and indirectly. For example, at the 37th session of the United National Human Rights Council in March of this year, the Council adopted a resolution on the rights of the child in humanitarian settings which specifically addressed issue of human trafficking of children. At the 35th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in June 2017, the Council adopted a resolution on the protection of human rights of migrants which addressed, *inter alia*, victims of human trafficking. Both resolutions were cosponsored by Ireland. At the 32nd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in June 2016, the Council adopted a resolution entitled Protecting Victims of Trafficking and People at Risk of Trafficking, Especially Women and Children

in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations, which was also cosponsored by Ireland.

Finally, among the special procedures of the Human Rights Council is the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, who is mandated to take action on violations committed against trafficked persons; undertake country visits; and to submit annual reports on the activities of the mandate. Ireland has supported the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, most recently in 2017 through co-sponsorship of a resolution extending the mandate of the office for a further three years.

### **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.

### **Western Balkans Issues**

104. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the EU can continue to provide a positive influence in the Western Balkans with a view to its stabilisation in the short, medium and long-term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28351/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The EU remains dedicated to supporting the European future of the Western Balkans region. In the Council Conclusions on Enlargement which were agreed on Tuesday 26th June, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to enlargement and stated that it continues to represent a strategic investment in peace, democracy, prosperity, security and stability in Europe. The Conclusions also stated that the EU is determined to strengthen and intensify its engagement at all levels to support the region's political, economic and social transformation, including through increased assistance, based on tangible progress on the rule of law, as well as on socio-economic reforms, by the Western Balkans. There is a recognition that this is not only a strategic investment in Europe's security and prosperity, but that it can also contribute greatly to the long term stability of formerly war-torn areas in that it helps create a political environment conducive to bilateral issues being resolved, as we have witnessed recently in the agreement between Athens and Skopje in regard to the name-issue. As a demonstration of the EU's commitment, the European Commission recently adopted a strategy for 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans'. In this Strategy, the Commission sets out clearly the actions that it will implement over in the short to medium term to boost the transformation efforts in the Western Balkans in areas of mutual interest. These actions are set out across six flagship initiatives which range from strengthening the rule of law, reinforcing cooperation on security and migration and expanding the EU Energy Union to the Western Balkans, to lowering roaming charges and rolling out broadband in the region. In addition, the Strategy underlines the need for the EU to be prepared to welcome new members on the condition they have met the rigorous criteria for doing so.

It should also be noted that the Commission proposal for the new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance fund (IPA III) for the 2021-2027 period, envisages a 13% increase (to €14.5 billion) compared to current funding, and also seeks to make this fund more strategic by clearly anchoring it in the context of the Western Balkans Strategy.

Over the longer-term, there is a recognition in the EU that enlargement is a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe based on common values and that a credible accession perspective is the key driver of transformation in the region and thus enhances our collective integration, security, prosperity and social well-being.

### **EU Issues**

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and

Trade the degree to which Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia continue to be positively supported by the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28352/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Eastern Partnership Initiative provides a framework for cooperation between the EU and six countries in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, including Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia. The aims of the Eastern Partnership are to promote peace and stability in the region and to enhance economic and political integration between the participating countries and the EU. The model of cooperation with each of the participating states has been tailored to meet their needs and priorities and those of the EU. At the fifth Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels in November 2017 a revised Eastern Partnership multilateral architecture was adopted to contribute to the goals of the partnership particularly by supporting the implementation of the "20 Deliverables for 2020" which sets the future priorities for the initiative. This roadmap identifies a range of short and long-term milestones aimed at developing a stronger economy, governance, connectivity and society to make tangible and pragmatic improvements to the lives of citizens in partner countries. The Eastern Partnership is viewed as an important tool for promoting peace and stability in the region, in the context of an unpredictable Russia and the conflict in Ukraine. While Ireland is aware of the wider geopolitical considerations at play in the region, we have sought to emphasise the importance of ensuring that the EU's values continue to guide our approach and that the Eastern Partnership continues to incentivise reform and progress.

The EU is committed to assisting Ukraine in delivering its ambitious and wide-ranging programme of reform and has provided unprecedented levels of support. This assistance includes loans, budget support, humanitarian aid, and technical assistance as well as important trade preferences, granted under the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement which came into force in 2016. In addition, the EU is helping to reform the civilian security sector through its Advisory Mission to Ukraine.

The EU continues to support efforts by the OSCE to secure full implementation of the Minsk peace agreements, which provide the basis for a comprehensive settlement of the four year conflict in eastern Ukraine. On a visit to Ukraine in March, EU High Representative Federica Mogherini reaffirmed the EU's unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and called on all parties to the conflict to support the vital work of international humanitarian organisations in meeting the needs of the local populations living in close proximity to the contact line as well as the large numbers of Internally Displaced Persons.

As with Ukraine, the EU remains committed to its political association and economic integration with Georgia and the successful implementation of the Association Agreement, including its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. The EU has praised Georgia's reform efforts while underlining the need to ensure sustainability of the changes which have already taken place including on democratic development and fundamental freedoms, on constitutional and parliamentary reform, and anti-corruption reforms.

The EU also fully supports Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. The appointment in November 2017 of a new EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, as well as the EU Monitoring Mission are visible and substantial signs of the Union's commitment to helping Georgia address its security challenges.

The European Union continues to have positive relations with Armenia, which receives considerable funding from the EU, with up to €170 million allocated for the period 2014-2017. This was focused on supporting private sector development and driving reforms in the areas of public administration and justice. In the margins of the 2017 Eastern Partnership Summit, Armenia signed a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with the EU which

facilitates political, economic and sectoral cooperation. By intensifying political dialogue and improving cooperation in a broad range of areas, the Agreement lays the foundations for more effective engagement with Armenia.

### **Trade Relations**

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he can positively influence the international situation now leading to a multiplicity of trade wars which will negatively affect persons particularly in smaller countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28353/18]

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which the international community remains alert to the dangers of trade wars which can result in severe hardship and starvation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28354/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 and 107 together.

The Government regards the question of possible disruptions to international trading relationships as a matter of concern and is working with its EU partners to promote Ireland's interests. The Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation has lead responsibility for international trade negotiations.

### **Electric Vehicles**

108. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if e-car charging points are provided at his Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28396/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** E-Car charging points are not provided at my Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations.

### **Tax Credits**

109. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to enable a retired person to claim a tax credit for their spouse that is not receiving a pension in their own right. [28097/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The State pension, including an increase for a qualifying adult dependent, is chargeable to income tax. Where an individual is entitled to the State pension and such pension is increased by virtue of that individual having a qualifying adult dependant, it remains one pension for tax purposes.

This position was not changed by Finance (No.2) Act 2013, which inserted Section 126(2B) into the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in order to re-affirm the position that any such increase is treated as the income of the person who qualifies for the pension. Entitlement to the State pension and any associated adult dependant allowance is based on PRSI contributions made by an individual and it is the choice of the individual pensioner whether to claim an increase for an adult dependant. The relevant income is therefore classed as that individual's income solely,

notwithstanding the fact that the dependant element of the pension may be paid directly to the qualifying dependant.

With regard to the taxation of the State pension in general, I would note that all social welfare payments are exempt from USC. Furthermore, a pensioner with an adult dependent that is solely in receipt of the State Contributory Pension, payable at the maximum rate, would in fact have no liability to income tax or USC at all, as the available income tax credits, including the Age Credit available to individuals aged 65 and over, would be sufficient to shelter the income from taxation.

There are therefore no plans to change this position. I would however note that the changes to the income tax system included in Budget 2018 mean that individuals who paid income tax and/or USC in 2017 will see a reduction in their tax bill in 2018 where incomes are equal. This is the fourth Budget in succession in which income tax reductions have been introduced, focussed particularly on low to middle-income earners.

### **Fiscal Policy**

110. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a proposal. [28111/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Deputy is asking what impact an increase in exchequer capital expenditure – in addition to existing National Development Plan (NDP) commitments - of c. €1.2 billion, €0.96 billion and €1.02 billion would have on fiscal space in 2019-2021 respectively.

Compared with the figures in Table 3 of the 2018 Summer Economic Statement, the increases would use fiscal space on the order of an additional c. €300 million in 2019, €540.3 million in 2020 and €794.8 million in 2021.

While the fiscal rules would be permit such additional spending, the additional money would have to be raised from an increase in taxation or borrowing, increasing the deficit.

The fiscal rules alone are not sufficient to ensure sensible fiscal policy – increasing borrowing as our economy approaches full employment would be clearly inappropriate. Sound budgetary policy respects the rules but must be guided by prudent judgement to avoid repeating the pro-cyclical mistakes of the past. The Government is committed to a budgetary policy that reduces, rather than increases, borrowing and supports steady and sustainable improvements in living standards.

### **Insurance Costs**

111. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address matters raised by an organisation (details supplied); the steps he is taking to ensure greater urgency to the work being carried out by the Cost of Insurance Working Group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28144/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I welcome the proactive role that the Alliance for Insurance Reform is taking in regard to the issue of the cost of insurance, particularly for businesses. I can assure the Deputy that my Department and I are both very conscious of the impact that the volatility in insurance prices in the last few years has had on consumers and businesses and am well aware of the issues raised by the Alliance. The Alliance has

featured prominently in the media and put its viewpoints across at Joint Oireachtas Committee appearances, while its members have submitted a large number of representations to the Department, both directly and through TDs and Senators. Moreover, the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Mr. Michael D'Arcy TD, has formally met with the Alliance, and relevant issues were discussed to some level of detail.

With regard to the “10 asks” of the Alliance in particular, most of the issues which have been raised by it were considered in detail by the Cost of Insurance Working Group in the course of its work to produce its two reports namely, the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance and the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. A number of these issues are in the process of being implemented, such as amending section 8 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 and establishing a procedure to ensure exaggerated and misleading claims are referred to the Gardaí for investigation and prosecution, if appropriate. There are other recommendations however, such as changing the approach to calculating the Book of Quantum, where we have clearly indicated to the Alliance that there are constitutional issues which need to be first considered, thus explaining why we have referred the matter to the Law Reform Commission for examination.

I have also pointed out to the Alliance that reinstating the “Blue Book” is a matter for the Central Bank of Ireland and as Minister, this is not an issue I have any influence over. Notwithstanding this, my Department remains open to maintaining constructive engagement with the Alliance on its key “asks”.

Finally, it is important that the Cost of Insurance Working Group continues to focus on implementing the recommendations of the two Reports as soon as possible so we can see what impact the completion of all the actions have on the cost of insurance before looking to introduce more changes. As I have stated previously, I believe that the cumulative effects of the implementation of all the recommendations should include increased stability in the pricing of insurance for consumers and businesses and improved availability of insurance generally.

### **Personal Injury Claims**

112. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to regulate claims harvesting companies in the area of personal injuries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28148/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Allegations of companies engaging in “claims harvesting” practices were brought up during the consultation process for the Cost of Insurance Working Group’s Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. The Working Group in turn put some of the points raised to the Law Society of Ireland. The Law Society stated that it actively enforces the relevant regulations in this area, such as the Solicitors (Advertising) Regulations 2002, which prohibit solicitors’ advertisements offering inducements to make personal injuries claims, and Section 62 of the Solicitors Act 1954, which prohibits solicitors from rewarding or agreeing to reward unqualified persons for the introduction of legal business. For example, the Law Society informed the Working Group that between 2014 and 2017, 14 “claims harvesting” websites were taken down as a result of its investigations, and the Society has instituted High Court proceedings against non-solicitors relating to two of the leading “claims harvesting” websites.

However, I am conscious that, notwithstanding the Law Society’s work in this regard, there is still something of a “grey area” in relation to the regulation of “claims harvesting” companies. As a result, through the Cost of Insurance Working Group, my officials are continuing to



examine the matter and are in the process of seeking to arrange a meeting with representatives from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Personal Injuries Assessment Board and the Law Society of Ireland in order to learn more about the extent of the problem within an Irish context.

### **Motor Insurance**

113. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding camper van insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28150/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level or terms or conditions that they should apply in respect of particular categories of drivers or vehicles.

In making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply, insurers will use a combination of rating factors, which include how the vehicle is used and the type of vehicle, as well as the age of the vehicle, the age of the driver, the relevant claims record and driving experience, and the number of drivers. My understanding is that insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices and availability of cover varies across the market. In addition, insurance companies will price in accordance with their own past claims experience, meaning that in relation to particular categories, different insurance companies will have different views.

However, it is acknowledged that pricing in the motor insurance sector has been subject to a lot of volatility in recent years, and this was the main impetus for the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group. Its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017. The Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, set out within an Action Plan.

Work is ongoing on the implementation of the recommendations by the relevant Government Departments and Agencies and there is a commitment within the Report that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress. The fifth such update was published on 11 May and shows that of the 50 separate deadlines set to date within the Action Plan, 40 have been met. Substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as “ongoing”. Both the Report and the quarterly updates are available on the Department’s website, within “The Cost of Insurance Working Group” sub-section of the main “Insurance” section.

It should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for May 2018) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have decreased by 19% since peaking in July 2016. While the CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures represent a broad average and therefore I appreciate many people may still be seeing increases. However, I am hopeful that the improved stability in pricing will be maintained and that premiums should continue to fall from the very high levels of mid-2016. In addition, with the full implementation of the Motor Report, I believe that Ireland should be more attractive to new entrants thus

increasing capacity as well as competition which should have a positive impact in niche areas such as motor insurance for camper vans and musicians.

Finally, as the Deputy may be aware, if a consumer is unable to secure a quotation on the open market, he or she may be in a position to avail of the Declined Cases Agreement (DCA) process. Under the terms of the DCA, which is adhered to by all motor insurers in Ireland, the insurance market will not refuse to provide insurance to an individual seeking insurance if the person has approached at least three insurers and has not been able to obtain cover from them. In this regard, there are further details available on the Insurance Ireland website, while more generally, Insurance Ireland also operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. The relevant contact details are: [feedback@insuranceireland.eu](mailto:feedback@insuranceireland.eu) or [declined@insuranceireland.eu](mailto:declined@insuranceireland.eu) or 01-6761914.

### Summer Economic Statement

114. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance if the elements of spending commitments under sections (details supplied) of the summer economic statement will be broken down in each of the years 2019 to 2021. [28162/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The following is a breakdown of 'pre-committed fiscal space for expenditure' in Table 3 of the Summer Economic Statement:

€ billions	2019	2020	2021
Demographics	0.4	0.4	0.5
Public Service Stability Agreement	0.4	0.3	0.2
Carryover of Budget 2018 measures	0.3	0.0	0.0
Capital expenditure*	1.0	1.0	1.1
Pre-committed Expenditure	2.1	1.7	1.8

\*This is the amount in fiscal space terms allowing for capital smoothing

The following is a breakdown of 'other' in Table 3 of the Summer Economic Statement:

€ billions	2019	2020	2021
Resources available for allocation	0.8	1.3	1.3
Other non-voted and general government movements	0.2	-0.7	0.9
Other	1.0	0.6	2.2

As I outlined in the Summer Economic Statement 2018, the concept of fiscal space is no longer an appropriate one for Ireland. Budgetary policy will be formulated on the basis of what is right for the economy at this stage in the cycle and not by rules that would increase borrowing.

### Trade Union Membership

115. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce tax relief on union subscriptions; the estimated amount such an initiative would cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28239/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** A review of the appropriate treatment for tax purposes of trade union subscriptions and professional body fees was carried out by my Department in 2016 and included in the 2016 report on tax expenditures published on Budget day 2016. The review may be found at the following link:

([http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2017/Documents/Tax\\_Expenditures\\_Report%202016\\_final.pdf](http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2017/Documents/Tax_Expenditures_Report%202016_final.pdf))

The review concluded that:

“...analysis of the scheme using the principles laid down by the Department’s Tax Expenditure Guidelines shows that it fails to reach the evaluation threshold to warrant introduction in this manner.

The reinstatement of this tax relief would have no justifiable policy rationale and does not express a defined policy objective. Given that individuals join trade unions largely for the well-known benefits of membership, and the potential value of the relief to an individual would equate to just over €1 per week, this scheme would have little to no incentive effect on the numbers choosing to join. There is no specific market failure that needs to be addressed by such a scheme, and it would consist largely of deadweight.”

Given the conclusions of the review, I have no plans to reintroduce such a relief.

I am advised by Revenue that the cost and the numbers availing of the relief prior to its abolition are available at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-expenditures.aspx>.

The following table sets out details of the cost of the relief in the seven years immediately prior to its end.

Year	Cost (€ million)	No. of Claims
2004	10.7	248,300
2005	11.8	272,100
2006	19.2	294,300
2007	20.7	316,300
2008	26.4	341,900
2009	26.7	345,800
2010	26	337,500

I am further advised by Revenue that these figures may not provide an accurate indicator of future costs of a new scheme and there is no other basis available to Revenue on which to estimate such costs.

### **Insurance Industry Regulation**

116. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of claims management companies operating here; if they are regulated by the Central Bank; the specific regulations that cover the operation of claims management companies; the specific penalties that arise for claims management companies which engage in poor conduct; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28372/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I wish to clarify for the Deputy that ‘claims management companies’ are not a specific authorisation category for Central Bank

of Ireland Regulated Financial Service Providers (RFSPs). Activities such as ‘loss assessing’ and ‘claims handling’ on behalf of a policyholder are considered to be regulated activities under the European Communities (Insurance Mediation) Regulations 2005 (the “IMR”). The IMR specifically excludes the management of claims when acting on behalf of an insurance company (typically referred to as “loss adjusting”).

Firms who deal with claims under insurance contracts are required to be authorised by the Central Bank as ‘insurance intermediaries’ under the IMR. Firms who undertake the management of claims on behalf of an insurance undertaking on a professional basis (i.e. loss adjusting) are not required to be authorised under the IMR.

The IMR sets out the rules for undertaking insurance mediation. “Insurance mediation” as defined under the IMR is ‘any activity involved in proposing or undertaking preparatory work for entering into insurance contracts, or of assisting in the administration and performance of insurance contracts that have been entered into (including dealing with claims under insurance contracts), but does not include such an activity that –

(a) is undertaken by an insurance undertaking or an employee of such an undertaking in the employee’s capacity as such, or

(b) involves the provision of information on an incidental basis in conjunction with some other professional activity, so long as the purpose of the activity is not to assist a person to enter into or perform an insurance contract, or

(c) involves the management of claims of an insurance undertaking on a professional basis, or

(d) involves loss adjusting or expert appraisal of claims for reinsurance undertakings.’

The IMR does not provide for sub-categorisation of authorisation type, e.g. “Loss Assessors”, there are currently 2,235 registered Insurance Intermediaries regulated by the Central Bank, who are authorised to undertake insurance mediation, which includes ‘loss assessing’ and ‘claims handling’.

The specific regulations that apply to loss assessor firms are, the IMR, the Consumer Protection Code 2012, and the Minimum Competency Standards. Both the Consumer Protection Code and the Minimum Competency Standards include specific provisions and standards applicable to such firms; for example Chapter 7 of the Consumer Protection Code deals with claims processing and Appendix 3 of the Minimum Competency Code 2017 outlines the competencies required when handling claims.

As part of its consumer protection mandate, the Central Bank challenges firms to demonstrate compliance with regulatory requirements. Any evidence of poor conduct may result in increased supervisory engagement or where appropriate, enforcement action, up to and including involuntary revocation of a regulated firm’s licence. The Central Bank’s powers derive primarily from legislation, e.g., the Central Bank Act 1942 and the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013.

## **Electric Vehicles**

117. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Finance if e-car charging points are provided at his Department’s buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28395/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The question raised by the Deputy is a matter for response by the Office of Public Works. The OPW have prepared a co-ordinated reply.

### **Public Sector Staff**

118. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a publicly funded organisation (details supplied) in County Kerry will be included on the public sector transfer list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28145/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** My department does not have a role in Public Sector transfers. Public Servants are employed under different legislative provisions and terms and conditions to Civil Servants. A Public Servant may apply for positions through an open recruitment competition for the Civil Service.

You will be aware that my department are currently developing a Civil Service Mobility scheme. This is one of a number of arrangements to be put in place to fulfill the requirements of Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan. The aim of the Mobility scheme is to create a fair, transparent and practical system that facilitates mobility across the Civil Service. This scheme is being launched on a phased basis, with Phase 1 of the scheme facilitating mobility for the general Civil Service grades of Clerical Officer and Executive Officer. It is intended that Phase 2 of the scheme, which will be introduced at a later stage, and will be open to the general Civil Service grades of Higher Executive Officer, Administrative Officer and Assistant Principal Officer.

A review of the Civil Service Mobility Scheme will be carried out after the launch of all phases. Plans to extend mobility to provide additional development opportunities and enable greater mobility across the public service will be assessed at this stage.

### **Garda Station Refurbishment**

119. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timeline for the completion of a new Garda station in Newcastle West, County Limerick. [28147/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The refurbishment and upgrade of Newcastle West Garda Station is included in the Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021 for An Garda Síochána. The Office of Public Works is currently developing plans for a new District Headquarters facility on the existing site in Newcastle West which is based on a brief of requirements received from An Garda Síochána. The construction works are expected to take 18 months to complete and it is anticipated that the necessary works in terms of design development, tender documentation should be completed by the end of 2019.

### **Public Sector Pay**

120. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the pay restoration measures implemented to date for public servants with the unwinding of FEMPI legislation; the schedule of further pay restoration measures planned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28251/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I refer the

Deputy to my answer to PQ 2235/18 on the 18 January 2018.

### **Pension Provisions**

121. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way in which a person (details supplied) can apply for a waiver of abatement rules under section 52 of the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012 in cases in which their training and experience in a previous public service role is required for their role; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28261/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** An application for an abatement waiver must come from the individual's current employer and must be signed by the Secretary General (or equivalent) of the Department/Office. An abatement waiver, if successful, is only granted in exceptional circumstances and for a limited period. An application for an abatement waiver must be addressed to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Appropriate documentation must accompany an abatement waiver application, including the following:

1. The letter signed by the Secretary General (or equivalent) of the Department, Office or Body stating the reasons why a waiver is sought;
2. Information on the competition(s) seeking a suitable appointee;
3. Details of the number of candidates interviewed;
4. The number of candidates on the panel;
5. The length of time for which a waiver is sought;
6. The criteria used for filling the position;
7. A plan of action for filling the position (where the position is permanent) in future without a waiver;
8. The employing Department/Body and contact name/details;
9. The Pension Paying authority and contact name/details; and
10. Any additional information which might support the waiver application.

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

122. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the issues surrounding the new entrant pay scales of primary level education teachers will be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28370/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 (PSSA), provided that an examination of remaining salary scale issues in respect of post January 2011 recruits at entry grades would be undertaken within 12 months of the commencement of the Agreement.

Additionally this Government accepted an amendment at Section 11 of the Public Service

Pay and Pensions Act 2017, that within 3 months of the passing of the Act, I would prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the cost of and a plan in dealing with pay equalisation for new entrants to the public service.

This was a significant body of work and staff resources from within the Irish Government Economic Evaluation Service (IGEES) were assigned to collect, collate and examine the data and provide detailed point in time costs associated with the measure.

In accordance with the legislation I submitted a report to the Oireachtas on the 16th of March. This report, and the substantial amount of data and analysis underpinning it provide a valuable evidence base for consideration of this matter. The report shows that there has been strong recruitment since 2011 to the estimated 237 recruitment grades across the public service, with over 60,500 new entrants hired. This includes over 16,000 teachers and nearly 5,000 Special Needs Assistants. Full year costs based on a two point increment jump for those effected were estimated at approximately €200m.

Discussions on this issue with public service trade unions and representative associations, commenced in October of last year. Further discussions are continuing as the parties continue to work through the various aspects of this issue.

### **Electric Vehicles**

123. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if e-car charging points are provided at his Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28400/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** There are no charging points in any buildings currently occupied by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. There is a very small number of charging points, maybe 4 or 5, in other buildings owned or leased by the Office of Public Works and occupied by central Government Departments and Agencies. These have been installed at the request of the occupying organisations.

### **Residential Institutions Redress Scheme**

124. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the survivors of the redress board undergo forensic style examinations in order to be believed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28253/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I assume the Deputy means survivors of children's residential institutional abuse who applied to the Redress Board, not survivors of the Redress Board. The Residential Institutions Redress Board was established in late 2002 to make fair and reasonable awards to persons who, as children, were abused while resident in any of 139 specified institutions. Awards were made following applications from survivors who provided evidence of having been in a specified institution and evidence also of injury arising out of abuse suffered while in residence. The amount of an award was determined by reference to the Board's assessment of the severity of the abuse and the consequential injury. A Residential Institutions Review Committee was set up to review decisions and awards made by the Redress Board.

Redress schemes offer victims a potentially faster and less onerous justice process. This is acknowledged in the Comptroller and Auditor General's special report 96 on the Cost of Child

Abuse Inquiry and Redress which states that ‘The setting up of a redress scheme following the work of the Commission (to Inquire into Child Abuse) provided reparation to those who had suffered abuse in the institutions. Without such a scheme, civil litigation cases taken by former residents through the courts system could have resulted in substantially higher legal costs and could have led to a backlog of cases for many years as a result.’

The purpose of the Redress Board as established by the Oireachtas under the Residential Institutions Redress Act 2002, was to make awards to the survivors of abuse. The statutory functions of the board as set out in section 5 of that Act include a requirement to “ensure in so far as is practicable, that hearings are conducted as informally as possible having regard to all the circumstances. The “forensic style examination” referred to in the Deputy’s question would clearly be at variance with this provision.

### **International Students**

125. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students from Kuwait studying here; if his Department in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills is working to attract more students from Kuwait here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28268/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Presently, there are approximately 700 students from Kuwait studying in Irish Higher Education Institutions. The majority of these students are studying in the medical fields.

Enterprise Ireland, who are responsible for promoting the Irish education system internationally, through the Education in Ireland brand, are working closely with the Kuwaiti Ministry of Higher Education, to enhance the collaborations between Higher Education Institutions in Ireland and Kuwait in a wide range of other disciplines that will be of mutual benefit to both Countries.

### **Schools Refurbishment**

126. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the grant promised for the refurbishment of a school (details supplied). [28113/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is currently in negotiations to purchase the building currently occupied by the school. When ownership transfers to my Department, arrangements to refurbish the building will be initiated. My Department will be in contact with the school authority at that point.

### **Departmental Correspondence**

127. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a reply will issue to correspondence regarding a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28118/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department’s Capital Programme.



The project for this school has been identified for delivery as part of a programme for the appointment of a Programme Manager. My Department expects to be in further contact with the school authority shortly on the matter.

### **Institutes of Technology**

128. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the suspension of the BSc Hons in digital media and society at the GMIT Castlebar; if the decision to suspend the course will be reversed; if not, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28123/18]

131. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if further courses are due to be suspended at GMIT, Castlebar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28154/18]

132. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to secure the future sustainability of GMIT, Castlebar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28155/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 128, 131 and 132 together.

The Government is committed to the future sustainability of the Castlebar campus of Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT). This is the reason why I established the Working Group in March 2017 to develop a plan that would safeguard the future of the Castlebar campus.

The Report of the Working Group was published in December 2017. It provides a wide-ranging assessment of the context within which the Campus is currently operating, and outlines a proposed vision for the future of the Mayo Campus. The Working Group recommendations are primarily for GMIT to implement, including those with regard to course provision at the Castlebar campus.

One of the recommendations of the Sustainability Plan is that the Digital Media programme be re-pitched, in collaboration with industry, for the 2018/19 academic year. I understand that this recommendation has yet to be implemented by GMIT. In the interim GMIT retained the programme as a CAO offering for 2018/19. However, predictive analysis carried out by GMIT determined that there was an insufficient number of applicants to make the programme viable. On that basis GMIT have taken the decision to suspend the programme for the 2018/19 academic year.

While GMIT took the decision to withdraw this course, it should be noted that the institute has reinstated other programmes at the Castlebar campus for 2018/19 - Sustainable Building Technology and the Heritage related programmes of History and Geography and Culture & Environment - subject to a viable number of applicants.

The Working Group's recommendations will be implemented over the next five years, over the period 2018-2022. Formal progress reports will be submitted to the GMIT Governing Body and the HEA every four months for review. I would like to again assure the Deputy that my Department and the HEA will continue to work closely with GMIT on ensuring that the recommendations of the Working Group are implemented as soon as possible, and with appropriate consultation with relevant stakeholders, to ensure the future sustainability and success of the Castlebar campus.

## **School Transport Eligibility**

129. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional funding has been secured for the 2018-2019 school year to ensure that seats will be available for those that apply for concessionary school bus passes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28128/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

Currently over 116,000 children, including almost 12,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Seats for concessionary applicants are allocated after all eligible children have been accommodated on school transport services. This exercise normally takes place after the closing date for receipt of payments. Where seats are limited a random selection process is used.

Arising from commitments in the Programme for Government, a review of the Concessionary Charges and Rules element of the School Transport Scheme was undertaken.

The review was published in December 2016 and made recommendations on both the charges and the rules element of concessionary school transport.

With regard to the charges for concessionary school transport the recommended course of action was to continue with the current position whereby charges remain in place for those in receipt of concessionary places. I agreed with this recommendation on the basis that those applying for concessionary transport are making a conscious decision to do so, understand that they are not eligible for school transport and understand the implications of this choice at the time of application.

The report also recommended that the number of concessionary places should be reduced in line with the rules introduced in 2012 on a phased basis. Previous plans to advance this option were put on hold, pending the completion of the review.

However upon consideration of the review and following discussions with the Cross Party Working Group which I established to feed into the review, I decided that there should be no planned programme of downsizing in the coming year except in line with normal operational decisions within the current scheme.

The terms of the School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

## **School Transport Provision**

130. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regard-

ing school transport for the 2018-2019 school year in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28140/18]

136. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding school transport for 2018-2019 in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28172/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 130 and 136 together.

School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

Currently over 116,000 children, including almost 12,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Seats for concessionary applicants are allocated after all eligible children have been accommodated on school transport services. This exercise normally takes place after the closing date for receipt of payments. Where seats are limited a random selection process is used.

Routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis; no additional State cost will be incurred.

Arising from commitments in the Programme for Government, a review of the Concessionary Charges and Rules element of the School Transport Scheme was undertaken.

The review was published in December 2016 and made recommendations on both the charges and the rules element of concessionary school transport.

The report also recommended that the number of concessionary places should be reduced in line with the rules introduced in 2012 on a phased basis. Previous plans to advance this option were put on hold, pending the completion of the review.

However upon consideration of the review and following discussions with the Cross Party Working Group which I established to feed into the review, I decided that there should be no planned programme of downsizing in the coming year except in line with normal operational decisions within the current scheme.

The terms of the School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

*Questions Nos. 131 and 132 answered with Question No. 128.*

### **Emergency Works Scheme Applications**

133. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an

emergency works scheme application by a school (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28157/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department's Planning and Building Unit received an Emergency Works Application from the school in question in December 2015. The school authority were requested to scale back the works to repair only and apply for a replacement roof under the Department's Summer Works Scheme (SWS) 2016/2017. An application for scaled back works was not received.

The school authority did submit a SWS application but applied for multiple projects which is not permitted under the SWS scheme as schools are only allowed apply for one project and as a result their application was not considered.

It is open to the school in question to submit a new Emergency Works Application for repair works only to the roof and apply under any future Summer Works Scheme to have the roof replaced. Schools seeking emergency works funding must complete an Emergency Works Application form, which is available on my Department's website.

### **Student Grant Scheme Applications**

134. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding SUSI applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28163/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The means test arrangements of the Student Grant Scheme are applied nationally on the same basis to both employed and self-employed applicants. Gross income before the deduction of income tax or the universal social charge, is assessed with certain specified social welfare and health service executive payments excluded.

The assessment of income from the same starting point is deemed to be fair and reasonable because this approach eliminates any distortion which might arise from different spending decisions in different households.

The Student Grant Scheme provides for different levels of income thresholds where families have (i) less than 4 dependent children (ii) between 4 and 7 dependent children and (iii) 8 or more dependent children. Also, in recognition of the additional cost to families where more than one person is attending college, income thresholds may also be increased by up to €4,830 for each additional family member attending college at the same time. In this way, the Student Grant Scheme is responsive to the individual circumstances of particular families.

Students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Office in the third level institution attended. This fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Also, tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners at [www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie)

## Education Policy

135. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a national educational policy with regard to the management of peer sexual assault in post primary education; if one is being drafted; and the location in which it can be accessed. [28171/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Department of Justice and Equality is responsible for the national criminal justice framework and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is responsible for national policy in relation to the protection and welfare of children.

My Department's role is to give guidance and direction to schools in relation to meeting their statutory and other obligations in respect of the protection of children, including in relation to the reporting of child abuse.

The statutory requirements of the Children First Act 2015 became fully operational on 11 December 2017 when the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs commenced the remaining provisions of the Children First Act 2015.

The Children First Act 2015 put in place a statutory obligation on certain professionals who work with children (referred to as mandated persons and including all registered teachers) to report child protection concerns at or above a defined threshold to Tusla. Under this Act, all concerns about sexual abuse must be reported by mandated persons to Tusla.

The Children First Act 2015 operates side-by-side with the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017) which was published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on 2 October and also became operational on 11 December 2017.

The full commencement of the Children First Act, 2015 and the publication of the new Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 necessitated changes to the existing Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

In December 2017, my Department published new Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary School 2017 which give direction and guidance to schools authorities and to school personnel in relation to meeting their new statutory obligations under the Children First Act, 2015 and in the continued implementation of the best practice (non-statutory) guidance set out in Children First National Guidance 2017 which requires all reasonable concerns about child abuse, including sexual abuse, to be reported to Tusla. The new procedures are published on my Departments website *www.education.ie*.

My Department's procedures for schools also outline that under the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 it is a criminal offence to withhold information about a serious offence, including a sexual offence, against a person under 18 years or a vulnerable person. The offence arises where a person knows or believes that a specified offence has been committed against a child or vulnerable person and he or she has information which would help arrest, prosecute or convict another person for that offence, but fails, without reasonable excuse, to disclose that information as soon as it is practicable to do so to a member of An Garda Síochána.

The reporting obligations under the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 are in addition to the reporting obligations under Children First National Guidance 2017 and the Children First Act, 2015.

*Question No. 136 answered with Question No. 130.*

## **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

137. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a specialised reading school (details supplied) has been informed it will have no special needs assistant support in September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28176/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on the Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie), in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

In considering applications for SNA supports for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

SNA allocations to all schools can change from year to year as children with care needs leave the school, as new children with care needs enrol in a school and as children develop more independent living skills and their care needs diminish over time.

My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support. In line with this policy, I announced last month that 800 additional SNAs will be allocated for the beginning of the next school year, with a further 140 expected to be allocated by the end of the year.

By the end of this year, there will be a total of 15,000 Special Needs Assistants working in our schools, a 42% increase on 2011.

The NCSE Appeals Process may be invoked by a parent or a school where it is considered that a child was not granted access to SNA support on the grounds that Department policy was not met in accordance with Circular 0030/2014.

Schools may also appeal a decision, where the school considers that the NCSE, in applying Department policy, has not allocated the appropriate level of SNA support to the school to meet the special educational and/or care needs of the children concerned.

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2018/19, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE. The closing date for receipt of any appeals in regard to SNA allocations is Friday, 28th September 2018.

As this question relates to a particular school I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply.

## **Special Educational Needs**

138. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a provision whereby it is accepted policy for schools targeting children with special educational needs to be able to provide special needs assistant support and thus not have their funding for such cut entirely. [28177/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on the Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie), in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

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By the end of this year, there will be a total of 15,000 Special Needs Assistants working in our schools, a 42% increase on 2011.

### **Departmental Properties**

139. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the person or body that has ownership of the site of a campus (details supplied). [28218/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Regarding the property referred to by the Deputy, I can confirm that it is not in the ownership of my Department. The owner of the site is Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board.

### **Schools Building Contractors**

140. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he had a contingency plan in place when a company (details supplied) went into examinership in January 2018; and if not, the reason therefor [28219/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In April 2018 when the company referred to by the Deputy entered into the examinership, my Department worked closely with the ETB's concerned to monitor closely the progress of projects during this period.

As part of contingency planning arrangements, officials from my Department and the relevant ETBs met with the contractor and the examiner in mid-April to discuss their plans to deliver the outstanding school projects. While work was continuing on one project, work has ceased on three other projects and these contracts were terminated in early May. The final contract was terminated upon the liquidation of the contractor in June 2018.

In the case of all projects, steps have been taken to put alternative arrangements in place and I have requested my officials to provide me with a critical path for the completion of the outstanding projects and to consider how each stage in that critical path can be delivered as quickly as possible while also ensuring that the quality and integrity of the project is fully protected. Etender notices have already been published seeking expressions of interest from contractors wishing to be considered for the completion of two of the projects and a further eTenders will be published later this week in respect of the third project. Identification of all outstanding works necessary to complete all schools is also on-going. This is the normal process followed when an insolvency event occurs.

### **Schools Building Contractors**

141. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department will now take back full ownership of a building (details supplied). [28220/18]

142. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a more proactive approach was not taken regarding a campus (details supplied) in view of concerns that led to his Department instigating the Thorn investigation. [28221/18]

143. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide the facilities that the schools in Maynooth need before the new term in September 2018 and subsequent years while the community in Maynooth and its hinterlands are awaiting the school. [28222/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 141 to 143, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy is aware the delivery of the two schools in question has been devolved to Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB) under a Service Level Agreement (SLA). In total, a SLA requires 18 interactions between my Department's Planning and Building Unit and the relevant agency delivering the project during the lifetime of the project. These interactions are specifically itemised in the SLA. Their purpose is to ensure that individual projects are delivered in accordance with the approved project brief, that both Department design guidelines and public procurement procedures are adhered to and that the project is delivered within the approved budget.

As KWETB are the patron of both schools and own the site, the delivery of the two schools will remain with them. Since the liquidation of the contractor, KWETB, their design team and officials from my Department's Planning and Building Unit have been working closely to ensure that a new contractor is appointed as quickly as possible to complete both schools. An eTender's notice has been forwarded to eTenders for publication seeking expressions of interest from contractors wishing to be considered for the completion of the project. The notice will be published later this week. Identification of all outstanding works necessary to complete both schools is also on-going.

My Department is also liaising with KWETB to ensure that both schools have the necessary accommodation to meet pupil needs pending the delivery of their new school buildings.



### **Schools Building Projects Status**

144. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the works schedule for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28245/18]

145. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated completion date for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28246/18]

146. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the contingency planning for a school (details supplied) in the event that the new school building is not completed in September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28247/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 144 to 146, inclusive, together.

The school building project to which the Deputy refers is currently at Tender Stage. The tender return date was the 6th June 2018. It is anticipated that construction will commence in Quarter 3 this year. The construction period is 44 weeks. The new school is due to be ready for occupation by September 2019.

### **Visiting Teacher Service**

147. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration will be given to restoring the visiting teacher system for Traveller children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28271/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As my colleague will be aware the statutory and policy remit in area of attendance, participation and retention in the school system lies with the Education Welfare Service of Tusla which incorporates the function of the former Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers.

In May 2011 a range of functions under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, including the operation of the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) and the integrated services under its remit were transferred from the Minister of Education and Skills to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The full budget for the National Educational Welfare Board transferred to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The relevant functions and related funding subsequently transferred to TUSLA on its establishment in January 2014.

The Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers ceased in September 2011 in line with Departmental policy on the mainstreaming of supports for all children including Travellers. Traveller children continue to be supported by the integrated Educational Welfare Service of Tusla.

In response to actions in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy and my Departments DEIS Plan, a 2 year Pilot Programme is being developed to target attendance, participation and school completion in specific Traveller and Roma Communities regionally. Tusla is leading this initiative and my Department is working in collaboration them, the Department of Justice and Equality along with the Traveller and Roma representative bodies and Communities.

My Department also continues to provide a number of Traveller-specific supports to assist with the transition to the mainstream system of pupils, previously provided for in segregated provision. These comprise of:

- 141 alleviation resource teacher posts for schools with significant numbers of Travellers at a current cost of €8.46 million.

- Additional pupil capitation for Travellers at a rate of €70 per pupil for Primary, and €201 per pupil for Post Primary at a current cost of €1.11m.

### **European Court of Human Rights Judgments**

148. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of victims of sex abuse by those that have been convicted of same that have not had access to the redress scheme due to not having made a prior complaint; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28280/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Deputy may be referring to the ex-gratia scheme established in the aftermath of the ECHR judgment in the Louise O’Keeffe case. Since this Judgement, the State Claims Agency (SCA) which is mandated to act on behalf of the State in cases of historic child abuse, has been notified of many claims. These are either (a) claims which are entirely newly instituted or (b) are pre-existing claims against school authorities and in which claimants are now more recently seeking to join the State as a respondent. The number of such claims is 170. Information on whether the individual claims to be a victim of a convicted abuser is privileged.

The SCA has engaged and will continue to engage with claimants’ solicitors to clarify the circumstances of new claimants’ claims and to make settlement offers where the claims come within the terms of the ECtHR Judgement and are not statute barred.

The position of historical cases which were discontinued has, as you may know, been reviewed. In July 2015, the Government agreed to respond to those persons who had instituted legal proceedings in relation to school child sexual abuse which were subsequently discontinued by offering ex gratia payments to those persons who come within the terms of the ECHR judgment and whose claims were not statute barred at the time of their discontinuance.

Persons who believe that their cases come within the criteria can contact the SCA and provide supporting evidence. The SCA has received 49 applications of which 44 applications have been declined. All of the applications that were declined were advised that they could apply to Mr Justice Iarfhlaith O’Neill, the independent assessor I appointed in November 2017, for an independent assessment of their application. 21 people have applied for this assessment.

Mr Justice O’Neill has looked for a submission on: ‘whether the imposition of the condition which required that there had to be evidence of a prior complaint of child sexual abuse on the part of the employee in question to the school authority (or a school authority in which the employee has previously worked), to establish eligibility for a payment under the ex gratia scheme, is consistent with and a correct implementation of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Louise O’Keeffe v. Ireland’

The submission forwarded to Mr Justice O’Neill on 27th April was prepared with the advice and assistance of the Attorney General and Senior Counsel and is now published on the Department’s website.

### **European Court of Human Rights Judgments**

149. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the previous

time he or his officials met a group of sex abuse victims that have not had access to the redress scheme due to no prior complaint having been made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28281/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Deputy may be referring to the ex-gratia scheme established following the ECHR judgment in the Louise O’Keffe case. While I am very familiar with individual cases who are in the position that they don’t meet the terms of the ex-gratia scheme, neither I nor my officials have met with this group of sex abuse victims. I have, however, met with the Deputy on a number of occasions to discuss the issue of child sex abuse and some of the individual cases that fall into this category.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

150. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the process and progress on the extension for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28282/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The building project referred to by the Deputy is for an extension and refurbishment to bring the school up to a 12-classroom school incorporating a 3-class Special Needs Unit (SNU).

The project has recently commenced the Design Team and Project Supervisor of the Design Process (PSDP) appointment procedure whereby an Architect, Civil & Structural Engineer, Mechanical and Electrical Engineer, a Quantity Surveyor and a PSDP will be appointed. This appointment process will be complete in the coming week.

On completion of the Design Team appointment, the Design Team will commence Stage 1 of Architectural Planning which consists of - Site Suitability, Site Report and Initial Sketch Scheme. The school is involved in the appointment process and was represented in conducting a marking exercise with Department officials on 13th June 2018.

### **Electric Vehicles**

151. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if e-car charging points are provided at his Department’s buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28393/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The details sought by the Deputy are not readily available. Officials in my Department are collating the information and I will arrange to have it forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

### **Commencement of Legislation**

152. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the parts of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 that have been commenced; the parts that have yet to be commenced; the progress made on disability legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28102/18]

165. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the provisions of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 will be implemented in full; the

progress made to date in implementing same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28383/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 152 and 165 together.

The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 provides a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults with capacity difficulties. The Act was signed into law on 30 December 2015.

New administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission (a body under the Department of Health), must be put in place before the substantive provisions of the Act can be commenced. A high-level Steering Group comprised of senior officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health, the Mental Health Commission and the Courts Service, together with the Director of the Decision Support Service, is overseeing the establishment and commissioning of the Decision Support Service (DSS) and this work is ongoing.

The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) Order 2016 (S.I. No. 515 of 2016), brought some provisions of Part 1 (Preliminary and General) and Part 9 (Director of the Decision Support Service) of the Act into operation on 17 October 2016. These provisions were brought into operation in order to progress the setting up of the DSS and to enable the process of recruitment of the Director of the DSS to begin. Ms Áine Flynn was appointed Director of the Decision Support Service on 2 October 2017.

The Minister for Health, under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) (No. 2) Order 2016 (S.I. No. 517 of 2016), brought into operation on 17 October 2016 some provisions of Part 8 of the Act relating to advance healthcare directives. The commenced provisions provide for the establishment by the Minister for Health of a multi-disciplinary group to advise in relation to codes of practice on advance healthcare directives.

The key preparations are being put in place under the oversight of the Steering Group to allow for further commencement orders for the provisions of the 2015 Act to be made when the DSS is ready to roll out the new decision-making support options. The Director is also working in a very determined way to get the necessary staff resources, processes, IT system, expert panels, codes of practice and regulations in place in order that the Decision Support Service can be up and running as quickly as possible. There are many complex strands to this work, including involvement of multiple organisations.

Every effort is underway to ensure that the Decision Support Service has all necessary capacity to open for business as soon as possible. My Department has received an outline implementation plan from the Director which contains monthly milestones for realisation of the objective of an active DSS. As time goes on, every effort will be made by all sides to achieve tightening of the timeframes where possible and the situation will continue to be monitored closely by the Steering Group. The 2018 Budget provides for an allocation of €3 million in the Justice and Equality Vote for the establishment of the Decision Support Service.

The commencement of Part 8 of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act, 2015 which provides for a legislative framework for advance healthcare directives, is a matter for the Minister for Health.

The Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill contains most of the final legislative amendments needed for compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabili-

ties (CRPD).

The Government decided in January 2018 to approve priority drafting for a standalone Bill on deprivation of liberty thereby de-coupling these provisions from the Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

The Equality Division of my Department is currently working with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to progress the remaining committee stage amendments which are mostly technical in nature. There has been some work to streamline content so that only what is absolutely necessary for compliance with the CRPD features in the Bill.

It is envisaged that the Bill will reach Committee Stage as soon as possible following the summer recess.

### **Insurance Fraud**

153. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to address fraudulent or exaggerated insurance claims as they apply to small business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28260/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that the Cost of Insurance Working Group was established by the Minister for Finance in July 2016. A significant factor in the rising cost of insurance, identified in both the first and second reports of the Working Group (on (i) motor insurance and (ii) employer's liability/public liability respectively), is the impact of fraudulent insurance claims. As such, the reports include a number of recommendations relating to insurance fraud.

An initial roundtable was convened by the Department of Finance in late 2017 to listen to the views of all of the key stakeholders in relation to insurance fraud. Additional fraud roundtable sessions have been convened this year to progress a number of specific recommendations contained in the Working Group's 'Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance', published in January this year. Recommendations 11 and 12 of the report relate to the production of statistics by An Garda Síochána and the Courts Service on complaints, investigations, prosecutions and convictions relating to fraud within the personal injuries area. My Department has liaised with the Garda authorities in relation to the production of these statistics, and I am informed that the necessary Pulse update is anticipated to be in place by the end of June 2018.

Recommendation 13 of the same report recommends that Insurance Ireland, An Garda Síochána and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions agree a set of guidelines in respect of the reporting of suspected fraudulent insurance claims. While guidelines were published in 2004, the Working Group noted that these have only been used to a very limited extent over the years and proposed that a new set of guidelines should be developed, using the 2004 protocol as a starting point.

In line with the intention to use the existing guidelines to inform the drafting of new, fit for purpose guidelines, An Garda Síochána produced a draft document which was communicated to Insurance Ireland. The draft document proposed a number of changes to the section of the existing guidelines concerning the station or section within An Garda Síochána to which a formal complaint should be made. Insurance Ireland signalled its agreement with the changes proposed at the roundtable session of 26 March. It was agreed that further consultations with stakeholders regarding the proposed guidelines would take place, including with insurance providers not represented by Insurance Ireland; two such consultations have already been held and the next meeting of the Roundtable, scheduled for later this week (29 June 2018), will aim to finalise the

new guidelines in the context of the feedback received in these consultations. Agreement on the new set of guidelines is expected to be completed on time in Quarter 3 2018.

The fraud roundtable process also intends to examine the follow-on procedure in circumstances where fraud or exaggeration is identified in court or acknowledged by a judge. Recommendation 12 of the Working Group's 'Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance' proposes that where an application under Section 26 of the Civil Liability Act 2004 is successful, this fact should be communicated to An Garda Síochána by the Courts Service. I understand that the fraud roundtable is currently engaging with the Courts Service in this regard.

The Deputy may be interested to note that the Department of Finance issues regular quarterly updates on its website in relation to the implementation of the respective reports of the Cost of Insurance Working Group, the latest (fifth) of which was published on 11 May 2018; the quarterly progress update for Quarter 2 will be published next month and will refer to the current status of all the recommendations from both reports.

### **Visa Applications**

154. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties being experienced by Kuwaiti persons trying to obtain short stay visas for Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28266/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that visa applications received from residents of Kuwait are processed by the Visa Office in Abu Dhabi. The current processing time for 'short stay' visas from Kuwaiti nationals is well within the target timeframe for the processing of visa applications, with an average processing time of 5 working days at present, and the overall grant rate for applications received to date in 2018 is 99%. A total of 1,030 applications were made in 2017, with a 98% grant rate.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS 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 INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **Firearms Licences**

155. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a family member or a relation can act as a character referee in respect of a person making a request for a licence for a firearm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28092/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** Section 4 of the Firearms Act 1925, as amended, provides the conditions to be satisfied prior to an issuing person granting a firearm certificate. Further information may be sought from an applicant by an issuing person, including the names and addresses of two referees who may be contacted to attest to the applicant's character, under Section 4(3) of the Act.

I am advised by An Garda Síochána that it is important to ensure that referees have an ad-

equate knowledge of the applicant. In that regard, regular contact, whether in a professional, business or social context, with an applicant for a period of at least five years is an example of adequate knowledge of the applicant. I am also advised that referees need not have any knowledge of firearms or shooting sports, but they should be in a position to comment on the applicant's general character and background and an issuing person may consider that a referee should be over 18 years of age. Accordingly, An Garda Síochána have confirmed that a family member or relation would be considered suitable to act as a referee in respect of a person making an application for a firearms certificate.

### **Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration**

156. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons that were issued with letters from INIS in the wake of a Supreme Court judgment (details supplied) advising them that their case was being considered in view of the judgment; the number of positive decisions that have issued by type of permission granted; the number of negative decisions that have issued; and the number of applications still awaiting a decision. [28096/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that this case relates to a number of persons who brought a Judicial Review to the High Court. As the proceedings are still *sub judice* I do not propose to comment further at this time.

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 INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **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](http://www.justice.ie).

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

The 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](http://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.

## **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](http://www.inis.gov.ie)).

### **Deportation Orders Re-examination**

160. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps he is taking regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28142/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 23 April 2009.

The statutory criteria which must be considered in relation to a decision to make a deportation order under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 include national security and public policy, the character and conduct of the person concerned and the common good. In determining whether to make a deportation order, in addition to the factors set out in Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999, the Minister of the day must also consider all relevant constitutional and international human rights arising including those enshrined in the Refugee Convention, the UN Convention Against Torture and the European Charter of Human Rights. The question of not returning a person to a place where certain fundamental rights would be breached (or *non refoulement* as it is referred to) is fully considered in every case when deciding whether or not to make a deportation order. This involves consideration of whether returning the person would result in the life or freedom of that person being threatened on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or whether the person would be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

I have met the family involved and am aware of the circumstances of the case. As I have already stated in the Dáil, when the court proceedings conclude I will use my powers as Minister to consider this case fully, including from a humanitarian point of view.

### **Personal Injury Claims**

161. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether section 8 of the Civil Liability Act 2004 requires amendment to reduce to one month the period in which a personal injury claim can be submitted in view of the fact that data protection rules mean CCTV footage can be kept for only one month; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [28159/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The matter which the Deputy has raised is one that I have recently dealt with in my Written Reply to Question no. 271 on 19 June 2018 which I will therefore reiterate on this occasion.

The amendment of Section 8 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 has been recommended by the Cost of Insurance Working Group Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. The Working Group, chaired by Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Michael D'Arcy TD, is undertaking a review of the factors which are influencing the increased cost of insurance, and brings together the relevant Departments and Offices involved. The Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance was published in January 2018 and is available on the website of the Department of Finance.

My Department is the lead in relation to Recommendation 6 of the Report which aims at amending the wording of section 8 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 to ensure that defendants are notified of a claim having been lodged against them. The intention is not to interfere with the discretion of the courts to deal with cases appropriately but to assist in enhancing the effectiveness of the statutory requirement for a plaintiff to serve a notice in writing on the defendant stating the nature of the wrong alleged to have been committed by him or her.

Among the amendments recommended to be made to section 8 is a reduction from two months to one month in the statutory time period for a plaintiff in a personal injuries action to serve a notice in writing on the alleged wrongdoer stating the nature of the wrong alleged to have been committed by him or her. In the view of the Working Group, this may be justified by way of being in alignment with data protection legislation which provides that data shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for the purposes for which it is obtained. This is relevant for personal injuries cases where CCTV may have captured relevant footage. Generally, the retention period for data protection purposes is one month, beyond which retention is only permitted in certain circumstances, including for example, in the context of an investigation.

In keeping with the relevant recommendations and timelines of the Working Group the relevant amendments to section 8 are under preparation at my Department so that a suitable legislative vehicle can be availed of for their timely introduction and enactment.

### **Insurance Fraud**

162. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if amendments to sections 25 and 26 of the Civil Liability Act 2004 will be considered in order to make it a matter of routine that misleading insurance claims are reported to An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28160/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The issues raised by the Deputy are among those being considered by the Cost of Insurance Working Group that was established by the Minister for Finance in July 2016 and is chaired by Minister of State, Michael D'Arcy TD. The objective of the Working Group is to identify and examine the drivers of the cost of insurance, and recommend short, medium and longer term measures to address the issue of increasing insurance costs, taking account of the requirement for the need to ensure a financially stable insurance sector. A significant factor identified by the Working Group in its reports, which are available with action updates on the Department of Finance website, is the impact of fraudulent insurance claims.

In its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance published in January 2017, the Working Group

reviewed sections 25 and 26 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004. It noted that the number of recorded prosecutions and convictions for the offence of false evidence in section 25 is very low and that this suggests a need for further co-operation between the insurance industry and An Garda Síochána. The Working Group noted its understanding that while the majority of the initial applications in respect of fraudulent actions under section 26 were refused it would appear from more recent reported judgments that more claims are now being dismissed following a successful action under section 26. The Working Group concluded that it is satisfied that sections 25 and 26 do not need further review.

However, a number of other measures are being taken by way of ensuring that sections 25 and 26 can have their intended effect in relation to insurance fraud. Key to this approach has been the convening of a roundtable by the Department of Finance in late 2017 to listen to the views of key stakeholders in relation to insurance fraud and which has met several times since to progress a number of specific recommendations contained in the Cost of Insurance Working Group's Report of January 2018 relating to the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. Recommendations 11 and 12 of that report concern the production of statistics by An Garda Síochána and the Courts Service on complaints, investigations, prosecutions and convictions relating to fraud within the personal injuries area. My Department has liaised with the Garda authorities in relation to the production of these statistics, and I am informed that the necessary Pulse update is anticipated to be in place by the end of June 2018.

Recommendation 13 of the same report recommends that Insurance Ireland, An Garda Síochána and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions agree a set of guidelines in respect of the reporting of suspected fraudulent insurance claims. While guidelines were published in 2004, the Working Group noted that these have only been used to a very limited extent over the years and proposed that a new set of guidelines should be developed, using the 2004 iteration as a starting point.

In line with the intention to use the existing guidelines to inform the drafting of new, more fit for purpose guidelines, An Garda Síochána produced a draft document which was communicated to Insurance Ireland. The draft document proposed a number of changes to the section of the existing guidelines concerning the station or section within An Garda Síochána to which a formal complaint should be made. Insurance Ireland signalled its agreement with the changes proposed at the fraud roundtable session of 26 March. It was agreed that further consultations with stakeholders regarding the proposed guidelines would take place, including with insurance providers not represented by Insurance Ireland. Two such consultations have already been held and the next meeting of the Roundtable, scheduled for later this week, will aim to finalise the new guidelines in the context of the feedback received. Agreement on the new set of guidelines is expected to be completed on time in Quarter 3 2018.

The fraud roundtable process also intends to examine the follow-on procedure in circumstances where fraud or exaggeration is identified in court or acknowledged by a judge. Recommendation 12 of the Working Group's Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance proposes that where an application under Section 26 of the Civil Liability Act 2004 is successful, this fact should be communicated to An Garda Síochána by the Courts Service. I understand that the fraud roundtable is currently engaging with the Courts Service in this regard.

As I think the Deputy will appreciate from these developments, a concerted policy approach is being taken with the support of the Cost of Insurance Working Group to address the issue of insurance fraud. This is being done by means of a series of mutually reinforcing measures that will include the type of enhanced Garda reporting that the Deputy has raised. At the same time they are intended, in their collective implementation, to give greater effect to the existing provisions of sections 25 and 26 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 .

### **Insurance Fraud**

163. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to establish an insurance fraud unit in An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28161/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Recommendation 26 of the ‘Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance’, published in January 2017, relates to exploring the potential for further cooperation between the insurance sector and An Garda Síochána in relation to insurance fraud investigation. Specifically, this involves considering the feasibility of establishing a specialised and dedicated insurance fraud unit within An Garda Síochána, funded by industry.

The Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) has engaged with Insurance Ireland, submitting a mechanism for further cooperation and a costed proposal to Insurance Ireland in the latter half of 2017. Insurance Ireland has agreed to explore the proposal further, subject to a full cost benefit analysis, to be carried out by Insurance Ireland’s Chief Financial Officers Working Group. The intention would be that such a dedicated Garda unit would be funded by Insurance Ireland members and non-members alike, i.e. all entities writing non-life insurance business in Ireland.

Further progress on this recommendation is dependent upon the outcome of this cost benefit analysis, which is currently awaited. As I have previously informed the House, Insurance Ireland has indicated that it expects to be in a position to provide an update in this regard by the end of June 2018.

Any proposed agreed mechanism will, of course, ultimately be subject to the approval of the Garda Commissioner and myself, as Minister for Justice and Equality.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

164. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extra efforts that are being made to tackle increased antisocial incidents on the DART; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28278/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the allocation of all Garda resources, including personnel, is solely a matter for the Garda Commissioner and his management team and I have no direct role in this regard. However, I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continue to monitor all new and emerging crime trends in our communities, particularly in the Summer months.

I am advised by An Garda Síochána that Garda management engages extensively with transport operators and a range of regional and local operations have been put in place to address incidents of anti-social behaviour. An Garda Síochána maintains close contact with local and senior management in Irish Rail and other transport providers. Gardaí also have a good working relationship with the public transport services providers and patrols of uniformed and plain-clothes Gardaí, including personnel on foot patrols and other community engagement duties, are routinely employed when deemed appropriate by Garda management.

Working with communities to tackle public disorder and reduce anti-social behaviour remains a key priority for An Garda Síochána. This approach includes a strong focus on quality of life issues and collaboration with local authorities to help address the causes of anti-social

behaviour. I might add that there is a range of strong legislative provisions available to An Garda Síochána to combat anti-social behaviour, including provisions under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Acts, the Criminal Damage Act and the Intoxicating Liquor Acts. There are also the incremental provisions contained in the Criminal Justice Act 2006 which provide for warnings and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by adults and Part 13 of the Act which provide for warnings, good behaviour contracts and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by children.

While An Garda Síochána will continue to tackle this problem head-on, they cannot eradicate the problem of anti-social behaviour alone. Specifically in relation to young offenders, it is also up to us as adults, particularly the parents and guardians of our young, to ensure that children are raised to be respectful and law-abiding. These lessons begin in the home, are further reinforced in our schools and then by society in general. We must all work together to ensure that such behaviour is never normalised and is tackled immediately.

*Question No. 165 answered with Question No. 152.*

### **Electric Vehicles**

166. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if e-car charging points are provided at his Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28399/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** My Department does not have e-car charging points in any of its Departmental offices. The requirement for such charging points will be kept under review.

### **Labour Court**

167. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the way in which a person that has had a ruling in their favour from the Labour Court can have that ruling upheld in cases in which their employer refuses to accept the ruling; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28184/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen):** The Labour Court engages with parties in industrial relations disputes in which resolution of issues at local level has not proved possible. In such instances, the dispute can be referred to the Court for an opinion in the form of a recommendation of the Court. However, in line with the voluntary nature of industrial relations in Ireland recommendations of the Labour Court are not binding on the parties. It follows therefore that there is no statutory mechanism by which recommendations of the Labour Court made under the Industrial Relations Acts 1946 to 2015 can be enforced in law.

Separately, since 2015 the Labour Court is the single appellate body for complaints arising under employment/equality law. The procedures for enforcing a determination of the Labour Court in this instance arise as a result of the appeal of a decision of an adjudication officer of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). These procedures are set out at section 45 of the Workplace Relations Act 2015.

A decision of the Labour Court arising from an appeal of an adjudication officer of the WRC must be implemented within 42 days from the date on which the notice was given to the

parties in writing. In circumstances where an employer fails to implement a decision of the Court within the prescribed time periods, an application may be made to the District Court for an order directing the employer to carry out the decision.

Ultimately, failure to comply with an order of the District Court is a criminal offence under section 51 of the Workplace Relations Act 2015. A person found guilty of such an offence is liable on summary conviction, to a class A fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or both.

### **Trade Missions**

168. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if trade missions are planned for Kuwait in the near future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28265/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Current planning envisages a ministerial led trade mission to Kuwait in the latter half of 2018. It will feature high profile buyer networking events and individual itineraries of buyer meetings for participating Enterprise Ireland client companies. Enterprise Ireland has prioritised Enterprise Ireland client activity in Kuwait for 2018, and ran a client networking event in Kuwait in February which coincided with a visit by Minister of State for the Diaspora and International Development Ciaran Cannon.

The Trade Mission in November will be especially relevant to Enterprise Ireland clients in the Agri/Food Tech, Maritime/Logistics, Healthcare, ICT, Fintech, Retail and Professional Services sectors. This trade mission is timed to coincide with the Gulf Food Manufacturing and SeaTrade Exhibitions.

Enterprise Ireland is the state agency under my aegis with responsibility for helping Irish companies to internationalise and scale. Enterprise Ireland's Trade Missions and Events promote the capabilities of client companies to potential business partners and customers in international markets; a central element of the agency's strategy for 2017 -2020: Build Scale, Expand Reach. In 2017 Enterprise Ireland ran 57 Ministerial-led international trade events, including trade missions to Japan, China and Oman.

On the 12th of March, Enterprise Ireland announced that it is set to undertake over 200 international and domestic trade events in 2018 to accelerate the number of Enterprise Ireland clients diversifying into new markets, beyond the UK and into the Eurozone and global markets. The number of trade events being undertaken represents a 50% increase on 2017, reflecting the challenge that Brexit poses for Irish businesses. 70 of these export focused trade events will be led by Government Ministers.

Irish Companies have enjoyed success on previous Trade Missions to the Gulf states including a visit to Oman and UAE in November 2017 where three Irish companies announced deals with Oman partner companies. On the same Trade Mission, Enterprise Ireland and Atlantic Bridge signed agreements with the Oman Technology Fund to further facilitate market entry in Oman for Enterprise Ireland clients and co-investment opportunities in Irish companies. On the same trade mission, the Dublin-based manufacturer of aviation fabrics and carpets, Botany Weaving, announced that it has secured a multi-million dollar deal with a UAE airline.

Outside of Trade Missions, Enterprise Ireland covers the Middle East & North Africa markets from its strategic office locations in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, and Doha. The Gulf States represent a significant market opportunity for export-focused Irish companies as a region heav-



ily reliant on imports and with major ambitions for infrastructural development.

The Gulf region has become a hub for international air travel, connecting Ireland to Asian and African markets and facilitating global expansion for Irish enterprises. A recent economic report commissioned by the Arab-Irish Chamber of Commerce forecasts that Irish exports to the Arab markets have the potential to reach €9 billion over the next two decades.

### **Exports Growth**

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which her Department continues to pursue market opportunities for Irish products globally; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28339/18]

170. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which her Department has redoubled its efforts to establish new markets inside and outside the European Union for Irish products in order to compensate for the consequences of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28340/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 169 and 170 together.

Promoting diversified export markets and pursuing new market opportunities for Irish products in light of the potential impacts of Brexit are key priorities for the Government and my Department. This includes markets that are growing as well as markets where we are already well established but with potential for further growth.

The Government's Enterprise 2025 Renewed strategy published in March 2018 sets out targets for export growth and diversification within the indigenous exporting base, with ambitions to increase exports as a percentage of total sales of Irish owned companies from 52 percent to between 55 and 60 percent by 2020 and increase Enterprise Ireland client exports beyond UK markets from €14.1 billion to €17.4 billion by 2020. The strategy also targets a 50 percent increase in the number of FDI investments from non-US markets by 2020.

In 2017, Enterprise Ireland launched its Eurozone Strategy as a key element of its supports to help companies diversify their export markets. In particular, it aims to increase exports to the Eurozone by €2bn per annum by 2020, equivalent to 50 percent increase. This would represent one of the most significant shifts in Enterprise Ireland supported client exports into the Eurozone and is particularly important in the context of Brexit.

The Government's Trade Strategy, Ireland Connected, supports an extensive programme of Ministerial-led trade missions, as part of a major drive towards market diversification. Enterprise Ireland delivered an impressive programme of international trade events in 2017, giving Irish companies the opportunity to meet with potential buyers and network with key influencers in countries around the world. In total, 57 internationally focused trade events were organised by Enterprise Ireland in 2017 including ministerial-led trade missions to Canada, Singapore, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and a major trade programme as part of the State visit to Australia and New Zealand.

In relation to 2018, the programme of ministerial-led trade missions and events has been finalised and published by Enterprise Ireland, with 70 Ministerial-led trade visits planned to 33 different markets, including to date missions to the USA, Mexico, Russia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, Poland and Czech Republic. Missions to EU markets will be a priority focus for the 2018 programme, together with missions to key markets where the EU

has or is negotiating free trade agreements. As part of the St. Patrick's Day "Promote Ireland" Programmes, Ministerial visits around the world were organised to ensure that we use this exposure to maximise the promotion of Ireland's trade, tourism and investment interests.

Furthermore, in June 2018, the Government formally launched the 'Global Ireland – Ireland's Global Footprint to 2025' initiative. Global Ireland will support efforts to grow and diversify export markets, inward investment and tourism, as Brexit becomes a reality. It will ensure that Ireland is better positioned to build the alliances necessary to advance its interests and defend its positions in a post-Brexit EU, while also helping to secure our deep and positive relationship with the UK and its constituent parts into the future. Under the Global Ireland initiative Enterprise Ireland will further increase the diversification of client exports into new markets, with the ambition that 70% of exports will go to markets beyond the UK by 2025.

As well as the global efforts supported by our agencies, key to our success has been our commitment to trade liberalisation in order to open new markets for our indigenous sectors. The EU has successfully concluded a number of important trade agreements with trading partners and is in the process of negotiating or upgrading its agreements with many more. These existing EU Agreements and new trade deals will continue to be very important for Ireland. With a small domestic market, further expansion in other markets is essential to our continued economic growth. In this regard Ireland will continue to support the EU's ambitious programme of negotiating new Free Trade Agreements, opening new markets for Irish companies and increasing export and investment opportunities.

The EU–Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) entered into force provisionally from the 21st September 2017. Irish companies may now take advantage of the all-important provisions of CETA including the elimination of tariffs on almost all key exports, access to the Canadian procurement market, the easing of regulatory barriers and more transparent rules for market access. CETA presents new opportunities for Irish business and professionals to work and provide services in Canada.

On the 21st April 2018, the EU and Mexico reached an agreement in principle on a new trade agreement that will be part of the broader Global Agreement. The Agreement will provide a platform to increase Irish exports to Mexico, the current total value is just over €2 billion per year with total imports of nearly half a billion euros per year. It will further remove industrial tariffs and important agricultural tariffs. This will be significant for Ireland's important Agri-food sector especially for dairy, pork and poultry products. Ireland is a significant exporter to Mexico of powdered milk and milk derivatives but there are currently significant barriers both to increasing powdered milk exports and to commencing exports of fresh dairy produce. There are many exciting opportunities in Mexico for Irish businesses including manufacturing, automotive, engineering, telecommunications, ICT, aerospace, software and service and manufacturing technology. The Agreement will also open up public procurement markets to Irish businesses and remove technical barriers to trade which will reduce the costs of entry to the Mexican market.

The EU is continuing its negotiations with Mercosur and recently announced the successful conclusion of negotiations of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. The agri-food sector, in particular will see benefits from access to Japan's highly valuable export market, with improved access for beef, pork, cheese and processed agricultural products. In addition, the EU's trade deal with Singapore is hoped to come into force by the end of the year, creating further opportunities across a diverse range of sectors for Irish-based enterprises. In May 2018, the Trade Council of Ministers adopted a decision authorising the opening of negotiations on free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand, as well as adoption of the respective negotiating directives for the Commission.

Ireland will continue to support the EU's ambitious programme of negotiating new FTA's giving Irish firms expanded market access and a predictable trading environment in third countries. My Department has recently commissioned a study to examine the economic opportunities and impacts for Ireland arising from FTAs, both currently in place and in negotiation. The objective is to deepen our understanding of how Ireland can best take advantage of these opportunities, and ensure that our businesses are prepared to access new markets.

### **Brexit Supports**

171. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which her Department continues to foster interaction with authorities throughout the globe with a view to encouraging enhanced trade in preparation for Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28343/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government and my Department is engaging with international partners through a range of strategies, initiatives and articulation of Irish trade interests at international fora. This is particularly important in the context of Brexit and the need to support companies to diversify their product and market bases.

The Government's Trade Strategy, 'Ireland Connected: Trading and Investing in a Dynamic World' supports an extensive programme of Ministerial-led trade missions, as part of a major drive towards market diversification. Enterprise Ireland delivered 57 internationally focused trade events in 2017 including ministerial-led trade missions to Canada, Singapore, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and a major trade programme as part of the State visit to Australia and New Zealand.

In relation to 2018, the programme of ministerial-led trade missions and events has been finalised and published by Enterprise Ireland, with 70 Ministerial-led trade visits planned to 33 different markets, including to date missions to the USA, Mexico, Russia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, Poland and Czech Republic. Missions to EU markets will be a priority focus for the 2018 programme, together with missions to key markets where the EU has or is negotiating free trade agreements. As part of the St. Patrick's Day "Promote Ireland" Programmes, Ministerial visits around the world were organised to ensure that we use this exposure to maximise the promotion of Ireland's trade, tourism and investment interests.

Furthermore, in June 2018, the Government formally launched the "Global Ireland – Ireland's Global Footprint to 2025" initiative, which is the most ambitious renewal and expansion of Ireland's international presence ever undertaken, including the objective of opening at least 26 new diplomatic missions and expansion of our agencies including the overseas networks of Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and Board Bia. Global Ireland will support efforts to grow and diversify export markets, inward investment and tourism, as Brexit becomes a reality. It will ensure that Ireland is better positioned to build the alliances necessary to advance its interests and defend its positions in a post-Brexit EU, while also helping to secure our deep and positive relationship with the UK and its constituent parts into the future.

Specifically, Global Ireland 2025 aims to strengthen our presence in the United States, including a new flagship 'Ireland House' – a hub for diplomacy, trade, business and cultural promotion in Los Angeles, and expanding our presence elsewhere in the Americas. It will also expand our presence in the Asia-Pacific region, including a new flagship Ireland House in Tokyo. It also strengthens our presence in North and West Africa, and in the Middle East and Gulf region as well as augmenting diplomatic and agency presence across our main European markets.

As well as the global efforts supported by our agencies and embassies, key to our success has been our commitment to trade liberalisation in order to open new markets for our indigenous sectors. The EU has successfully concluded a number of important trade agreements with trading partners and is in the process of negotiating or upgrading its agreements with many more. These existing EU Agreements and new trade deals will continue to be very important for Ireland. With a small domestic market, further expansion in other markets is essential to our continued economic growth. In this regard Ireland will continue to support the EU's ambitious programme of negotiating new Free Trade Agreements, opening new markets for Irish companies and increasing export and investment opportunities.

The EU–Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) entered into force provisionally from the 21st September 2017. Irish companies may now take advantage of the all-important provisions of CETA including the elimination of tariffs on almost all key exports, access to the Canadian procurement market, the easing of regulatory barriers and more transparent rules for market access. CETA presents new opportunities for Irish business and professionals to work and provide services in Canada.

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The EU is continuing its negotiations with Mercosur and recently announced the successful conclusion of negotiations of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. The agri-food sector, in particular will see benefits from access to Japan's highly valuable export market, with improved access for beef, pork, cheese and processed agricultural products. In addition, the EU's trade deal with Singapore is hoped to come into force by the end of the year, creating further opportunities across a diverse range of sectors for Irish-based enterprises. In May 2018, the Trade Council of Ministers adopted a decision authorising the opening of negotiations on free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand, as well as adoption of the respective negotiating directives for the Commission.

Ireland will continue to support the EU's ambitious programme of negotiating new FTA's giving Irish firms expanded market access and a predictable trading environment in third countries. Ireland continues to actively articulate its trade interests at EU level at the Trade Council and through collaboration with like-minded Member States, in addition to active participation and representation at the World Trade Organisation. My Department has recently commissioned a study to examine the economic opportunities and impacts for Ireland arising from FTAs, both currently in place and in negotiation. The objective is to deepen our understanding of how Ireland can best take advantage of these opportunities, and ensure that our businesses are prepared to access new markets.

Finally, I and my colleague Ministers of State in the Department as well as Ministers across Government, avail ourselves of numerous opportunities to meet international Government

colleagues, industry groups and individual companies during each year to promote our trade growth, diversification and FDI strategies.

### **Electric Vehicles**

172. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if e-car charging points are provided at her Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28388/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Accommodation for my Department is provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW) in buildings which are either State owned or leased by OPW on our behalf. The accommodation is typically shared with other Government Departments and Offices with limited car parking spaces available to staff.

There are currently no e-car charging points in any of the car parks in locations occupied by the Department and its Offices.

### **Transport Support Scheme**

173. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health when the new transport support scheme will be established; the reason for the delay in establishing the new scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28084/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Deputy will be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in February 2013. Since the closure of the Mobility Allowance, the Government has directed that the Health Service Executive should continue to pay an equivalent monthly payment of up to €208.50 per month to the 4,046 people in receipt of the Mobility Allowance, on an interim basis, pending the establishment of a new Transport Support Scheme.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. The Programme for a Partnership Government acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme to assist those with a disability to meet their mobility costs. The Health (Transport Support) Bill is on the list of priority legislation for publication in the Spring/Summer session 2018. I can confirm that work on the policy proposals for the new Scheme is at an advanced stage. The proposals seek to ensure that:

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;
- Resources are targeted at those with greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

My colleague, the Minister for Health and I recently brought a Memorandum to Government for proposals for a new Transport Support Payment Scheme. Following consideration of the matter, it was decided to withdraw the Memorandum from the cabinet Agenda on 8 May

last. I intend to revert to Government with revised proposals to reflect the discussion at Cabinet, in due course.

With regard to the Motorised Transport Grant, this scheme operated as a means-tested grant to assist persons with severe disabilities with the purchase or adaptation of a car, where that car was essential to retain employment. The maximum Motorised Transport Grant, which was payable once in any three year period, was €5,020. Following the closure of the scheme in February 2013, no further Motorised Transport Grants have been payable.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance. Specifically adapted vehicles driven by persons with a disability are also exempt from payment of tolls on national roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular scheme.

There are improvements in access to a range of transport support schemes available to persons with disabilities in the State and on-going work is being carried out by Government Departments, agencies and transport providers to further improve access to public transport services. Under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has responsibility for the continued development of accessibility and availability of public transport for people with a disability.

### **General Practitioner Contracts**

174. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the status of the negotiations on the general practitioner contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28086/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** General practice is one of the cornerstones of our health service and the Government recognises that the contractual arrangements between the HSE and GPs must enable patients' needs to be met while also addressing the sustainability of general practice into the future.

The Government is therefore committed to engaging with the representatives of general practitioners on the development of a package of measures and reforms to modernise the 1989 GMS Contract. Our goal is to develop a contractual framework that has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion, disease prevention and for the structured care of chronic conditions and up-to-date provisions on service quality and standards, performance and accountability.

Officials from my Department and the HSE met with the Irish Medical Organisation at the beginning of May to set out the State's position in relation to the GMS contract and to progress this important issue. The Department subsequently wrote to the Irish Medical Organisation to set out the proposals made at that meeting in writing and is currently awaiting the Organisation's official response.

In line with the long-established approach to such processes, and by agreement of the parties concerned, I am not in position to give further details while discussions between the parties are under way.

Reform of the GMS contract will enable general practitioners to better meet the needs of

their patients while promoting general practice as a viable and rewarding career for both existing doctors and future medical graduates.

I look forward to positive and productive engagement with all parties concerned that will facilitate a substantial increase in Government resourcing of general practice on a multi annual basis, contingent of course on agreement to the delivery of much-needed service improvements and contractual reforms.

### **Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists**

175. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health if a child (details supplied) will be seen by a public orthodontist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28087/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Respite Care Services Availability**

176. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason respite services have been cut at a facility (details supplied); when they were cut; the location persons are expected to receive respite in County Cavan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28090/18]

**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.

### **Disability Support Services Provision**

177. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a long-term sustainable all round care plan will be put in place for a person (details supplied); if a plan was agreed following a meeting of 17 professionals associated with the care of the person; if a direct line of communication will be set up by the HSE with the family; the reason a meeting with local HSE officials did not take place as planned; the reason the HSE objected to a public representative being present with the family; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28105/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy’s question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Respite Care Services Data**

178. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of applications for re-

spite made to a facility (details supplied) in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of those that received respite at the facility in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28116/18]

**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.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

179. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of the HSE's discussions regarding the availability of a drug (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28117/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE pursuant to the Community Drugs scheme, the company must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the Reimbursement List.

As outlined in the IPHA agreement, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to either add the medicine to the reimbursement list or agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse the medicine.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro investments on an on-going basis. This can lead to a protracted deliberation process.

I have been informed that Ocrelizumab for the treatment of adult patients with early primary progressive multiple sclerosis (PPMS) and for the treatment of adult patients with relapsing forms of multiple sclerosis (RMS) is currently undergoing a full pharmacoeconomic assessment by the NCPE.

### **Hospital Appointments Delays**

180. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28122/18]



**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Services**

181. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if hospital services in counties Cavan and Monaghan will be invested in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28138/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The planning and management of future health expenditure is considered as part of the annual estimates and budgetary process which seeks to balance available funding across all service areas to achieve the best possible outcomes for the greatest number of service users and prioritise areas of greatest need. The 2018 HSE National Service Plan outlines the HSE's need to continue to pursue increased efficiency, value for money and budgetary control in delivering safe and effective healthcare services within its budget allocation.

In response to the particular query raised, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you as soon as possible outlining any specific investment plans at these two hospitals.

### **Hospital Appointments Delays**

182. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [28139/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to

respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospitals Data**

183. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the did not attend rates for hospital procedures by hospital in 2017 and to date in 2018. [28141/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) collects and collates information in respect of the Inpatient, Day Case, Planned Procedure (IDPP\*) and Outpatient (OP) Waiting Lists.

In terms of the query raised by the Deputy, the NTPF have provided me with this information, and I have arranged for my Department to email you the relevant spreadsheet.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

184. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); if the appointment will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28146/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services**

185. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a CAMHS appointment. [28149/18]

**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.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

186. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the reason persons with disabilities under 18 years of age are not able to access personalised budgets; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [28158/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I have received the Report of the Task Force on Personalised Budgets and am currently considering its recommendations.

### HSE Documents

187. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE appeals procedure in relation to circular 17/2013 was first issued; the steps taken to ensure compliance with this appeals procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28164/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

### UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

188. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with disabilities that remain in inappropriate institutions; if the matter will be addressed in the context of Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in the context of the recent ESRI and Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission report Discrimination and Inequality in Housing in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28168/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As the deputy will be aware, Ireland recently ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which came into force for Ireland on 19 April this year.

The Convention, in Article 19, calls upon State parties to recognise the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others, and shall take effective and appropriate measures to facilitate full enjoyment by persons with disabilities of this right and their full inclusion and participation in the community. Accordingly, 'Living in the Community' has been designated as one of eight themes within the National Disability Inclusion Strategy launched in 2017, which is co-ordinated by the Department of Justice and Equality.

The strategy commits the Government to supporting people with disabilities to live a fulfilled life and enabling them to participate fully in the activities of their communities through a range of measures. Such measures include full implementation of the Transforming Lives Programme; a strengthened focus on culture change from the 'care' to 'support' model; and the development of actions at community level to build and sustain for disability.'

The report by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, referred to by the Deputy, examines several different aspects of discrimination and inequality relating to housing, accessing housing and housing quality and is a matter for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government. However, in the context of decongregation, and the process of moving people from institutions into modern independent community living, there is regular and continued engagement between officials from the Department of Health, the HSE and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

This Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet

their needs and plan their lives .

The HSE Disability Service Plan is providing for 8,399 residential places this year. The process of moving people with a disability from congregated settings into the community, to live more independent lives, is progressing. At the beginning of 2018 there were 2,370 residents remaining in a congregated setting, down from over 4,000 when this process began. In 2017, 144 people moved into the community, while there has been steady progress in the first quarter of 2018. Current projections are that 170 will complete their move to the community this year.

### **Alcohol Pricing**

189. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his views on laws governing the below cost selling of alcohol; his further views on whether the law as stated is robust enough; and his plans to bring forward further legislation in this area. [28170/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** One of the main provisions of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill is the introduction of minimum unit pricing. This provision will prohibit the advertising or sale of alcohol products below a set minimum price. This is a targeted measure designed to prevent the sale of alcohol at very cheap prices and aimed at those who drink in a harmful and hazardous manner.

My Department has evidence based findings from commissioned research which show that minimum unit pricing is a more targeted and therefore effective measure than increasing excise duty or introducing a ban on below cost selling. The research indicates that neither of these options address the health harms associated with the consumption of strong cheap alcohol products.

A ban on below cost selling based on the invoice cost price of the alcohol product to the retailer would not target strong, cheap alcohol unlike minimum unit pricing which will target the very cheapest alcohol relative to its strength because the price is determined by, and directly proportionate to, the amount of alcohol in the drink.

### **Magdalen Laundries**

190. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the details of the medical card provision to survivors of the Magdalen laundries; the scope of its cover; the services it does not provide for; the similar provisions that apply in other cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28215/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Qualification for health services under the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions (RWRCI) Act 2015 is based on the following:

(i) The Minister for Justice and Equality has determined that a woman is eligible under the Restorative Justice Scheme, which provides for the making of ex-gratiapayments to women who were admitted to and worked in a relevant institution; and,

(ii) A woman has accepted a formal offer made to her by the Minister for Justice and Equality under the Restorative Justice Scheme.

These women will receive a 2015A Scheme card from the HSE, which identifies the holder as qualifying for the health services specified in the RWRCI Act 2015.

The following primary and community health services are available to cardholders in Ireland and will be provided on the basis of assessed needs:

**(i) General Practitioner Service**

This includes standard attendances for routine general practitioner services at a GP chosen by the cardholder from the list of GPs participating in the General Medical Services (GMS) scheme or a non-GMS registered medical practitioner providing general practitioner services.

**(ii) Drugs, Medicines and Medical and Surgical Appliances**

The card holder is eligible to receive free of charge all medicines, medical and surgical appliances that are currently reimbursed by the community drugs scheme. This eligibility refers to items prescribed by a clinical professional. Cardholders are not required to pay any prescription fees.

**(iii) Dental, Ophthalmic and Aural Services**

The card holder has access to public dental, ophthalmic (eye sight) and aural (hearing) services.

**Dental Services**

Service under the Dental Treatment Service Scheme include:

- A free oral examination every calendar year
- Two fillings every calendar year
- All extractions
- Free emergency dental treatment for relief of pain and sepsis
- Dentures (every 5 years, if clinically necessary)
- Additional fillings, prophylaxis, other more complex dental treatments if clinically indicated

**Ophthalmic Services**

This service includes:

- Free eye examination by an optometrist or an ophthalmologist
- Any necessary standard spectacles, (frames and lenses, once every two years more often if required in certain medical circumstances). Lost or broken spectacles may be replaced within two years.

**Aural Services**

The HSE provides aural services, including hearing tests, hearing aids and repairs of hearing aids.

**(iv) Home Nursing Service**

The card holder can access the home nursing service, which is provided by the HSE under section 60 of the Health Act 1970, (as amended). The nursing service, which is defined as care provided at home, can provide advice on matters relating to the cardholder's health and assist

her if she is sick.

**(v) Home Support Service**

The card holder can access the home support service, which is provided by the HSE under section 61 of the Health Act 1970, (as amended). This service assists her to remain in her own home and provides assistance with personal care. The extent of support will be determined following an assessment by a registered medical practitioner or a registered nurse that the service is so required.

**(vi) Chiropody Service**

The card holder can access chiropody services, which are provided by the HSE, following a referral made by a registered medical practitioner, registered nurse or Primary Care team.

**(vii) Physiotherapy Service**

The card holder can access physiotherapy services, which are provided by the HSE, following a referral made by a registered medical practitioner or Primary Care team.

**(viii) Counselling Service**

The card holder can access a counselling service, relative to her admission to and/or work in any of the institutions specified in the Schedule in the RWRCI Act 2015. The counselling service is provided by the HSE, following a referral made by a registered medical practitioner, e.g. the woman's GP.

In order to access the services of the RWRCI Act, card holders are required to produce their cards as evidence of eligibility to gain access to services.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

191. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for a procedure at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28217/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Health Services Provision**

192. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health if hospital transport can be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28240/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

### **Hospital Appointments Delays**

193. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28241/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

194. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have an operation at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28242/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

### **Hospital Appointments Delays**

195. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28243/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Appointments Delays**

196. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28244/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Home Care Packages Administration**

197. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied that those in need of home care are able to access the care in a timely manner and that this care is adequate to meet their needs in view of the reliance on private companies to deliver home care packages; if an audit of these services has been carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28249/18]

**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.

### **Hospital Appointments Delays**

198. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28263/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Appointments Delays**



199. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28264/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Ambulance Service**

200. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if more resources will be provided for ambulance services across counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28283/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

### **Office of Government Procurement**

201. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if a company (details supplied) is an approved agency for tendering for Government contracts; if his attention has been drawn to the practice of company renaming in the past in order to obviate regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28355/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Office of Government Procurement has responsibility, together with sectoral partners, for putting in place framework agreements and contracts through which public sector bodies can buy goods and services. The Office is also responsible for procurement policy and procedures, sourcing systems and data analytics. With regard to the company (details supplied), the Deputy will be aware that my Department availed of their HR coaching services in 2015.

### **Mental Health Services Data**

202. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the number of clinical psychologists in counties Laois and Offaly primary care psychology that were available for children with mental health complaints in each of the past ten years; the number of children referred to them; the number that were seen for a psychology assessment; the number that were offered follow-up interventions by them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28356/18]

**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.

### **National Maternity Hospital Status**

203. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in finalising the deal with St. Vincent's Hospital group with regard to the future of the national maternity hospital; the nature of the agreement in respect of the site to be provided; the outstanding impediments to the completion of the deal; the timescale to which he is working; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28357/18]

204. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if the new national maternity hospital will remain in public ownership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28358/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 203 and 204 together.

The terms of the Mulvey agreement provide for the establishment of a new company which will have clinical and operational, as well as financial and budgetary independence in the provision of maternity, gynaecology and neonatal services.

At present, a draft legal framework is being finalised which will ensure that the State's significant investment in the new maternity hospital will be protected. This framework will also further underpin the operational and clinical independence of the new hospital; it is intended that the new hospital building will remain in State ownership.

This work has proven to be highly complex and, consequently, taken some time to progress. While completion of the detailed legal agreement will require further engagement between both hospitals, the HSE and my Department, I can confirm that a broad understanding has been reached on the way forward.

### **Cancer Screening Programmes**

205. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the origin of the further 46 identified cases referred to in media reports (details supplied); the way in which these cases were identified; if the women concerned have all been contacted; the number of cases being dealt with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28359/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The CervicalCheck clinical audit process included 1,482 cases of cervical cancer notified to CervicalCheck since 2008. In April, the Serious Incident Management Team identified that there were 209 women for whom clinical audit results should have been disclosed but that in the majority of cases, this had not happened. The initial focus was on ensuring these 209 women were communicated with.

At that time, there were a further 46 cases of the overall 1,482 for which clinical audit had been initiated but not completed. The clinical audit process for 12 of these cases was finalised in recent days. The HSE has advised that open disclosure of these newly available results to the women concerned is currently underway. The aim is to ensure disclosure is completed in a timely, sensitive and appropriate manner, as should always be the case, recognising the impact on women of previous failings in this regard.

## Cancer Screening Programmes

206. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if all the women and families affected by the CervicalCheck scandal have now been contacted; the number of support packages that have been put in place; and the reason for the delay in finalising outstanding packages of supports [28360/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Contact has been made with 208 of the 209 women who were part of the original audit whose cytology results were known to have a different interpretation as a result of the audit. The one remaining woman who has not yet been informed has emigrated. Efforts are continuing to contact this woman through Department of Foreign Affairs.

As of 22 June, HSE Liaison Officers had held 155 face-to-face meetings with individuals affected to discuss their needs and the process of issuing medical cards and delivering other services, such as counselling, is well underway.

It is important to note that every individual's circumstances will be unique to them and thus the HSE has taken care to respect the wishes of the women and their families regarding the timing of contacts and subsequent meetings. Where meetings have not yet been held, this reflects the wishes of the individuals concerned either to meet at a future date that suits them or, in some instances, not to take up the offer of support.

Arrangements to make an ex gratia payment of €2,000 as recommended by Dr Gabriel Scally in his Progress Report of 11 June to each of the women affected or, where a woman has died, to their next-of-kin, are being coordinated through the HSE Liaison Officers. The provision of these payments has begun and the HSE aims to have all the payments processed by the end of June, subject to banking details being provided.

## Cancer Screening Programmes

207. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the undertaking that the women and families affected by the CervicalCheck scandal would not be brought through the courts and that the State would enter into mediation; the number of offers of mediation that have been made; the number that have agreed to the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28361/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The SCA, in collaboration with the relevant laboratories in the individual cases, is committed to resolving these cases in line with the principles outlined by the Government, expediting resolution of the cases in a sensitive manner, utilising mediation wherever possible and placing a high priority on treating the people who have made the claims, and their families, with dignity and compassion.

Subject to the express wishes of any particular claimant to choose otherwise, the SCA is committed to ensuring that the cases are resolved through mediation rather than through the Courts. In that regard, the SCA will offer mediation in all of the cases. Currently, mediation has been offered in four cases where the cases are being case-managed by the High Court. In one of the cases where mediation was offered, the claimant declined mediation and a settlement of that case was arrived at by means of lawyer to lawyer negotiations.

## Open Disclosures Policy

208. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to follow through on the commitment to introduce mandatory open disclosure; and the timescale proposed for its completion. [28362/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government recently gave approval to the drafting of legislative provisions to provide for mandatory open disclosure through the development of the General Scheme of a Patient Safety Bill. The General Scheme has been developed by officials of my Department, with a view to having this item brought to the Government for consideration in early July 2018. It is hoped that it will be possible to have the Bill referred to the Oireachtas in order for Parliamentary Counsel to commence drafting of the legislation shortly thereafter.

These provisions to provide for mandatory open disclosure of serious patient safety incidents will be in addition to the provisions for open disclosure contained in the Civil Liability (Amendment) Act 2017. The Regulations to prescribe the process for open disclosure in line with the Civil Liability (Amendment) Act 2017 are also being drafted at present and are expected to be finalised shortly.

The Patient Safety Bill, in addition to addressing mandatory open disclosure will also provide for a number of other important patient safety concerns, including in relation to mandatory reporting of serious incidents to an appropriate regulatory body such as HIQA, enabling the Minister for Health to issue guidance in relation to clinical audit, and extending the remit of HIQA to private hospitals.

### **HSE Board**

209. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the reinstatement of the HSE board; and his views on whether this will be completed by the 2018 summer recess of Dáil Éireann. [28363/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The legislation to establish an independent Board for the HSE is being drafted as a priority and the Minister expects to publish the Bill in July. The Minister hopes to have cross-party support to bring the Bill through the Oireachtas as quickly as possible to ensure its early passage, subject to the legislative schedule. He intends to establish the Board once the legislation has been passed.

### **Health Services Reports**

210. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation of Sláintecare; the reason for the delay in appointing a lead executive to head up the implementation office; and when the appointment will be made [28364/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The successful delivery of the ambitious reform plans envisaged in the Sláintecare report will be a significant undertaking and needs to be translated into a detailed and phased programme of work to be delivered over a ten year timeframe. In this regard, my Department is currently finalising an implementation plan in response to the Sláintecare report, with a focus on the initial three year period. It is my intention to bring proposals to Government before the summer recess and to publish the implementation plan shortly thereafter. While I accept that this is later than originally envisaged, it is important that we get it right.

I have already acted on several of the specific recommendations proposed in the Sláintecare report. A Sláintecare Programme Office is being established in the Department of Health and a provision of €1 million was made available for the Office in Budget 2018. This office will be tasked with implementing a programme of reform, as agreed by Government, arising from the Sláintecare Report. The process for the appointment of an Executive Director to lead the Sláintecare Programme Office has been managed independently by the Public Appointments Service. This has been a thorough process involving a national and international executive search. An appointment will be made shortly.

An independent board for the HSE is being established as recommended in the Sláintecare report. The General Scheme of a Bill has been published and it is hoped that legislation will be enacted this year.

The Sláintecare Report recommended the removal of private practice from public hospitals. I have established an Independent Review Group to examine how private practice can be removed from public hospitals. It will report later this year.

A public consultation on the geographical alignment of Hospital Groups and Community Healthcare Organisations has recently been completed and responses are being analysed. This will inform work on broader health service structural reform as recommended in the Sláintecare report.

Finally, the Government has demonstrated significant commitment to invest in our health and social care services since the publication of the Sláintecare report. Funding for new initiatives in Budget 2018 were closely aligned with proposals in Sláintecare. In addition, funding of €10.9 billion has been ear-marked for health projects in the National Development Plan. This will include the development of primary care centres, community diagnostics, community care beds and additional acute hospital capacity, including three elective facilities.

This is the first time in the history of the State that cross-party consensus of this scale has been achieved on health policy and I welcome this. I intend to harness the consensus generated by the Report to move forward with a significant programme of health reform. The Government is committed to making tangible improvements in our health service and the Sláintecare Report provides the direction of travel for this.

### **Residential Institutions**

211. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if a supervised residential facility will be found urgently for a person (details supplied) before harm comes to them or others; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28373/18]

**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.

### **Audiology Services Provision**

212. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if a review of services provided to 1,000 children by an audiologist in the south east is being carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28382/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE advises that it is proceeding with

a precautionary recall of children and young adults in CHO5 (Counties Waterford, Wexford, Carlow, Kilkenny and South Tipperary) for further assessment following an audit, as part of a quality assurance process.

This recall follows an analysis of the quality of service delivery in the area against the standards for such services that were set out in the National Audiology Review Group Report (2011). Since 2011, the recommendations of this Report, including clinical governance and quality assurance processes, have been the benchmark for the quality of service delivery throughout the country.

### **Electric Vehicles**

213. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health if e-car charging points are provided at his Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28397/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** My Department's new Headquarters in Mission Plaza has two e-charging points.

### **Health Services Staff Recruitment**

214. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the status of the recruitment by the HSE of 19 speech and language therapists and 12 occupational therapists to work with the 150 schools and pre-schools in a pilot project in CHO 7. [28404/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **TAMS Applications**

215. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 461 of 22 May 2018, the status of a TAMS II application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28101/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The applicant submitted a claim for payment on 1 June 2018 for investment items carried out under the Animal Welfare and Nutrient Storage Scheme of TAMS II. A number of deficiencies were identified during the course of the pre-payment validation checks with the documents submitted. A query letter was issued to the applicant on 6 June 2018 detailing the issues concerned and the appropriate corrective action required. The applicant was requested to submit a reply to the queries raised within 10 working days from this notification. To date, the applicant has not responded to the queries raised and the issues remain outstanding.

## Live Exports

216. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the conditions pertaining to the movement of live cattle North and South and exports of live cattle to Britain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28109/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Live exports are an important component of Ireland's livestock industry. I am conscious of the vital role they play in stimulating price competition, and providing an alternative market outlet for farmers.

Last year my Department reduced the veterinary inspection fee payable on live exports of calves under three months of age to €1.20 per animal, from €4.80. This gave an important boost to the trade in young calves, and brought greater equity in the fees payable for calves, weanlings and adult cattle.

Movement of cattle to Northern Ireland increased by 1, 542 head to over 26, 000 head from 2016 to 2017, while there was a decrease in exports to Great Britain by 724 to 5, 900 head in the same period. In 2018 to date nearly 8, 600 have been moved to NI, with over 3, 200 moved to GB.

Movement of cattle between EU Member States is subject to a number of conditions. Animals must be properly identified, undergo a veterinary inspection, be fit to travel, and be accompanied by an Intra-Community Trade Animal Health Certificate (ITAHC), issued under the EU TRACES system by my Department. Cattle are usually exported from approved assembly centres and must complete a 30-day residency period on a holding (this does not apply to cattle for slaughter) and a TB test prior to export.

## Basic Payment Scheme Appeals

217. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied); the reason for the delay in making a decision in relation to this review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28110/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The representatives of the person named contacted my Department in May 2017 with regard to the Potential Unused Entitlement Notification which issued in April 2017.

My Department explained to the solicitor that if a Basic Payment Scheme application was submitted for 2016/2017, the unused entitlements would be reviewed.

An official from my Department has forwarded 2016 and 2017 application forms to the representatives of the person named. This will facilitate the lodging of an appeal with my Department.

## Basic Payment Scheme Applications

218. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a reply will issue in respect of a query (details supplied); the reason for the delay in issuing a response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28114/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The 2015 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application in respect of the person named was received on 29 May

2015. Following the processing of this application, small over claims were identified on the parcels claimed. This resulted in no financial impact on the herd owner's 2015 BPS payment. An official from my Department will contact the person named directly to clarify the position.

In addition, my Department has been dealing with a 2017 BPS query from the Deputy regarding the same applicant, and this process is on-going.

### **Basic Payment Scheme Applications**

219. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a reply will issue in respect of a query (details supplied); the reason for the delay in issuing a response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28115/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The 2015 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application in respect of the person named was received on 06 May 2015. Following the processing of this application, small over claims were identified on the parcels claimed. This resulted in no financial impact on the herd owner's 2015 BPS payment. An official from my Department will contact the person named directly to clarify the position.

In addition, my Department has been dealing with a 2017 BPS query from the Deputy regarding the same applicant, and this process is on-going.

### **Fur Farming**

220. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is examining the possibility of banning fur farming here; the status of the codes of practice set out in the review report of 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28132/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department has statutory responsibility for the welfare and protection of farmed animals under the European Communities (Welfare of Farmed Animals) Regulations, 2010 (Statutory Instrument No 311/2010) and the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. Irish fur farmers are, in this regard, subject to the same animal welfare legislation as other livestock farmers.

A small number of Member States have imposed bans on fur farming, however the activity is common in many European countries.

A review of all aspects of fur farming in Ireland was commissioned in November 2011. The Terms of Reference of the Review Group were:

- (i) To review fur farming in Ireland taking into account existing legislative provisions for the licensing of mink farming;
- (ii) To comment on the economic benefits of the sector;
- (iii) To consider the effectiveness of existing welfare controls, and
- (iv) To make appropriate recommendations

The Review Group invited submissions from the public and interested parties and considered over four hundred submissions which were received.

The Group concluded that it did not find the arguments in favour of banning the farming of



fur animals in Ireland compelling and recommended that instead, fur farming be allowed continue under licence and subject to official control.

On foot of the Review Group's deliberations, my Department introduced more rigorous controls on licence holders in the areas of animal welfare, animal accommodation, security and nutrient management. Licensees are subject to regular inspections, including unannounced inspections by the Departments Veterinary officers.

The group recommended that Codes of practice be drawn up. Codes of practice were drafted in consultation with my Department's agricultural inspectors and a public consultation on them was held in 2014.

### Fur Farming

221. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of inspections at each fur farm here in each year since 2015 to date; the number of minks killed at fur farms here in each year since 2015 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28133/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** There are currently 3 mink fur farms operating in Ireland. Inspections of these farms relating to their licensing and to animal welfare matters are carried out by officers from my Department. Since 2015 there have been 36 inspections carried out, breakdown for each year as follows:

2015	2016	2017	2018
12	12	11	1

My Department does not hold records of the numbers of mink slaughtered.

### Harness Racing

222. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the efforts being taken to address the issue of illegal sulky racing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28135/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The use of sulkies or any other horse drawn vehicles on the roads is a legitimate activity provided it is done in a safe manner giving due care and consideration to other road users and the animal's well being. However, illegal racing activities taking place on roads, involving any type of vehicle, is a matter for An Garda Síochána and the Department of Transport.

My Department's interaction with the sulky issue is focussed on animal welfare. The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 provides a robust and wide ranging protection for all animals. This includes horses and ponies used in road racing.

The issue of regulating the use of sulkies has been examined by my Department and the issues are complex and not always clear cut, particularly as there are a variety of horse drawn vehicles legitimately and safely used on Irish roads.

Therefore the approach being taken by my Department is to raise the awareness of the importance of good horse welfare amongst sulky participants and the owners and keepers of trotting horses. My Department has recently awarded a tender to operate an education program,

that has been designed specifically for sulky drivers and trotter horse owners, in a number of locations around the country. This course will encourage participants to move away from the road racing practices to racing on tracks and to engage with the regulated sport of harness racing on tracks as operated by the Irish Harness Racing Association.

The course provider has a clear understanding of the cultural sensitivities surrounding participation in road-racing. Meeting these goals will be underpinned by the relevant experience of both the course provider and the team of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses that will be delivering the course.

The first round of the course which was undertaken in North Dublin proved very popular with participants. The next round will be run in north Cork in the coming weeks and in the midlands after that.

### **Live Exports**

223. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to issues raised in correspondence (details supplied) the steps he is taking to ensure that the Carriage of Livestock by Sea Regulations 2016 are stringently enforced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28183/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In the vast majority of instances the carriage of livestock from Ireland to various destinations to date in 2018 have taken place without incident and in full compliance with the relevant requirements of the EU and national legislation.

In the case of a small number of non-compliances detected to date in 2018 in relation to transport of livestock involving truck and roll-on, roll-off ferry transport, following investigations by the Irish and/or French authorities, penalties were applied accordingly under S.I. 675 of 2006.

My Department is currently drawing up plans for the 2019 peak export period to further enhance compliance levels.

Separately, the position in respect of exports of live cattle by dedicated livestock ships is that my Department updated the existing Diseases of Animals (Carriage of Cattle by Sea) Orders, 1996 and 1998 requirements with current legislation enacted by S.I. 356 of 2016 (Carriage of Livestock by Sea Regulations 2016). These regulations continue to play a critical role in safeguarding the welfare of animals transported by sea, and are unique by European Union standards.

Both I and my Department will continue to promote and maintain an environment in which live exports can take place in both an economic and sustainable manner, with due regard for the welfare of all animals exported.

### **Fur Farming**

224. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ban fur farming here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28366/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** This issue was examined as part of a review of all aspects of fur farming in Ireland, which was commissioned

in November 2011. The conclusion of the group did not support a ban on fur farming.

The Terms of Reference of the Review Group were:

- (i) To review fur farming in Ireland taking into account existing legislative provisions for the licensing of mink farming;
- (ii) To comment on the economic benefits of the sector;
- (iii) To consider the effectiveness of existing welfare controls, and
- (iv) To make appropriate recommendations

The Review Group invited submissions from the public and interested parties and considered over four hundred submissions which were received.

The Group concluded that it did not find the arguments in favour of banning the farming of fur animals in Ireland compelling and recommended that instead, fur farming be allowed continue under licence and subject to official control.

On foot of the Review Group's deliberations, my Department introduced more rigorous controls on licence holders in the areas of animal welfare, animal accommodation, security and nutrient management. Licensees are subject to regular inspections, including unannounced inspections by the Departments Veterinary officers.

A small number of Member States have imposed bans on mink farming, however the activity is common in many European countries.

### **Fur Farming**

225. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if rescinding the licences of the remaining fur farms (details supplied) will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28367/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department has statutory responsibility for the welfare and protection of farmed animals under the European Communities (Welfare of Farmed Animals) Regulations, 2010 (Statutory Instrument No 311/2010) and the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. There are currently three operators in Ireland licensed to keep mink.

In 2011 a Review Group was established to examine all aspects of fur farming in Ireland. The Terms of Reference of the Review Group were:

- (i) To review fur farming in Ireland taking into account existing legislative provisions for the licensing of mink farming
- (ii) To comment on the economic benefits of the sector
- (iii) To consider the effectiveness of existing welfare controls, and
- (iv) To make appropriate recommendations

The Review Group invited submissions from the public and interested parties and considered over four hundred submissions which were received.

The Group concluded that it did not find the arguments in favour of banning the farming of

fur animals in Ireland compelling and recommended that instead, fur farming be allowed continue under licence and subject to official control.

On foot of the Review Group's deliberations, my Department introduced more rigorous controls on licence holders in the areas of animal welfare, animal accommodation, security and nutrient management. Licensees are subject to regular inspections, including unannounced inspections by Department officials.

In the circumstances, given the recommendations from the Review Group, I have no plans to rescind the licences concerned.

### **Electric Vehicles**

226. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if e-car charging points are provided at his Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28387/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department currently provides an e-car charging point and parking bay at the National Seafood Centre, Clonakilty, Co. Cork. This building is where the Department's Seafood and Marine Divisions, the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and Bord Iascaigh Mhara are all co-located.

### **Fishing Industry**

227. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeline for the opening of applications in relation to the eel fisherman hardship scheme. [28099/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne):** Ireland's Eel Management Plan (EMP), including the closure of commercial fishing, was approved, in 2009, by the European Commission under EU Regulation 1100/2007. Fishing for eel was by way of public licence and therefore the issue of compensation does not arise. However, I directed my officials to engage with the European Commission in relation to Ireland's proposals to fund a support scheme for former eel fishermen. The outcome of that engagement confirmed that funding for the proposed measure is not eligible for support under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. However both Minister Naughten and I have secured Exchequer funding to support the measure and our position that this does not constitute State Aid has been confirmed to the Commission. Consultation with the Revenue Commissioners is at an advanced stage. Until consultations are completed, it is not possible to elaborate on the terms and conditions for, or the prospective number of participants in, any potential support measure. Once completed it is intended to publish the relevant details in the coming weeks

### **Fish Farming**

228. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 184 of 20 June 2018, if Inland Fisheries Ireland has received a comprehensive report from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine regarding the farmed salmon escape from an operation at Glinsk in Mulroy Bay, County Donegal in July 2017; if Inland Fisheries Ireland is satisfied the Department of Agriculture,

Food and Marine has addressed all matters relating to the escape; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28124/18]

229. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether it is possible the farmed salmon stock captured in the western river basin district in 2017 had the potential to originate from a jurisdiction other than that of Ireland or Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28125/18]

230. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied with the relationships between Inland Fisheries Ireland, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Marine Institute in relation to the licensing and regulation of salmon farming; if he is satisfied with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's response to the discovery of farmed salmon in the western river basin district in August and September 2017; if he is satisfied that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is fully committed to a properly regulated aquaculture sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28126/18]

231. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if it is still possible for Inland Fisheries Ireland to provide the Marine Institute with samples of the farmed salmon stock captured in the western river basin district in 2017; the reason Inland Fisheries Ireland has to date not provided samples of same to the Marine Institute as requested; if he will request Inland Fisheries Ireland to provide samples to the Marine Institute; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28127/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 228 to 231, inclusive, together.

I am advised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that a comprehensive report in relation to the fish farm escape at Glinsk in Mulroy Bay has not yet been received.

Biological samples (tissue) of a number of the escaped farmed fish were provided by IFI to University College Cork for genetic analysis. Scale samples of these escaped farmed fish are available within IFI. I am fully satisfied with the analysis provided by IFI in relation to the farmed fish escape. IFI have advised that they are not aware of any request from the Marine Institute to provide samples of farmed salmon stocks captured in the Western River Basin district in 2017.

IFI also advise that escaped farmed salmon, particularly larger fish, have been recorded on the high seas distant from farm production units. However, in general, escapes of farmed fish are recorded and captured in proximity to the escape location. The farmed salmon recorded in the Western river basin district, in August and September 2017, were all recorded in rivers in the Ballinacill and neighbouring Bangor Fishery Districts. No escaped farmed fish were recorded in rivers to the north and south of this region and it is, therefore, highly likely that the escaped farmed fish originated in the mid-West region.

The competent authority for the licensing, regulation and development of aquaculture is the Department of Agriculture Food and Marine (DAFM). My Department has no direct role in these issues and questions regarding policy and operational issues around the licensing and regulatory regime for aquaculture are a matter for that Department.

My Department and its agency, IFI, are the competent authorities for the protection, conservation, promotion and development of the inland fisheries resource including wild salmon and trout. In that regard, IFI are the statutory scientific advisors to my Department.

From a wild fish policy perspective, my Department and IFI have consistently set out our

position as regards the development of aquaculture. The policy of the Department and of IFI is to support the development of aquaculture which is environmentally sustainable and which is consistent with domestic, EU and International environmental obligations and requirements in particular the EU Habitats Directive under which wild salmon is included at Annex II.

When we are consulted on aquaculture proposals, it is this policy that guides our inputs to the Department of Agriculture Food and Marine.

For my Department and IFI, the provision of advice to ensure the protection of wild salmonid stocks from sea lice infestations emanating from fish farms, particularly in advance of the critical wild juvenile salmon migration season, has always been of paramount importance. Both I and successive Ministers in the Department have consistently expressed the wish to make progress in addressing the issues and in promoting agreement among the diverse stakeholders.

### **Renewable Heat Incentive**

232. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the planned renewable heat incentive scheme will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28156/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Support Scheme for Renewable Heat was approved by Government in December 2017. The details of the scheme, including the tariffs that will apply, are published on my Department's website. As with all such schemes, engagement with the European Commission under EU State Aid approval processes is necessary, and my Department is engaging with the European Commission regarding approval for the scheme. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) will administer the scheme and is currently developing the detailed Terms and Conditions. An allocation of €7 million has been provided for the scheme this year. In addition, the National Development Plan sets out an indicative funding allocation of €300 million for the rollout of the scheme for the period 2018-2027.

The scheme is planned to commence operation later this year subject to State Aid approval.

### **Energy Schemes**

233. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a person (details supplied) will receive the outcome to a SEAI appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28173/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers the Government's energy efficiency grant schemes on behalf of my Department. I have no function in relation to individual grant applications or appeals.

I am advised that the re-appeal mentioned in the Question is under review by SEAI and that correspondence is due to issue to the applicant.

### **National Clean Air Strategy**

234. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and En-

vironment when he plans to publish the final report of the national clean air strategy which was due to be published at the end of March 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28369/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The National Clean Air Strategy will provide an overarching policy framework within which clean air policies can be formulated and given effect in a manner consistent with national, EU and international policy considerations and priorities. The Strategy will address priority air pollutants in Ireland in an integrated manner, and will complement the stated objectives of the National Mitigation Plan. Comprehensive analysis of the replies received to the public consultation has been completed, and my officials have been engaging with other Departments, Agencies and stakeholders in order to complete the drafting of the Strategy. I intend to publish the strategy in the coming weeks.

### **Electric Vehicles**

235. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if e-car charging points are provided at his Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28390/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** Currently, my Department has one e-car charging point at its headquarters in Dublin 2, and this is set to increase to three charging points shortly. The position at my Department's office locations will be kept under review in the light of growing demand.

### **Transport Infrastructure Ireland Projects**

236. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if upgrade works to the N4 will be carried out following the mid-term review of the capital investment programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28104/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Road Improvement Schemes**

237. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; his views on the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28250/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Firstly, I am sorry to hear of the ill-health and ensuing difficulties of your constituent.

However, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory

responsibility of local authorities, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

All grant funding available to my Department has now been allocated. The grants this year include provision for:

- An 18% increase in Restoration Improvement monies for road strengthening works;
- A 17% increase in Restoration Maintenance monies for surface dressing works;
- The introduction of a new grant for Drainage works;
- Ring fenced monies for Community Involvement Schemes .

It is a matter for each Council to determine its priorities and decide its work programme taking available grant funding and its own resources into account. In this context I continue to emphasise to local authorities the importance of prioritising roads when allocating their own resources.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

238. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has met with the Minister for Justice and Equality to discuss the increased violent incidents on trains and the DART; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28277/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport and I have not met with the Minister for Justice and Equality to discuss anti-social behaviour on trains and the DART.

I am concerned, however, to ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place to ensure the safety and security of passengers and staff travelling and working on our rail network.

There were 45.5 million passenger journeys in 2017 on Iarnród Éireann, the vast majority of which occurred without incident.

However, I have been advised by the company that the number of recorded anti-social incidents has risen in the last number of years. In 2016, 492 incidents were recorded, of which 12 were assaults on staff. In 2017, 705 incidents were recorded, of which 15 were assaults on staff. To date this year, 305 incidents have been recorded, of which 5 were assaults on staff.

The safety and security of passengers and staff, including arrangements to deal with anti-social behaviour on the rail network, are matters for the operators, in conjunction with, as appropriate, An Garda Síochána. Iarnród Éireann has advised that it liaises on a minimum quarterly basis with An Garda Síochána in major districts to address trends and issues on an area basis. In addition, this allows for proactive planning for events and known recurring issues.

Security patrols by the company have increased by 21.8% since 2016 and Iarnród Éireann has advised that it has enhanced general security cover and provides for enhanced security patrols for major events.



Furthermore, in view of concerns raised by trades unions regarding security on certain routes in Dublin, Iarnród Éireann has committed to a number of immediate and short-term measures to maintain a safe travelling environment for customers and staff and to ensure service continuity.

I have asked my Department to write to the CEO of Iarnród Éireann, Mr Jim Meade, and the Chairman of the Railway Safety Advisory Council, Mr John Power, to seek their views on the adequacy of the current arrangements for combating anti-social behaviour on our rail network.

In addition, I have also asked my Department to engage with the CEO's of Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann to seek their views on the adequacy of the current arrangements for combating anti-social behaviour on our buses.

Once I have received their responses, I will, in conjunction with stakeholders, including my colleague, the Minister for Justice and An Garda Síochána, review the measures in place to ensure the safety of all passengers and staff on our bus and rail network.

### Sport Ireland Funding

239. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if additional funding will be provided to an organisation (details supplied) to enable its athletes to participate in future international competitions in view of the increasing number of its athletes now eligible to qualify for international competitions. [28330/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, increasing participation at all levels and raising standards. This includes responsibility for the allocation of funding for high performance sport. Sport Ireland channels its funding through the recognised National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs), in this case Rowing Ireland.

I have referred the Deputy’s Question to Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

### Electric Vehicles

240. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if e-car charging points are provided at his Department’s buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28403/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The information requested by the Deputy is presented in the table:

Department location	Number of electric vehicle charger points
Dublin	1 (includes 1 parking bay)
Loughrea	0
Killarney	0
Shannon	0

The Deputy should note that any further installation of electric vehicle charge points is subject to demand.

### Youth Unemployment

241. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the assistance available for young persons to train and gain employment in public projects in their local area (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28085/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department does not have a role in relation to the public project referred to, as this is a matter for Dublin City Council.

However, this Government supports young, unemployed people with a number of policies directed to help them to secure sustainable jobs.

The first intervention under the Government policy is to provide a case officer to support the newly unemployed young person.

The case officer will work with the young person to develop a Personal Progression Plan which identifies the steps to be taken to facilitate a swift return to employment, which may include further education and training or other opportunities. This training is provided by the relevant State agencies.

My Department has been provided with funding under the Dormant Accounts Fund for the development of a Youth Employability Initiative. My Department will be announcing details of a needs led Youth Employability Initiative later this year, which will focus on providing soft skills to young people to improve their employability.

Also, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection will shortly introduce a new work experience programme targeted specifically at young jobseekers who are long term unemployed or who face significant barriers to gaining employment. The new Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) will provide young people with the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement.

### **HSE Reports**

242. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to a report by a section 3 committee within the HSE and Tusla which reported in 2011 and issued documents, including a policy, guidelines, assessment tools and a training plan for handling child sexual abuse, none of which were implemented; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28374/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I have requested further information from the Deputy about the report referred to in the question. As the Deputy will be aware, Tusla was established in 2014 and therefore did not participate in a committee, report on or issue documents prior to that. I thank the Deputy for the question on these important matters, and I will provide a response when the report is identified.

### **Electric Vehicles**

243. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if e-car charging points are provided at her Department’s buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28389/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department shares an OPW leased building in Miesian Plaza, Baggot Street, Dublin 2, with a number of

other Government Departments. The car-parking facility is operated under the lease arrangements between the OPW and the landlord and I can confirm that this includes two e-car charging points in two parking bays for electric vehicles.

There are no other e-car charging points or parking bays specific to electric vehicles provided at any other location of my Department.

### **CLÁR Programme**

244. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when a decision will issue on applications for CLÁR funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28337/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** CLÁR is a targeted capital investment programme for rural areas which have experienced significant levels of depopulation.

I launched the 2018 CLÁR programme on the 15th March last, with an indicative allocation of €5 million for qualifying projects under the following measures:

Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas/Multi-Use Games Areas

Measure 3: First Response Support Measure

The closing date for CLÁR 2018 was 30th April, and more than 400 applications have been received across the three Measures.

My officials are currently finalising the assessment of the applications and I hope to be in a position to announce the successful projects shortly.

### **Electric Vehicles**

245. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if e-car charging points are provided at his Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28401/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** My Department has offices in Dublin, at Trinity Point on Leinster Street South, and in Ballina, Co Mayo.

There are no e-car charging points or specific parking bays allocated to electric vehicles at either location, however, there are e-car charging points situated in close proximity to both office locations, one at Merrion Square in Dublin, and two in Ballina, in Humbert St and off Bachelors Walk.

### **Poverty Data**

246. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her Department has a policy definition of the working poor; if so, the number in this category and for those deemed to be in consistent poverty; and if she will make a statement on

the matter. [28088/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** In-work poverty measures the at-risk-of-poverty rate (i.e. the percentage with incomes below 60% of the median income) among adults (16+) who are 'in-work', based on their self-defined principal economic status. The most recent CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions data shows that in 2016 the at-risk-of-poverty rate was 5.6% for those aged 16 years or over with a principal economic status of 'at work'. This was a reduction on the 2015 figure of 5.8%. Eurostat data (calculated on a basis that differs slightly from the CSO measure) suggests that in-work poverty is relatively low here; the Eurostat estimate for Ireland in 2016 is 4.8%, as compared with the EU average of 9.5%.

Consistent poverty refers to people who are both on relatively low incomes and experiencing deprivation. The consistent poverty rate in 2016 was 8.3 per cent for the overall population, down from 8.7 per cent in 2015. Numerically, 395,000 people were in consistent poverty in 2016, based on the 2016 Census population figure of 4.76m. An analysis of consistent poverty rates by principal economic status shows that the consistent poverty rate was lowest among those who were at work (1.9%).

The full impact of the recovery is not reflected in these 2016 figures for Ireland. Macro-economic and labour market indicators have shown continued economic and employment growth since then. The number of people in receipt of working-age income and employment supports has continued to fall. With these improvements, the Government was in a position to introduce a range of welfare increases from 2016 onwards. Measures include increases in core weekly rates for working-age adults, child benefit, income disregards for lone parents, rent limits for housing support payments and new initiatives to make work pay, such as the Back to Work Family Dividend.

Income supports play an important role in addressing poverty. The Working Family Payment (WFP) (formerly known as Family Income Supplement (FIS)) and Back to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD) are important in-work supports for this group. WFP is an in-work support which provides an income top-up for employees on low earnings with children. It is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependants and to offer a financial incentive to take-up employment. The BTWFD is a targeted scheme designed to further improve the incentive to take-up employment or self-employment for welfare recipients with children. In 2016, social transfers reduced the at-risk-of-poverty rate for people of working-age from 33.6% to 16.5%. This equated to a poverty reduction effect of 50.9%.

Recent budgets have been forward looking, allocating limited resources in a prudent way, to make sure that everyone benefits from the recovery. The focus of these budgets has also been on the provision of services rather than simply on income supports (e.g. extension of the School Meals Scheme and the Single Affordable Childcare Scheme).

The Social Impact Assessment of Budget 2018 show average household incomes increasing by 1.1% (€11.40 per week). They also provided greater rewards for working, with over 80% of the unemployed substantially better-off in work and almost 25% of the working population experiencing a reduction in their Marginal Effective Tax Rate with little to no impact predicted for a further 69% of the working population.

The improvement in the economy, together with the welfare measures referred to, are likely to have supported a reduction in poverty since the period in 2016 to which the SILC publication refers. This improvement is expected to continue with further rises in incomes and living standards.

### One-Parent Family Payment Data

247. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of one parent family allowance by county in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28089/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the table.

Recipients of One-Parent Family Payment at the end of May 2018 by county

County	Recipients
Carlow	547
Cavan	464
Clare	680
Cork	3,662
Donegal	1,290
Dublin	14,251
Galway	1,215
Kerry	916
Kildare	1,587
Kilkenny	532
Laois	640
Leitrim	168
Limerick	2,034
Longford	420
Louth	1,648
Mayo	777
Meath	759
Monaghan	384
Offaly	659
Roscommon	287
Sligo	466
Tipperary	1,482
Waterford	1,397
Westmeath	750
Wexford	1,426
Wicklow	1,139
Total	39,580

### Social Welfare Appeals Status

248. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28100/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 29th May 2018, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Telephone Support Allowance**

249. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the eligibility criteria for the telephone allowance will be amended in order that it will not be necessary for a claimant to be in receipt of the living alone allowance and the fuel allowance to qualify for the benefit in view of the fact that this penalises other deserving applicants such as pensioners in receipt of a fuel allowance in the UK but are living here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28103/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The new weekly Telephone Support Allowance (TSA) is a payment of €2.50. Customers of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection who are in receipt of a qualifying payment and who are in receipt of the Living Alone Allowance and the Fuel Allowance will automatically qualify for the TSA. Approximately 127,000 customers are in receipt of the TSA payment. The estimated full year cost of the scheme is €16.14 million.

The primary objective of the TSA is to allow the most vulnerable people access to personal alarms or phones for security. The allowance will also encourage social contact and assist in the prevention of social isolation for those living alone.

The British UK winter fuel payment is a non means tested payment which is automatically paid to people in receipt of a British state pension. People in receipt of the British winter fuel payment and the British state pension may apply for fuel allowance. As with all other recipients of the fuel allowance, the claimant must satisfy a means test as well as all other qualifying conditions.

People in receipt of the British state pension are not entitled to receive the living alone increase. The living alone allowance is paid as an increase in the weekly rate of payment to pensioners and people with disabilities in receipt of qualifying payments who live alone. There are no circumstances where the living alone increase is paid to people who are not in receipt of a qualifying payment from my Department. This applies equally to individuals in receipt of an occupational or private pension but not a State pension.

Where a person, in receipt of a UK State pension, has a legal right to reside in Ireland and is habitually resident in this State, and the level of their weekly means are €257.50 or lower, they may claim a State pension (non-contributory) from my Department, effectively as a top-up to their UK pension. If they qualify for that payment, at any weekly payment rate, and receive a Living Alone Allowance and Fuel Allowance, they will qualify for a TSA payment, on the same basis as someone who paid into the Irish Social Insurance Fund.

There are no plans at this time to review or extend the criteria for the TSA to allow people who are not in receipt of the living alone increase to receive the payment. Any decision to do

so would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **JobPath Programme**

250. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of referrals made by JobPath providers (details supplied) to recruitment agencies since the commencement of the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28178/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** As the Deputy will be aware the primary purpose of the activation services provided by my Department, including the JobPath service, is to assist and support jobseekers to look for and sustain full time employment. My Department refers long-term job seeking customers to the JobPath service to receive one-to one intensive and regular engagement with a personal adviser. The JobPath companies do not onward refer or place Jobseekers with recruitment agencies and accordingly there is no recording of same.

The JobPath contractors engage with employers across the range of employment sectors to establish vacancies and to understand the needs of employers in assisting job seekers returning to the workforce. The business needs of some employers and the buoyant job market occasions that some employers may choose to use the services of recruitment agencies in identifying and recruiting staff. The JobPath companies will engage as appropriate with these agencies to assist jobseekers gain sustainable employment. However, as I have indicated already, they do not refer jobseekers to recruitment companies for activation support.

Many jobseekers also self-refer to recruitment agencies to maximise their chances of employment, as well as registering with the various recruitment websites including my Department's own recruitment website [www.JobsIreland.ie](http://www.JobsIreland.ie).

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **JobPath Programme**

251. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if JobPath providers (details supplied) have been trained on the new GDPR rules; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28179/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department collects and holds large volumes of personal data on customers and is very aware of the need to have adequate data protection policies, procedures and structures in place in line with the GDPR. Preparations for the GDPR have been overseen by the Department's Data Management Programme Board. The Department has a dedicated GDPR implementation team in place and has commissioned external expertise to assist it with achieving GDPR compliance. While my Department already has strict data protection guidelines, policies and procedures, all have been subject to review and updated to ensure that the processing of all personal data is GDPR compliant. All data sharing arrangements are also being reviewed to ensure compliance with the Regulation.

Contracted providers of Activation services act on behalf of the Department for the purpose of delivering these services and are subject to strict obligations imposed by the Department in

terms of data protection.

JobPath providers are contractually required to register with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner. Data protection legislation requires that personal data shall be kept only for one or more specified and lawful purposes and that personal data shall be used and disclosed only in ways compatible with these purposes. The legislation also requires that the data should be adequate, relevant and not excessive. Any suspected breach of the data protection legislation will be investigated by the Department and may also be a matter for the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner.

My Department has regular meetings with both JobPath providers to ensure that they are fully aware of and are fulfilling their contractual obligations, including those concerned with data protection regulations. Both companies have undertaken regular independent audits of their data processes and procedures as part of these contractual obligations. In addition, the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner has recently conducted audits of each company. Employees of both companies, and their subcontractors, are subject to the same data protection laws as Departmental staff.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **JobPath Programme**

252. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if JobPath providers (details supplied) receive job sustainment fees in cases in which they send participants to recruitment agencies and in which employment is successfully sourced through the recruitment agency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28180/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** JobPath is one of a range of activation supports which includes schemes such as TÚS and Community Employment (CE), catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers. Activation services are also provided by departmental case officers in the Intreo Centres, or by contracted companies and organisations such as Local Employment Services (LES), Job Clubs and the JobPath providers.

The JobPath service is being delivered through a payment by results model and the Department was careful in designing the service to ensure that payments to contractors are conditional on people not just finding a job, but finding sustainable employment. If a person secures a job and sustains that job, the contractor may be able to claim a job sustainment fee. JobPath is an activation service and not a placement agency and as such clients are assisted to secure their own employment. Depending on the nature of that employment it may be beneficial to the client to make use of Recruitment Agencies to help them secure a position. However the JobPath providers continue to work with the client until such time as they have found sustainable employment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Support Grant**

253. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 295 of 10 May 2018, the status of the case (details supplied); when a decision will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28248/18]



**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department is reviewing the decision to refuse the claim of the person concerned for Carer's Support Grant. In this regard the Deciding Officer is awaiting a report from a local inspector. The inspector has advised that he will arrange to meet the person concerned within the next week and will furnish a report shortly thereafter. If the outcome of the review is not favourable to the person concerned, her claim will be referred to the Social Welfare Appeals Office for decision of an Appeals Officer.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Eligibility**

254. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a disability allowance will be awarded to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28272/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this gentleman on 2 May 2018.

On 25 June 2018 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on his eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made on his DA application and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Benefit Eligibility**

255. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding extensions to carer's benefit; the timeframe for same; if subsequent extensions can be granted; the timeframe to process the requests in view of the fact that the carers involved may have employment commitments and deadlines; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28284/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's benefit (CARB) is a payment made to insured people who leave the workforce to care for a child or an adult in need of full-time care and attention.

It is payable for a maximum of 104 weeks for each person being cared for.

This may be claimed as a single continuous period or in any number of separate periods up to a total of 104 weeks.

Where a person is receiving CARB for a period of time and has used less than 104 weeks at the end of that period, they can seek to have their current period of entitlement extended on request. As part of the request they must submit evidence to show that they will be remaining out of employment during the extended period, except where the regulations otherwise allow.

They may also need to submit evidence to show that their care recipient will require full-time care and attention for the duration of the expended period.

Where the Department accepts that the care recipient will require full-time care and attention for the foreseeable future, and the carer submits the required employment evidence, extension requests are generally processed within two weeks.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

256. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) will be determined; if same will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28333/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on the 20 February 2018.

CA is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

A person can be considered to be providing full-time care and attention where they are engaged in employment, self-employment or on training courses outside the home for a maximum of 15 hours per week, provided that they can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that adequate care has been provided for the care recipient in their absence.

As the applicant is a self-employed farmer, the matter was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 9 April 2018 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of CA are satisfied.

Enquiries by the SWI are continuing. Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

257. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application for an invalidity pension by a person (details supplied) will be determined; if same will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28334/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 03 May 2018. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on the 12 July 2018. Any arrears due from 03 May 2018 to 11 July 2018 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue in due course. The lady in question was notified of this decision on the 26 June 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Appeals**

258. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position in relation to a social welfare appeal against the decision to refuse an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); if same will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28335/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 27th March 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers have been received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Appeals**

259. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position in relation to a social welfare appeal against the decision to refuse an application for invalidity pension by a person (details supplied); if same will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28336/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 11th April 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Electric Vehicles**

260. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if e-car charging points are provided at her Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28394/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** There are no e-car charging points provided at the Department's buildings in Dublin, or at any other locations throughout the country.

## **Tenant Purchase Scheme Review**

261. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the report on the review of the tenants purchase scheme will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28091/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, a review of the first 12 months of the Scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which took place in 2017 and saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations.

In finalising the report some further consultation was necessary and due consideration had to be given to possible implementation arrangements. These matters are now almost completed and I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review shortly.

## **Property Registration**

262. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the mechanism for registering a property; the person or body with responsibility for ensuring that all properties are registered; the steps or sanctions taken if a company or person fails to register a property; the steps that are taken to ensure that companies that are resident abroad are compliant with the relevant legislation here in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28094/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Under the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006, the Property Registration Authority (PRA) was established as and from 4 November 2006. The PRA replaces the Registrar of Deeds and Titles as the registering authority in relation to property registration in Ireland and, subject to the above Act, is independent in the performance of its functions.

Property is registered in the Land Registry on foot of applications for registration, in the prescribed forms as provided for in the Land Registration Rules 2012 - 2013, lodged with the PRA. The PRA is responsible for registration on foot of such applications.

The responsibility for registering the ownership of a property, or an amendment to registered property, rests with the owner of the property or the interest in the registered land.

While there is no sanction in registration of title legislation, failure to register a property carries significant risk for a person or entity acquiring title. If the property is subject to compulsory first registration and an application to register the title is not made in the PRA within six months of the purchase, the legal title in the property does not vest in the purchaser. If a person acquires an interest in registered land and fails to make an application for registration in relation to the

said interest, this can result in the loss of priority.

Companies resident abroad are in the same position as Irish companies or persons in that the responsibility lies with them to apply for registration with similar consequences for non-registration.

### **Local Authority Housing Data**

263. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the €400 million social housing fund that was to be ring-fenced following the sale of Bord Gáis Energy and announced in budget 2015; the number of social housing units that were built with the €400 million; the status of the pilot affordable rental scheme that was subsequently announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28129/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Prior to the publication of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, it was planned to establish a financial vehicle to facilitate the aggregation of private investment into a fund for subsequent lending as project finance. The intention was that this investment would be off-balance sheet and in Budget 2015, the Government announced that €400m of public investment would be made available, including the proceeds from the sale of Bord Gáis, to provide 2,000 homes. The objective was that this investment could leverage private sector finance from the EIB, ISIF, pension funds, credit unions and other financial institutions.

A structured, formal process was put in place to facilitate engagement with these bodies. A body called the Social Housing Investment Proposals Clearing House Group was established in 2015 to examine and consider proposals and to meet with the companies, groups and institutions involved. However, despite a detailed investigation of options to use the available funding in this way, including a high level of engagement with potential social housing providers and potential financiers of social housing, no new model could be identified that would, of itself, be capable of providing and/or financing social housing on an off-balance sheet basis and that would be capable of utilising the available funding.

In response to this outcome, it was decided to modify the original commitment in relation to the €400m funding to provide €10m per annum, indexed for inflation, over a longer period (20 years), which could be used to secure the development of a pilot affordable rental scheme, as envisaged in Rebuilding Ireland. Provision was made for €10 million to be allocated to my Department's Vote in 2017.

Furthermore and taking account of the work and analysis of the Clearing House Group, it was subsequently considered that it would be more constructive to use the existing social housing funding and support mechanisms and, where appropriate, make adjustments to those mechanisms, in order to provide a framework with more realistic prospects of harnessing private investment in an off-balance sheet manner.

This approach resulted in the design of an alternative delivery mechanism, the Enhanced Long-term Leasing Social Housing Scheme, which was launched on 31 January 2018. Funding is in place to support the delivery of this new scheme and the principal objective of the scheme is to encourage larger levels of private investment in social housing, while ensuring that the resulting leasing arrangement is off-balance sheet in respect of Government expenditure. The scheme is targeted at new build or new-to-the-market properties to be delivered at scale and will complement the existing long-term leasing arrangements, which will continue to be available

for leasing existing properties.

In respect of the commitment to develop an affordable rental model, this is now being progressed through an initial pilot project in Dublin, based on a cost rental model, where local authorities can release the value of their land, and also access funding for enabling infrastructure, to reduce the construction costs of providing such rental units and facilitate the delivery of the optimal number of affordable homes to rent for low- to moderate-income households, as part of mixed-tenure developments. Lands held by local authorities, particularly in urban areas where there are high rental costs and significant housing demand, are being identified for cost rental projects, including a large-scale cost rental site in Dublin city, details of which I expect to announce shortly.

### **Brexit Issues**

264. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is represented on the Dublin Region Homeless Executive working group which is examining the possible impact of Brexit on homeless services; when this working group will report to him; the additional resources that will be required to cater to an increased demand for shelter post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28131/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless accommodation and related services rests with individual housing authorities.

The group referred to is internal to the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) and is designed to ensure that, from an operational perspective, the DRHE has robust systems in place to deal with any increase that may arise in the number of non-nationals seeking assistance from homeless services following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. While therefore not represented on this group, my Department works closely with the DRHE in relation to homelessness issues on an ongoing basis and, in that context, will be engaging in a similar manner in relation to any issues emerging from the working group.

### **Local Authority Housing Rents**

265. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there are changes being proposed with respect to the operation of the differential rent scheme; if individual local authorities have the power to make changes to the scheme without a statutory instrument authorising such a change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28136/18]

266. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authorities that have made changes to the operation of their differential rent schemes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28137/18]

267. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding the review of local authority social housing differential rents schemes being carried out under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness; if as part of the review he is giving consideration to exercising his powers under section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 to make regulations to ensure that carer's

payments are disregarded for rent assessment purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28143/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 265 to 267, inclusive, together.

At present the making of rent schemes and the setting of rent levels is a matter for each local authority under the provisions of the Housing Act 1966. The making or amending of such schemes is not a reserved function and does not require the approval of the elected members, however it is subject to the influence of the elected members through the annual estimates process. The Chief Executive of the authority makes the (non-statutory) rent scheme subject to broad principles laid down by my Department in Circular letter HRT 3/2002 dated March 6th 2002.

Considerable work has been carried out by my Department in developing a draft national differential rents framework under section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. Such a framework had as its main aim the facilitation of a significant harmonisation in local authority rents, including a set of standardised income disregards, whilst retaining the general principle of rents related to household income.

The introduction of a rent framework could mean that the amount of rent payable by some households may be subject to change in some cases. This work is now being examined further in the light of the broader commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, to review the disparate systems of differential rent for social housing in place across local authorities. The overall objective is to ensure that housing supports are fair and sustainable, prioritise those on lowest incomes and avoid creating social welfare traps that may prevent people from either returning to work or to the private housing market.

I expect that the review will be completed in the near future.

### **Local Authority Housing Data**

268. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons with disabilities on the 2018 local authorities social housing waiting lists nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28165/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Information on the number of households qualified for and in need of social housing support whose need has not been met is set out in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA) which, since 2016, is carried out annually.

The most recent assessment was carried out in 2017, full details of which are available on my Department's website, at the following link:

*[http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/sha\\_summary\\_2017.pdf](http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/sha_summary_2017.pdf)*

The SSHA for 2018 is currently in progress and I expect to be in a position to publish the report later in the year.

### **Irish Water Expenditure**

269. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government

the reason Irish Water spent in the region of €200,000 on advertisements in a national newspaper rather than a newspaper (details supplied) with greater circulation, which would have cost less; if the advertisements for CPO were for Fingal and Dublin only; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28213/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Water Services Acts 2007-2017 set out clearly the arrangements in place for the delivery of water and wastewater services by Irish Water, and further set out the scrutiny and oversight provisions that apply in respect of these arrangements. Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of the planning, delivery and operation of water and wastewater services at national, regional and local levels, including day to day operational matters.

The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) which has statutory responsibility for protecting the interests of customers. An important aspect of the CRU's work is ensuring that Irish Water's revenue is spent appropriately to improve services for customers.

The position therefore in relation to the notification of compulsory purchase orders relating to water and wastewater services is that such notifications are an operational matter for Irish Water. Irish Water is subject to independent oversight by the CRU in respect of its efficiently incurred costs.

If Deputies have any queries on specific issues in relation to water services, Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

### **Housing Assistance Payment Administration**

270. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to make changes to the housing assistance payment model in order to speed up the process (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28252/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I refer to the replies to Question Nos 589 of 22 May 2018 and 625 of 8 March 2018.

The position in relation to the processing times for Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) applications remains unchanged. Once a HAP application has been received and confirmed as valid by the relevant local authority, it is then processed by the HAP Shared Service Centre. On average, HAP applications are processed by the HAP SCC within 1 working day of receipt.

I am satisfied with the operation of the HAP scheme and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

### **Derelict Sites**

271. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if renovation work or the selling of land at a location (details supplied) will be enforced under section 11(2)(a) of the Derelict Sites Act 1990; and if he will make a statement on the matter.



[28368/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):**

The Derelict Sites Act 1990 provides local authorities with a range of powers to deal with derelict sites within their functional areas, including powers to require specified measures to be taken in relation to a derelict site, to impose a levy on sites which are included in the local authority's derelict sites register, or to compulsorily acquire any derelict site. I understand from Dublin City Council that the particular site in question is not included in their Derelict Sites Register. Under the Act, I have no role to play as Minister in relation to particular sites where they are not included on the relevant authority's derelict sites register.

It is open to any person to contact a local authority in relation to a particular site which may be considered a derelict site for the purposes of the Act. It is a matter for local authorities to determine the most appropriate use of the legislation within their respective functional areas.

**Approved Housing Bodies**

272. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the Housing Finance Agency or his Department have been approached for funding from approved housing bodies for the purchasing of properties at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28371/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department offers a range of funding programmes to assist the voluntary sector with the delivery of social housing, including the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS).

CALF is a facility, which is exclusively available to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), to assist them in accessing private or Housing Finance Agency (HFA) finance for the purchase, construction or refurbishment of units that will be made available for social housing purposes under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP).

In order for a CALF application to be advanced to my Department, there is a substantial amount of work to be progressed. It is essential to the overall process that an AHB engages at an early stage with the relevant local authority to discuss demand and general suitability of a proposed scheme/ units. Once the CALF application is submitted to my Department, the relevant local authority will be asked to provide formal comments on the proposal, including on the housing need in the locality, the local authority's intention to exercise their nomination rights, sustainable communities, financial details including market rent, and overall suitability. In this context, local authorities play a key role in the operation of the CALF facility. The Housing Agency will perform a financial appraisal of the application. My Department will then make a decision whether a proposed scheme is suitable for conditional approval for CALF funding.

To date, my Department has not received an application for funding for the aforementioned project. My Department is aware that an AHB has held discussions with Fingal County Council with regard to this project. However, the progression of the project to funding application stage is a matter between the local authority and the AHB in that context.

**Electric Vehicles**

273. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government

if e-car charging points are provided at his Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28398/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** There is one eCar charging point at the Custom House currently. My Department's Workplace Travel Plan (WTP) aims to encourage greater staff use of sustainable transport options when travelling to and from work, and to ensure that, where practicable, staff opt for sustainable transport options when conducting business on behalf of the Department. My Department will keep the matter under review as the use of electric cars increases.

### Archaeological Sites

274. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there is a suspected mass Famine grave behind a location (details supplied); her plans to ascertain whether it is in fact a mass grave; and if, in the event it is found to be a mass grave, her plans to ensure that its location is marked appropriately. [28216/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I am advised that a granite pillar was brought to the attention of my Department's National Monuments Service as possible evidence of the existence of a famine graveyard at the location in question. However, I understand that the Department's view is the origins and associations of the pillar are unlikely to relate to burials.

While there is insufficient evidence at this point for the marker to be recorded as an archaeological monument, I understand that my Department has given guidance to help local investigations to find out more about it and will be happy to advise on any such further information that may come to light.

### Toghcháin d'Údarás na Gaeltachta

275. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta céard iad na socraithe a bhí i bhfeidhm don toghchán deireanach le haghaidh Údarás na Gaeltachta in 2005 ó thaobh ionaid chomhairimh, foireann toghcháin agus ábhar breise a bhaineann leis na toghcháin sin, ar nós páipéir bhallóide; agus cén costas a bhí air. [28181/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Mar gur rinneadh, le hachtú Acht na Gaeltachta 2012, aisghairm ar na forálacha reachtúil a bhain le toghcháin Údarás na Gaeltachta, níl aon ról reachtúil agam maidir leis an gceist atá ardaith ag an Teachta.

É sin ráite, tuigim gur i gcomhar leis na *Cinn Comhairimh sna Comhairlí Contaetha Gaeltachta a rinneadh na socruithe maidir le Toghchán 2005 d'Údarás na Gaeltachta a réachtáil*. Go bunúsach, mar sin, is iad na Cinn Comhairimh a bhí freagrach as na hionaid chomhairimh, foireann toghcháin agus na nithe gaolmhara eile a eagrú. Tuigim chomh maith gur bhain costas circa €380,000 leis an toghchán féin a réachtáil.

### Waterways Issues

276. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

if her attention has been drawn to the fact that Waterways Ireland has introduced a new set of permits blocking persons living aboard their boats from continuing to do so; her plans to increase the number of mooring points for houseboats on the Dublin canals and basins; and the reason canal dwellers are being removed from their homes. [28254/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** A regulatory system for boating on the Grand & Royal Canals and Barrow Navigation has been in place since November 2012 to ensure the investment in amenities and infrastructure along all three navigations is accessible to all boaters. Waterways Ireland introduced the current regulatory system in order to provide a mechanism by which the canal navigations would be available for all users in an equitable manner.

Since 2012 demand for long term berths has, however, outstripped supply at some locations, with a resultant impact that the infrastructure at these locations is not available to all those who wish to avail of those specific berths. The current system is also difficult to manage in ensuring that all vessels have appropriate and up-to-date permits. This is an important aspect of the regulatory system in providing a controlled environment so that our navigations can be open and utilised by all.

The Grand Canal Basin in Dublin is a much sought after location for long term mooring. Many vessels have come into the city centre location and have refused to leave. There are 55 berths in the inner basin of Grand Canal Dock.

Following a recent review of permitting, Waterways Ireland have decided to allocate 20 berths as Primarily Non-Residential Extended Mooring Permits which will allow owners to berth their vessel in a specified location, but they may stay on-board in Grand Canal Dock for a maximum of 90 nights in a 12 month period. The remaining 10 moorings have been allocated to visiting vessels who wish to moor in the dock for less than 5 days.

In June 2017 all boat owners currently moored in Grand Canal Dock were requested to indicate their preference for a Residential Extended Mooring Permit or a Primarily Non-Residential Extended Mooring Permit. The demand outweighed the supply for the Residential Extended Mooring Permits and Waterways Ireland applied the criteria noted in Section 3 to allocate these berths. Those who were unsuccessful in being offered a Residential Extended Mooring Permit were offered Primarily Non-Residential Extended Mooring Permits, if all other criteria were met.

Waterways Ireland only has planning permission for 20 houseboat/Residential moorings. Any permanent residential activity in excess of those 20 berths is in contravention of the 2013 planning approval.

Waterways Ireland have been in continuous communication with boat owners in Grand Canal Dock regarding the review and has provided boat owners with ample opportunity to make alternative arrangements should the decision to grant a Residential Extended Mooring Permit or a Primarily Non-Residential Extended Mooring Permit not be acceptable to them.

## **Electric Vehicles**

277. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if e-car charging points are provided at her Department's buildings in Dublin or in other locations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28391/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The

management of offices occupied by my Department in Dublin and other locations is generally a matter for the Office of Public Works.

There are currently five electric vehicles in operation in the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). I am advised that e-car charging facilities are available to the public at the Visitor Centre in Glenveagh National Park in Donegal. E-charging facilities for official vehicles are also located at the NPWS offices at Kilafin, Co Wicklow and at Muckross, Killarney, Co Kerry.

My Department is exploring the scope for the provision of e-charging facilities at all National Parks.