



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs

Our Ref: Fol/Req/21/095

Date: 14/05/21

Dear Catherine McDonnell

I refer to the request which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for access to records held by this Department, as follows:

The passport office is not issuing passports, even online, except in emergencies, apparently due to Covid 19 restrictions.

My question is what entity or organisation has instructed the Government to stop issuing passports?

What reason was given by this entity or organisation that this restriction was necessary?

What is the Government's reason for closing the passport office? Covid 19 is not a major problem so cannot be used as an excuse, seeing as medical treatments and preventatives (other than a vaccine) are available to all.

Also, there has been no change in the normal illness rate of shop workers this past year, thus proving there is no danger in working amongst the public. In any case, passport office workers would, I assume, rarely be interacting with the public, as most work could be done online as has been the case for years.

So I need to know the real reason as to why the passport office is closed and is only issuing passports in an emergency.

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 26/04/21.

I have made a decision to refuse your request on administrative grounds under Section 15 (1) (b) of the FOI Act.

Section 15 (1) (b) of the FOI Act states that;

“A head to whom an FOI request is made may refuse to grant the request where — (b) the FOI request does not comply with Section 12 (1) (b)”

The requirement under Section 12 (1) (b) of the FOI Act is that the request must contain “sufficient particulars in relation to the information concerned to enable the record to be identified”.

The FOI Act provides for a right of access to records held by an FOI body. Requests for information or for answers to questions, as opposed to requests for records, are not valid requests under the Act, except to the extent that a request for information or for an answer to a question can reasonably be inferred to be a request for a record containing the information or answer sought.

My colleague, Cillian Rossi of the Passport Service, has written to you separately outside of the FOI Act and outlined the reasons for the restricted passport service at present.

Right of Appeal

Should you wish to appeal this decision, you may do so in writing to the Freedom of Information Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 76-78 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2 or by email to foi@dfa.ie. A fee applies for an appeal for access to non-personal information; the level of this fee has been set at €30, (€10 for medical card holders). A copy of the medical card should be provided to avail of the reduced fee. For methods of payment, please contact FOI Unit at foi@dfa.ie, or 01-4082618.

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

Yours sincerely

David Ormond
FOI Section
Department of Foreign Affairs