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Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Baile Átha Cliath 2  
Dublin 2

13 February 2017

Darren Hassett  
DailyMail.ie

**Our Ref: FoI/Req/17/021**

Dear Mr Hassett,

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

**Information on the amount spent by the Department of Foreign Affairs on consular assistance at home and abroad for 2015 and 2016.**

**Where possible under the act I'm looking for a breakdown of the amount of money spent according to:**

- 1. Which country the money was spent in (including Ireland and families of those in need of assistance abroad)**
- 2. A breakdown of the reasons / type of consular assistance and why it was provided (death abroad, sick or injured)**
- 3. A breakdown of the costs for each reason / type of consular assistance (including: flights, accommodation to and from Ireland)**
- 4. The outcome of the consular assistance.**

The Department's consular staff, at headquarters and in our network of Embassies and Consulates, provide consular assistance in the form of information, advice and practical support to Irish citizens in distress abroad, along with worldwide travel advice. Examples of

consular cases include a family bereavement, hospitalisation, arrest, imprisonment, or being a victim of crime.

A record number of Irish citizens were provided with consular assistance in 2016. For the first time, more than 3,000 new requests for assistance – 3,139 – were responded to within a single year. This represents an increase of 31 per cent in demand for consular assistance provided by the Department in Dublin and around the world, in comparison with the previous year. Between 2014 and 2016, there has been an 84 per cent increase in requests for help from Irish citizens in distress abroad. The Department now regularly publishes comprehensive consular statistics on its website, including an analysis of trends, available at <https://www.dfa.ie/travel/statistics/>

The consular assistance provided is delivered by the Department's staff – diplomats and civil servants, staff locally employed by Embassies and Consulates abroad and, in some cases, by Honorary Consuls and Honorary Consuls General engaged in locations where Ireland does not have a formal diplomatic presence. With the exception of the HQ-based Consular Assistance Unit (7 officers) and Crisis Unit (3 officers) and a small number of officers in missions abroad who have exclusively consular roles, in almost all cases responding to requests for consular assistance is just one aspect of the broader roles of officers and business units (political engagement, trade support, cultural representation, development aid expenditure, etc).

The apportioning of administration and operational expenditure of the Department and its mission network (e.g. staff salaries, office accommodation costs, IT systems, telecommunications etc) reflects this multi-faceted work. Based on estimates provided by business units of what percentage of their time is spent on each of the Department's five high-level goals, in the most recently published estimates the cost of consular assistance work undertaken by the Department is included under programme A "Our People", together with estimated expenditure of running the Passport Service, undertaking diaspora engagement and North-South cooperation, and many other activities. The 2016 estimate of total programme A expenditure is €68.074 million, representing 27% of total Departmental administration expenditure. It is not possible to provide an indication of the proportion of this total that relates to the provision of consular assistance.

Out of several thousand consular cases each year, only a tiny handful involve any separate expenditure beyond that which is budgeted for in the context of the day-to-day operations of the Department. The vast majority of consular support provided is non-financial, and takes the form of relevant and helpful information and advice, such as linguistic or cultural support on who to contact and how things are done locally; issuance of emergency travel documents; details of English-speaking doctors and lawyers; contact established on behalf of citizens with their family or friends; comprehensive travel advice on health, security and other topics; and, as appropriate, communication and interventions on behalf of citizens with relevant local authorities.

As is clearly set down on the Department's website at <https://www.dfa.ie/travel/know-before-you-go/what-we-can-and-cannot-do/>, the Department does **not** have funds to cover medical bills, legal bills or other expenses. Nor do we pay for relatives or friends to visit a citizen while in prison. We can advance cash in emergency situations - provided that the amount needed has been lodged in advance with us at our offices in Dublin or Cork or at a Garda station.

In exceptional circumstances and in a very small number of cases, the Department can assist with repatriating from abroad Irish citizens in distress caused by a variety of reasons, for example destitute persons, persons with serious mental illness, or where there is a serious concern for the welfare or safety of a citizen. We work very closely with the HSE and other domestic partners, as appropriate, in relation to any such case. Any person assisted in this way is expected to sign an undertaking to repay to the Department the amount of any costs incurred on his/her behalf.

This table shows the countries, numbers involved and total cost:

<b>2015</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of citizens</b>
	France	3
	Thailand	1
	India	1
	Kenya	1
	Finland	1
	Total cost	€2,981.41*
	*€2,322.79 of this amount has been repaid.	
<b>2016</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of citizens</b>
	Argentina	2
	Germany	2
	India	2
	Spain	1
	Indonesia	2
	Thailand	1
	Australia	1
	Hungary	1
	China	1
	Total cost	€19,903.08*
	*11,704.12 of this amount has been repaid.	

As is evident in the published consular statistics at <https://www.dfa.ie/travel/statistics/>, not only did 2016 see a significant increase in overall consular assistance work, but there were notable increases in complex and time-intensive case categories such as mental health (77 per cent increase since 2015) and child abduction (33 per cent increase year on year). The biggest increases in numbers of assistance cases were observed in Spain, Portugal, Poland and Thailand. It should be noted that amidst this surge in demand, the Department has also successfully introduced a range of customer service improvements, including enhanced customer insight, new easy online payment systems, a sophisticated new *TravelWise* smartphone app, and the extensive consular efforts around Euro 2016 in France that were recognised by a Civil Service Excellence Award for customer service.

### **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@dfat.ie](mailto:foi@dfat.ie). A fee applies for an appeal for access to non-personal information; the level of this fee has been set at €30. For methods of payment, please contact FOI Unit at [foi@dfat.ie](mailto:foi@dfat.ie), or 01-4082857.

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,



Colm Ó Conaill  
Consular Division