

Consular Division Briefing

Consular Division covers two main areas, **Consular Services and Consular Assistance**.

Consular Services is responsible for the following:

- Authentication of Documents
- Issuing Certificats de Coutume (letters of freedom for Irish people planning to marry or enter a civil partnership abroad)
- Foreign Birth Registration (citizenship for people born abroad to an Irish citizen not born in Ireland)
- Honorary Consuls
- Liaison with the Department of Justice on visa matters
- Irish children sent abroad for adoption in the 1950s and 1960s (Passport application files)

In 2013 Consular Services authenticated in excess of 57,000 Irish documents such as educational certificates, legal documents and company documents, which were required for presentation abroad, many of which were required in order to secure employment or for property and commercial transactions.

Approximately 3,000 letters of freedom (Certificates de Coutume/ Nulla Osta) were issued last year, with the most popular countries being Italy, Spain, Germany, Malta and Scotland.

The Department registered almost 5,000 people for Irish citizenship through Foreign Births Registration in 2013. The majority of these applications are received through the Embassies and Honorary Consulates in the United States, Britain, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, reflecting the large Irish communities living in these areas.

The priority in the above areas is to continue to provide high quality service to the public and particularly to continue to offer same day service for the majority of authentication requests.

In November 2012 the MAC agreed to a proposal from Consular Division that a review be undertaken of our Honorary Consul Service. The draft review was considered by the MAC at a recent meeting was circulated to all Heads of Missions for their input. It is proposed to present the updated draft to the MAC by the end of July.

The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of the Department of Justice and Equality is working with the UK authorities on a reciprocal Common Travel Area visa arrangement whereby each country will recognise short-stay visas issued by the other, thus allowing free movement between Ireland and the UK for the duration of that visa. Consular Services is working closely with the Department of Justice on this project.

In the 1950s and 1960s a large number of Irish children were sent abroad for adoption. Most of these children were sent to the United States, however, a small number were sent to other countries. They are sometimes referred to in the media as “Banished Babies”.

The Department provided passports for these children, to enable them to travel abroad for adoption. Consular Division retains over 2,000 files relating to these children. Our priority is to continue to deal sympathetically with requests for information from people affected by these adoptions while still ensuring the legal requirements for protection of this data are met.

Consular Assistance and Crisis Planning

The number of Irish citizens travelling abroad has increased over the last decade, with over 6.3 million visits abroad by Irish residents in 2012. While the number of Irish citizens travelling and living abroad continues to rise, so too does the need for consular assistance and support. During 2013, Consular assistance was provided to over 1,500 Irish citizens following serious consular emergencies overseas, including deaths, arrests, kidnaps, accidents, child abductions and hospitalisations. Contact from families increases substantially during the summer holiday period of June, July and August and these months account for nearly half of all cases. While Consular assistance was provided to Irish citizens in many countries around the world, by far the highest number of consular emergencies in 2013 occurred in Spain, followed by Australia, US, Britain, Canada, France, Thailand, Portugal, UAE, Philippines, Italy, India, the Netherlands, China, Vietnam and New Zealand.

Consular assistance was provided to the families of 225 people who died abroad in 2013, a number of these in tragic circumstances. Unfortunately, this figure reflects an increase on the 2012 figure of 194 Irish people who died while abroad. The number of cases of international parental child abduction continues to rise each year, with 26 in 2013, compared with 22 in 2012 (an 18% increase). There were 255 Irish citizens arrested in 2013, compared to 290 in 2012.

The Department runs an out of hours duty officer system whereby citizens requiring consular assistance abroad can contact HQ and/or our Embassies and Consulates 365 days a year.

Currently there are a number of ongoing and high-profile cases being dealt with by Consular and the relevant Missions abroad. 7

Consular Division maintains up to date Travel Advice on the Departmental website. This, in conjunction with our Citizens' Registration service on the same website, allows us to advise our citizens travelling abroad and offers them the ability to register their contact details with us prior to travel so that they may be contacted in the event of an emergency or crisis situation. Both of these public services are popular but could benefit from a wider uptake from the general public.

Consular Division strives to be ready to respond to crises affecting our citizens abroad. We have ensured that our Missions abroad have crisis contingency plans in case of events such as natural disasters, civil unrest or other such crises. During the Arab Spring of 2011, the Department evacuated some 400 people from Libya. The Department activated its Crisis Centre and deployed an Emergency Civilian Assistance Team (ECAT) together with two Aer Corps aircraft to Malta/Libya. The ECAT team made three flights from Malta to Libya in the course of which the team assisted in the evacuation of Irish and other EU citizens from Libya. Cooperation and daily teleconference with our EU colleagues formed a key part of our crisis response in Libya.

Consular Services

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