

**The Department of Foreign Affairs**  
**Statement on International Travel Disruption and Consular Assistance**

While the Department of Foreign Affairs does not have a role in implementing the new Covid testing rules for incoming travel into Ireland, the Department does continue to assist and advise citizens around the world in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our current advice to citizens is that there are risks associated with international travel and that this is likely to remain the case over the coming months. In recent years, the Department has responded to unprecedented requests for assistance and carried out the largest repatriation operations in the history of the State.

The Department's Travel Advice pages which cover 200 countries are some of the most visited pages on the DFA website. Every effort is made to ensure the provision of practical assistance and clear advice to the citizen. In this regard, the Department's travel advice is hugely significant for a range of stakeholders, and significant thought and resources have been put into ensuring clear, accurate and timely advice to help assist and inform citizens. Given the rapidly evolving circumstances of recent years, the importance of close cooperation with missions, EU and like-minded countries; the advice of relevant organisations; and in particular, coordinating closely with the Department of Health and the HSE, has been paramount.

On a daily basis, the Department ensures that the 200 travel advice pages it operates covering all countries in the world are up-to-date. Timely and up-to-date advice serves citizens in ensuring they make informed decisions before

travelling and can help ensure that citizens avoid getting into difficulty while they are travelling internationally.

In the current climate, our general advice to citizens remains that travel restrictions are subject to change at short notice and that all passengers should undertake proper research and carefully consider the necessity of their travel.

At present, the Department and its Embassy network continue to provide consular assistance to Irish citizens impacted by the evolving travel restrictions imposed in response to cases of the new Omicron variant.

The Department's Consular teams are dealing with a high volume of calls and emails from citizens concerned about their travel plans or how restrictions will affect loved ones returning to Ireland.

To respond to these queries, the Department established a dedicated Helpline to give immediate advice to citizens on 2 December. In just the first week of operation, call handlers have already responded to over 1,100 calls and over 500 emails.

We will respond to these requests along with the continued assistance we provide in non-Covid or travel related consular cases. We will also continue to monitor any restrictions abroad which may impact our citizens.

While the Department of Foreign Affairs has no direct role in the introduction of inward restrictions on travellers arriving in the State, we continue to coordinate with relevant Departments in relation to the dissemination of information on travel restrictions and the practical assistance to citizens these restrictions may affect. This is most recently notable in the restrictions imposed on scheduled States in southern Africa, following the emergence of the Omicron variant.

In southern Africa, our Embassy network has responded to hundreds of queries and is in ongoing contact with the remaining citizens and dependents who are attempting to return to Ireland following the imposition of flight bans.

The Irish Embassy in Pretoria has engaged directly with around 200 citizens and family members who have been attempting to secure flights back to Ireland. Flights are now starting to resume and many of the affected citizens have returned Ireland.

On 29 November, the Government of Morocco announced a travel ban on all inward and outward flights in response to the new COVID variant. The Department moved quickly to establish how many citizens were in Morocco and how the ban would affect them.

Following an assessment of the situation, the Department, through our Embassy in Rabat, moved quickly to charter a Ryanair aircraft to repatriate stranded citizens. This flight departed from Marrakech on Saturday 5 December with 156 passengers on board and included a number of citizens from the EU and the UK. No other direct repatriation flights from Morocco are planned. Several airlines are operating special flights to European capitals from where onward flights to Ireland can be purchased. Our Embassy in Rabat is available to provide advice to any affected citizens.

In 2021, the Department of Foreign Affairs and our mission network has continued our mandate in supporting Irish citizens caught up in both major and relatively minor incidents overseas. From the evacuation of citizens from Afghanistan to the support of a citizen who has had their passport stolen abroad, we remain dedicated to this role.

Staff in our Consular Directorate in Dublin, our 95 embassies and consulates-general, and our 94 Honorary Consuls around the world remain willing and ready to provide assistance and support to citizens in need.