

Revised Estimates for Public Services 2022

Vote 28: Foreign Affairs

10 March 2022

Opening remarks by the Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Chairman, I am pleased to be here this afternoon to present the Revised Estimates for my Department for 2022.

I will focus on Vote 28, the Vote for the Department of Foreign Affairs, and my colleague, Minister of State Colm Brophy, will address you afterwards in relation to Vote 27 (International Co-operation).

2022 Estimates and Allocation

Members will have seen the advance briefing notes provided by my Department on the two Votes, which summarise the main activities and priorities under each Expenditure Programme.

For 2022, the overall gross estimate for the Foreign Affairs group of Votes (Votes 27 & 28) is **€921m**, This represents a €69 million increase on its 2021 allocation.

Vote 28 – Foreign Affairs

For 2022, the total gross expenditure allocation for Vote 28, including a capital allocation of €22.5m, is **€316m**. This is an overall increase of just over €35m or 12%. This increase has been allocated to programmes to assist the Department in meeting the many challenges and opportunities we face in the coming year.

Over the last two weeks, we have seen the scale and horror of Russia's invasion which has shocked us all. As we have just discussed, my Department is at the centre of this country's response and will remain so.

The scale of events means that our existing priorities, at home and abroad, will need to change. This will bring its own budget challenges and require reprioritisation and reallocation of resources. Our work will form part of a wider Government-led response across all Departments.

As has been proposed, Mr Chairman, I will now proceed to make some short introductory comments on each of the programmes in sequence.

Programme A – Our People

Programme A (allocation €98m) covers many key policy areas for my Department, including Consular Services and Assistance, the Passport Service, our Emigrant Support Programme and Northern Ireland.

Under this programme, the Department has been provided with an allocation of **€10m** from the COVID Contingency Fund for the **Passport Service**. Demand for passports continues to be very strong. In February 2022, the Passport Service received 156,000 new passport applications. This is the highest volume of monthly applications ever received and is a result of the pent-up demand for passports following the relaxation of necessary travel restrictions due to the Covid pandemic. We anticipate 1.4 million applications this year compared to 900,000 in 2019.

Since June of 2021, over 300 members of staff at all grades have been assigned to the Passport Service. My Department is working closely with the Public Appointments Service to recruit additional staff over the past several months. In addition to this, the Passport Service is running its own recruitment competition for Temporary Clerical Officers with a view to assigning additional staff and to maintaining staffing levels throughout the year to meet the demand expected in the coming months.

Furthermore, in the context of the National Development Plan, the Department is making a major investment in the future of the Passport Service. Over the next couple of years, we will replace the core technology underpinning the service, which will deliver efficiencies and a more resilient passport system.

The processing of Foreign Birth Registration resumed in November 2021. Due to the complex nature of the Foreign Birth Registration process, applicants should allow approximately 2 years from the receipt of supporting documentation for processing of applications at this time. Increased resources are being allocated to work on Foreign Birth Registration applications as additional staff are assigned to the Passport Service.

The 2022 allocation for the **Emigrant Support Programme** remains at the same level as it was in 2021 - **€12.6m**. The last two years have demonstrated more than ever the need to continue support and deepen our bonds with our vibrant and diverse global Irish community and, in particular, to need to innovate and diversify the ways in which we connect.

I commend the work of my colleague Minister of State Brophy in this important area in his role as Minister for the Diaspora, and he will take any questions that you have on these matters today.

This Programme also deals with matters relating to **Northern Ireland, North South Cooperation, and British-Irish relations**, which are a particular emphasis of my Department and we remain focused on strengthening **our relationship with the UK** in the post-Brexit context.

Programme B – Our Place in Europe

The focus of work under Programme B – Our Place in Europe (€39m) will be to safeguard Ireland's interests in the broader context of Brexit and the future direction and policies of the Union. It will also support Ireland's contribution to the EU's global engagement on peace, security, trade and development, as well as security in the wider European region.

Programme B is also used to fund projects and proposals that further Ireland's **Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) priorities, support EU engagement**, and support the placing of **Irish Personnel in EU and International Institutions**. The Department's costs associated with Ireland's upcoming Presidency of the Council of Europe (May – November 2022) and the EU50 programme, marking the 50th Anniversary of Ireland's accession to the European Union, will also be met from this programme.

Programme C – Our Values

The majority of current expenditure under Programme C (allocation of **€62m**) consists of **Ireland's contributions to international organisations**. The allocation set aside for these contributions, at **€40m**, is a €6m increase on last year reflecting the first year of contributions to the European Peace Facility (€5.4m).

The EPF, established this year, funds EU Common Security and Defence Policy with a financial ceiling of €5.7 billion for 2021-2027. We are already seeing significant pressure on this fund arising from the Ukrainian crisis and Ireland will have to make additional contributions this year. On 27 February, EU Foreign Ministers agreed an EPF package of €500 million in assistance for Ukraine. Ireland will contribute to the funding for non-lethal equipment only. Ireland's contribution to this measure will amount to approximately €10.5 million this year. It is clear that this assistance to Ukraine absorbs the bulk of the EPF ceiling for commitments for 2022 (which is €540 million).

This means that it is very likely that the overall budgetary implications of the EPF for Member States in 2022 will be significantly higher than anticipated. It is not possible to provide a definitive estimate on the increase this year at this stage as the EEAS are still working on detailed proposals in this regard.

Programme D – Our Prosperity

Under this programme (allocation €44m) there will be particular focus in 2022 on assisting Irish business to identify new opportunities as we emerge from the global pandemic. To this end, we will continue our highly successful collaborations with other departments and state agencies, which deliver effective results for our citizens and our business sector.

Our annual St Patrick's Day programme also comes under this Programme. This year, in the wake of the pandemic, we will connect with our communities at home and overseas, and especially the people of Ukraine. We will mark this St Patrick's Day with solidarity rather than celebration and we express our Irish identity by re-dedicating ourselves to democratic and humanitarian values.

Programme E – Our Effectiveness

Programme E (allocation €50m) covers the management and development of staff, the management and mitigation of risk, ICT, property management and compliance with statutory and legal obligations. The programme also covers communication by the Department of its policies, objectives, and activities to citizens at home and abroad.

The resources for the Global Ireland 2025 strategy are managed under this programme. This year, consulates in Miami, Toronto and Lyon and an embassy in Dakar, Senegal will open. I do not think it can be underestimated how important this programme is – having infrastructure on the ground in Rabat and

Kyiv for instance allowed us to provide direct assistance and support to hundreds of Irish citizens and their families to get safely home.

That's a very brief overview of the main activities and priorities of the Department of Foreign Affairs for the year. I welcome any comments and questions from Committee members on any of the Foreign Affairs Programmes and the broader work of the Department.