

## Written Answers.

---

**The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received on the day from the Departments [unrevised].**

---

*Questions Nos. 1 to 20, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 21 to 42, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 43 to 53, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Question No. 54 answered with Question No. 51.*

### Northern Ireland

55. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he will take to safeguard the peace process, in view of the collapse of the Executive in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3036/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government is constantly engaged with the British Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the political parties to support the peace process and political progress in Northern Ireland on the basis of the Agreement. In recent weeks, both the Taoiseach and I have had intensified contacts with the parties and the British Government on the political difficulties that were threatening the continuation of the Executive.

It was clear, immediately following the resignation of the deputy First Minister, that the prospect of a resolution ahead of the triggering of an Assembly election was slim. However both Governments, in their capacity as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, made full use of the narrow window available to ensure that any avenues for resolution between the parties prior to an election were fully explored.

In the event, an Assembly election has been triggered and it is important to emphasise that this eventuality is one covered by the legislation governing the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. When parties in an administration cannot agree, an election is the consequence and the outcome of that is now for the electorate in Northern Ireland to determine.

The Secretary of State and I have agreed that both Governments should continue to work closely together in the weeks to come, looking ahead to the post-election period, when a new power-sharing Executive will need to be formed. We have also urged the parties to approach the election campaign in calm and respectful terms, conscious that polarising rhetoric and frayed relationships will damage the prospects of forming an Executive after the votes have been counted.

We must all be mindful that effective devolved Government, underpinned by a genuine

spirit of partnership, is what the people of Northern Ireland voted for in 1998 and what they expect their politicians to deliver.

After the election, it will therefore fall to the parties to form a power-sharing Executive and this will require the parties to find a way forward on issues which contributed to the calling of the election. The Government is of course always ready to support and assist the parties in any way we can. Our commitment as a co-guarantor of the Agreement is a constant one – in good times and bad.

The Government will continue to work with the British Government and the political parties to support the fulfilment of the full promise of that Agreement and to advance political stability, reconciliation and economic prosperity in Northern Ireland.

### **Middle East Peace Process**

56. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his recent attendance at the international Middle East peace conference; his views on the position being taken by President Trump in relation to the rights of the Palestinian people and in particular his intention to move the embassy of the United States to Jerusalem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3055/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I attended the Conference on the Middle East Peace Process in Paris on 15 January, which was hosted by President Hollande. Some 70 countries and international organisations participated in the meeting, which was a follow up to the first conference held in Paris in June 2016, which I also attended. This “French Initiative” was aimed at reviving a stalled peace process, and reaffirming international support for the two state solution to the conflict between Israel and its Arab and Palestinian neighbours. Contrary to intentions, the meeting did not include the parties themselves, as Israel refused to attend or to engage in any way with the French initiative. This was regrettable and mistaken.

The conference adopted a Declaration which clearly expressed the view of the broad international community that the two state solution was the only way forward. This followed on and reinforced the similar message in Security Council Resolution 2334, adopted in December, which I welcomed at the time.

However, there was also great concern among all participants about threats to the viability of that solution, stemming principally from the settlement policy of the Israeli Government. The Middle East Peace Process has been effectively stalled for three years, and there is no clear view on how to renew it. Uncertainty about the direction which the new US Administration will take was, of course, one factor in that regard.

The Paris Conference, and the initiative taken by France during 2016, can be said therefore to have been partially successful, particularly in maintaining an international focus on the issue at a time when other events in the Middle East have been dominating attention. France is to be commended for initiating and persevering with this challenging work, despite the many and clearly anticipated difficulties inherent to it. The wider ambition, of helping to restart the peace process, remains to be achieved, and is a task for the whole international community. Ireland will continue to argue for the European Union to play its full part in that.

It is too soon to tell what positions the new US Administration will take in relation to Israeli-Palestinian issues. I have addressed the specific issue of the location of the US Embassy in reply to an earlier Question today (No. 53).

## Prisoner Releases

57. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the circumstances surrounding the revocation of a licence (details supplied) due to allegations that have not been substantiated by any witnesses or other corroborative evidence. [3034/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am aware of the particular case to which the Deputy refers. My officials in the Belfast Secretariat monitor this and other cases as part of their ongoing work around prison issues generally in Northern Ireland. The circumstances of the individual in question, have been raised with the Northern Ireland Office. The Deputy will be aware that the person concerned was detained in March 2016 when the release licence granted to him under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement was revoked by the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Theresa Villiers.

I am informed that as part of the revocation process, the independent Northern Ireland Parole Commissioners carry out a full review of the case. The Parole Commissioners are charged with taking into account the obligations on the State of the European Convention on Human Rights in making their recommendation. This includes assessing the risk to the public should the person remain at liberty.

Those whose licence is revoked under this process are provided with a copy of the independent Parole Commissioners recommendation, which sets out the reasons the licence was revoked.

Deputies will be aware of my concern about prison conditions generally in Northern Ireland. I had a useful discussion on this wider issue with Claire Sugden MLA, the Northern Ireland Minister of Justice when she visited Dublin recently. Minister Sugden does not have any role in the revocation of licences issued under the Good Friday Agreement which remain a matter for the Secretary of State.

## Human Rights

58. **Deputy Darragh O’Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the recent efforts made by his Department to secure the release of a person (details supplied) detained without trial in Egypt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3037/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** This consular case continues to be a top priority for the Government and substantial resources and time are being devoted to it, by the Taoiseach, by me as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, by officials in my Department, by our Ambassador and his team in Cairo, and by the entire Irish diplomatic network. The Government is doing everything it possibly can to ensure that the Egyptian authorities are in no doubt about our determination to see this young man returned to his home and his family.

I acknowledge and express my appreciation to the Ceann Comhairle, and to all of the members of the cross-party delegation that went to Cairo recently to meet this citizen and to hear his story at first-hand, and to press the case for his return to Ireland with the Egyptian authorities at the highest levels. These messages have been clearly and repeatedly conveyed by the Government, and it is very useful that the Egyptian authorities are clear on the fact that there is absolute unanimity across Dáil Éireann on this matter.

The Taoiseach has been in direct contact with Egyptian President el-Sisi on numerous occasions and has called on him to exercise his powers under Egyptian law to resolve this case and return this young man to Ireland. He has done so in face-to-face meetings on two occasions and also by telephone and by letter. The Taoiseach most recently wrote to President el-Sisi about the case in November. For my part, I have engaged continuously on this case with my Egyptian counterpart, Foreign Minister Shoukry, and I once again raised this case with him when I met him in Paris at the Middle East Peace Conference on Sunday, January 15th.

The trial in which our citizen is a defendant along with more than 400 others was back in court for a further hearing on 17 January. The hearing saw witnesses called and cross-examined for the first time since the trial began. This may be an indication that the trial has now, at last, moved into a substantive phase and that a conclusion may finally be in prospect. The Irish Government has been present at and has observed every hearing in the trial to date and our Embassy was again represented at the hearing on 17 January. The next hearing will be on 14 February and the Embassy will once again be present on that occasion to observe the proceedings.

The Egyptian President has consistently advised us that the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary must be respected, and that the Egyptian Government cannot intervene until after the trial has concluded. The President has also consistently made clear to us that he is anxious to resolve this issue as soon as he can, and that he will be able to intervene in the case once the trial has ended. I welcome the fact that he reiterated this to the Oireachtas delegation when they met with him in Cairo on January 11th.

I and my colleagues in Government and our officials at every level will continue to do everything possible and appropriate to engage with the authorities in Cairo on this citizen's behalf both directly and through and with EU and international partners.

## **Human Rights**

**59. Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on representations that he has made to international bodies regarding the persecution of the Rohingya population in Myanmar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3056/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Ireland has been active in raising concerns regarding the treatment of the Rohingya community in Myanmar/Burma at a multilateral level over recent years. In 2016, Ireland supported the EU-led resolution on the situation of human rights in Myanmar/Burma at the 31st session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in March 2016. This resolution conveyed the HRC's serious concerns over human rights violations in the country, including the situation in Rakhine State and particularly with respect to religious and ethnic minorities, including the Rohingya minority. Ireland also raised this issue in a statement at the 32nd session of the HRC in June 2016 and during the review of Myanmar's human rights record at the HRC's Universal Periodic Review in November 2015.

Ireland has also supported the inclusion of this issue in the EU's contacts with the Government of Myanmar, including in the most recent EU-Myanmar Human Rights Dialogue which took place on 22 November 2016.

I am particularly concerned about the recent outbreak of violence in Rakhine State, which began in the wake of attacks on police posts in October 2016. I support the concerns expressed by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in December 2016, in which the Commissioner called for access by independent monitors and an independent investi-

gation of allegations of human rights violations by the security forces in their response to these attacks. Ireland has also actively called for the restoration of access for humanitarian aid to the region.

My Department will continue to raise these concerns in our contacts with international bodies, in the context of our membership of the EU and the UN, as well as in our bilateral contacts with the Government of Myanmar.

### Foreign Conflicts

60. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent US led airstrikes on Mosul which killed 30 civilians; if he will cease US military aircraft and hardware coming through Shannon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3092/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I regret the deaths of all civilians in every military conflict. I am conscious of multiple reports, including from civilians in Mosul, claiming that Daesh is deliberately using civilians as human shields. I would also note that the liberation of Mosul, from a terrorist group which a UN body has found responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, has been legally mandated by the UN Security Council under resolution 2249, which calls on UN Member States to “*prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIL*” and “*to eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria*”. Security operations taking place against Daesh inside Iraq are also conducted under the legal authority of the sovereign Government of Iraq.

The Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft) Order 1952, gives the Minister for Foreign Affairs primary responsibility for the regulation of activity by foreign military aircraft in Ireland. The practical implementation of this provision is guided by and reflects Ireland’s traditional policy of military neutrality.

### Human Rights

61. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to an open letter to the UN Security Council from more than a dozen Nobel laureates, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, criticising Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar’s de facto leader, for a bloody military crackdown on minority Rohingya people, warning of a tragedy amounting to ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3030/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am aware of the open letter to which the Deputy refers. The Government remains deeply concerned about the ongoing violence in Rakhine State in the wake of attacks on police posts near Myanmar/Burma’s border with Bangladesh in October 2016. Ireland has called for an immediate end to violence in the region, and for an impartial, independent investigation into serious allegations of human rights violations committed by security forces in response to the attacks. Also critical is full restoration of access for humanitarian aid to Rakhine State, to ensure vulnerable communities receive the support they need.

Ireland has been active in raising our concerns at bilateral level with the authorities in Myanmar/Burma and in the context of our membership of the EU and the UN. Ireland’s Ambassador



to Thailand, who is accredited to Myanmar/Burma, raised Ireland's concerns regarding the situation in Rakhine State with Minister of State for Foreign Affairs U Kyaw Tin during a visit to the country earlier this month. The Embassy continues to monitor the situation closely.

Ireland welcomes the democratic transition which is currently underway in Myanmar/Burma following elections in November 2015. We recognise the positive steps that the new Government of Myanmar/Burma has taken in pursuit of peace and reconciliation, democratic reforms and economic growth. The Irish Government is of the view that respect for human rights and the rule of law for all people in Myanmar/Burma remains central to the long-term success of these goals. Addressing the underlying root causes of tensions in Rakhine State, in a manner that takes account of the concerns of the Rohingya and Buddhist communities, and led by the Government of Myanmar/Burma, is critical in this context.

*Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 49.*

### **Human Rights**

63. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the execution of three prisoners in Bahrain on 15 January 2017 and claims concerning same (details supplied); and if he will raise the execution of these prisoners with his Bahraini counterparts. [3047/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am aware of the recent executions in Bahrain, and of the allegations that these persons were tortured and subjected to unfair trials prior to the executions. It is disappointing to see Bahrain revert to using the death penalty, which they have not done since 2010. This move is a backwards step in Bahrain's efforts to improve its human rights record, and only serves to reinforce the concerns that I have expressed in this House about the human rights situation in Bahrain of late.

I am also aware that last week's executions triggered public protests and demonstrations. I call on the protesters and the Bahraini authorities alike to exercise restraint, for the protesters to express their views peacefully and for the authorities to permit them to do this. I remind the Bahraini Government that preventing people from expressing their views does not quash people's grievances; it only reinforces them.

Ireland is unequivocal in its stance on the death penalty. We oppose and condemn its use in all circumstances, and in particular in cases where there are allegations of unfair trials preceding its implementation. The abolition of the death penalty is one of Ireland's international priorities, and my Department regularly conveys our stance on this issue to all countries where the death penalty is still in use.

These executions are a worrying development, as they coincide with an overall deterioration in the human rights situation in Bahrain, in particular targeting those who express dissent or criticism of the Bahraini Government. This is despite repeated statements from the Bahraini authorities of their commitment to improving the human rights situation in that country. Ireland made specific reference to Bahrain in our Item 4 Statement at the Human Rights Council in Geneva last September, expressing concern about "restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association aimed at silencing the voice of civil society and human rights defenders in countries including Bahrain".

Ireland's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, who is accredited to Bahrain as we do not have an Embassy there, recently met with the Bahraini Deputy Minister for International Affairs, Abdullah Bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, and they discussed human rights. My Department will also

specifically raise the renewed use of the death penalty with Bahrain at the next available opportunity, and we will continue to call on Bahrain to live up to its commitments to improve the human rights situation for all Bahrainis.

### Foreign Conflicts

64. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the arrest of five persons by the French police, with the co-operation of the Spanish police, in the Basque town of Luhuso (details supplied); his views on whether the arrests are a blow to efforts to promote the Basque peace process; and his further views on whether the French and Spanish Governments should instead promote and support a process of dialogue to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Basque Country. [3046/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Government continues to support and encourage all efforts aimed at securing peace and stability in the Basque Country. As the Deputy will be aware, the Government welcomed the declaration by ETA of October 2011 that the organisation had decided on “a definitive cessation of its armed activity”. We continue to encourage all those involved to build on this step and work for a long-term political solution and lasting peace and reconciliation in the Basque Country.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the internal legal processes of two fellow EU member states.

### Human Rights

65. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the contact he has had with Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, President of Egypt, and the Egyptian government in regard to a person (details supplied). [38633/16]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** This long-running and complex consular case continues to be a top priority for the Government and substantial resources and time are being devoted to it, by the Taoiseach, by me as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, by officials in my Department, by our Ambassador and his team in Cairo, and by the entire Irish diplomatic network.

The Government is doing everything it possibly can to ensure that the Egyptian authorities are in no doubt about our determination to see this young man returned to his home and his family.

The Taoiseach has been in direct and personal contact with Egyptian President el-Sisi on numerous occasions calling on him to exercise his powers under Egyptian law to resolve this case and return this citizen to Ireland. He did so when he met the President face-to-face to discuss this case in New York in September 2015, and again in Paris in November 2015. The Taoiseach restated the Government’s position on the case again when he spoke to the President by telephone last July. The Taoiseach has also written to President el-Sisi on a number of occasions about this case, including in a letter in August 2016 and again, most recently, in a letter dated 17 November 2016.

In all of these contacts, the Taoiseach has underlined our concerns about the continuing detention of this young man, who has been in prison for more than three years without having been convicted of any crime, and who is part of a group trial that has been adjourned on many

occasions.

For my part, I have been in continuous contact with my Egyptian counterpart, Foreign Minister Shoukry, about this case since my appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. I have met the Minister face-to-face on several occasions to discuss the case including, notably, during a visit to Cairo last June and in New York in September 2016. I discussed the case most recently with Minister Shoukry when I met him in Paris on Sunday, January 11th.

I have also spoken with the Minister by phone on many occasions about the case. I have also had many meetings and phone conversations about the case with the Egyptian Ambassador in Dublin, Soha Gendi.

The matter has also remained the top priority for our Embassy in Cairo and our Ambassador there raises this case regularly at all levels with the Egyptian Government.

In all these contacts we underline the Irish Government's support for this citizen's immediate return to Ireland.

Our key focus in this case is securing this citizen's best interests. We are working to see him released by the Egyptian authorities at the earliest possible opportunity.

Regardless of our difficulties with the ongoing trial, the reality is the Irish government cannot directly interfere with a trial in another country. What we can do and what we are working very hard to do is to secure this citizen's release by the Egyptian authorities at the earliest possible time so that he can return home to his family in Dublin, and to provide every possible consular support for his welfare while he remains in detention.

All of the sustained and focused actions that have been taken by the Government, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and our Embassy in Cairo throughout this case have been aimed at furthering these two objectives, and importantly, avoiding any action that could be counterproductive or detrimental to this citizen's best interests.

### **EU Meetings**

**66. Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when the next EU Foreign Affairs Council will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2797/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The next EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting is due to take place on Monday 6th February in Brussels. I will attend the meeting. I expected that Egypt, Libya and Ukraine will be discussed. Libya was last on the agenda of the Foreign Affairs Council in April 2016. It has been over a year since the signing of the Libyan Political Agreement and the February FAC presents an opportunity to reassess the situation, in particular the status of the political transition. A viable political solution remains the only way forward for the Libyan people and Ireland continues to support the formation of a functioning government.

Ministers will discuss the situation in Egypt and EU-Egyptian relations at the Council meeting. This will be the first opportunity in three years for such a discussion. The discussion will cover a wide range of issues of concern, including human rights, regional stability, terrorism and economic developments.

The discussion on Ukraine will be a good opportunity to review overall relations with a key



neighbouring country. There is likely to be a particular focus on progress in the implementation of Ukraine's political and economic reform programme.

### **Human Rights**

67. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans following the latest deferment of the trial of a person (details supplied) in Egypt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3098/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** This consular case continues to be a top priority for the Government and substantial resources and time are being devoted to it, by the Taoiseach and myself, by officials in my Department, by our Ambassador and his team in Cairo, and by the wider Irish diplomatic network. The Government is doing everything it possibly can to ensure that the Egyptian authorities are in no doubt about our determination to see this young man returned to his home and his family.

I acknowledge and express my appreciation to the Ceann Comhairle, and to all of the members of the cross-party delegation that went to Cairo recently to meet this citizen and to hear his story at first-hand, and to press the case for his return to Ireland with the Egyptian authorities at the highest levels. These messages have been clearly and repeatedly conveyed by the Government, and it is very useful that the Egyptian authorities are clear on the fact that there is absolute unanimity across Dáil Éireann on this matter.

The Taoiseach has spoken directly and personally with Egyptian President el-Sisi on numerous occasions now calling on him to exercise his powers under Egyptian law to resolve this case and return this young man to Ireland. He has done so in face-to-face meetings on two occasions and also by telephone and by letter. The Taoiseach most recently wrote to President el-Sisi about the case in November. For my part, I have engaged continuously on this case with my Egyptian counterpart, Foreign Minister Shoukry, and I once again raised this case with him when I met him in Paris at the Middle East Peace Conference on Sunday, January 15th.

The trial in which our citizen is a defendant along with more than 400 others was back in court for a further hearing on 17 January. The hearing saw witnesses called and cross-examined for the first time since the trial began. This may be an indication that the trial has now, at last, moved into a substantive phase and that a conclusion may finally be in prospect. The Irish Government has been present at and has observed every hearing in the trial to date and our Embassy was again represented at the hearing on 17 January. The next hearing will be on 14 February and the Embassy will once again be present on that occasion to observe the proceedings.

The Egyptian President has consistently advised us that the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary must be respected, and that the Egyptian Government cannot intervene while the case remains before the courts. The President has also consistently made clear to us that he is anxious to resolve this issue as soon as he can, and that he will be able to intervene in the case once the trial has ended. I welcome the fact that he reiterated this to the Oireachtas delegation when they met with him in Cairo on January 11th.

I and my colleagues in Government and our officials at every level will continue to do everything possible and appropriate to engage with the authorities in Cairo on this citizen's behalf both directly and through and with EU and international partners.

### **Human Rights**

68. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he had any dialogue at EU level regarding addressing the urgent situation whereby members of civil society are at extreme risk in view of the increase in attacks and murders of human rights defenders in Colombia, since the cease fire in August 2016. [3031/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The increase in attacks against human rights defenders in Colombia during 2016 is a matter of great concern. The situation is being closely monitored by my Department and by the Embassy of Ireland in Mexico, which is accredited to Colombia. I condemn unreservedly any intimidation or violence perpetrated against human rights defenders in Colombia or elsewhere. I firmly believe that the Colombian peace process, which aims to create a virtuous circle between peacebuilding and respect for human rights, provides the framework in which the endemic violence which has afflicted Colombian society can successfully be addressed.

I had the opportunity to discuss the peace process in Colombia with my EU colleagues and with the President of Colombia, Mr Juan Manuel Santos, at the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on 12 December. The EU Special Envoy to the Colombian Peace Process, Mr Eamon Gilmore, also participated in our discussion. I made clear the importance Ireland attaches to supporting the implementation of the peace agreement, and noted the need for all parties to the process to maintain momentum and to ensure that the citizens of Colombia begin to see evidence of a peace dividend.

Ireland is a founder member and one of the largest contributors to the EU Trust Fund for Colombia. We have committed to providing €3 million in funding over the lifetime of the Fund, which aims to support the implementation of the peace agreement. Ireland has been closely involved in discussion of its strategic direction and advocated a strong human rights perspective for the Fund, in keeping with our commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights internationally. We will continue to prioritise this issue as the agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC is implemented in the months and years ahead.

Officials from my Department regularly meet representatives of human rights organisations active in Colombia. Most recently, in November 2016, they hosted a delegation from Peace Brigades International to discuss the worrying increase in violence against local leaders and human rights defenders in Colombia to which the Deputy refers.

Officials from our Embassy in Mexico also regularly interact with organisations working to promote and defend human rights in Colombia. Ireland has provided more than €5 million to international and local civil society organizations in Colombia since 2009, including to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Christian Aid, amongst others. In addition, Ireland regularly raises issues relating to human rights directly in Bogotá and via the UN and European Union.

### **Dublin-Monaghan Bombings**

69. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the outcome of recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and with the British Foreign Secretary in relation to the need for the British Government to respond positively and without further delay to the requests of Dáil Éireann to provide access to papers and files pertaining to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 1974; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3044/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** This is a repeat of

my answer to Priority Question no. 47 / 3262-17.

Dealing with the legacy of the past relating to the conflict in Northern Ireland is a major priority for me as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and for the Government. This commitment is reflected in the Programme for a Partnership Government, which makes specific reference to pursuing the issue of the Dublin Monaghan bombings.

The All-Party motion on the 1974 Dublin Monaghan bombings adopted in this House on 25 May last year has, like those adopted in 2008 and 2011, been conveyed to the British Government. These motions call on the British Government to allow access by an independent, international judicial figure to all original documents relating to the bombings.

The Government is committed to actively pursuing the implementation of these all-Party Dáil motions, and has consistently raised the issue with the British Government. The Taoiseach has raised the issue with Prime Minister May, emphasising the Government's continued support for the Dáil motions. I have also raised the matter on a number of occasions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire, most recently at our meeting in Belfast on 19 January.

In our discussions, I have advised Secretary of State Brokenshire that the Dáil motions represent the consensus political view in Ireland that an independent, international judicial review of all the relevant documents is required to establish the full facts of the Dublin Monaghan atrocities. I have also underlined to the Secretary of State that the absence of a response from the British Government is of deep concern to the Government and indeed this House, and emphasised the urgent need for a response from the British Government.

Secretary of State Brokenshire has acknowledged the importance that the Government and Dáil Éireann attach to this case, but indicated that the British Government is still considering how it could respond in a way which would adequately address the motions and be consistent with its obligations.

The Government will continue to pursue this matter with the British Government, urging them to provide a satisfactory response to the motions that have been adopted by this House.

There are many families throughout these islands and beyond who continue to deal not only with the awful pain of losing a loved one, but also with the struggle for answers decades after these traumatic events. Accordingly, the establishment of a new comprehensive framework for dealing with the past, as envisaged in the Stormont House Agreement, is a priority for the Government.

I am continuing to engage with the Secretary of State and with the Northern Ireland parties to ensure the Executive is up and running as soon as possible after the upcoming Assembly elections, so that a way can be found to achieve a final agreement on legacy issues at political level. There has been positive work and discussions ongoing over the last number of months. There remain a number of outstanding issues, but there is an urgent need to achieve progress, so that the institutions can be established and start working to meet the needs of victims and survivors and support broader societal healing and reconciliation. The Government will continue its engagement to achieve the establishment of these legacy institutions at the earliest possible opportunity following the Assembly election.

### **Humanitarian Aid Provision**

**70. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way

in which Ireland is supporting efforts to address the humanitarian crisis in north east Nigeria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3035/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh)**  
**(Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am deeply concerned by the humanitarian crisis in Nigeria. Despite recent progress made by Nigerian and regional armed forces, violence by Boko Haram remains a serious threat to the peace and security of Nigeria and to the wider Lake Chad region. This conflict has resulted in the displacement of millions of people and has caused a humanitarian crisis affecting some 14 million people.

Since 2015, the Government has provided over €3.1 million in humanitarian assistance for those affected by this crisis. Last year, we provided €1 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross and €1 million to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation for their response in the region. We also provided €430,000 to our NGO partners, Oxfam Ireland, MSF, Plan International Ireland and the International Rescue Committee. In addition, Irish Aid deployed six specialists last year to work with UN agencies in the region under the Rapid Response initiative.

We are also working closely with our partners in the EU, which has pledged up to €50 million to the Multinational Joint Taskforce, which supports 8,700 troops from Nigeria and neighbouring countries in promoting regional security. Since 2014, the European Commission has provided €96.8 million for humanitarian assistance in Nigeria, and the crisis in the Lake Chad Basin remains a priority for the year ahead.

Our Embassy in Abuja has also been playing a leading role on the ground, in cooperation with the United Nations.

Our Ambassador has made a number of visits to North-Eastern Nigeria, meeting with representatives of the UN and NGOs and with the Governor of Borno State, to discuss priorities for 2017. We are continuing to monitor developments closely, and to work with the Nigerian Government, with regional authorities and with other key partners to address the humanitarian crisis through diplomatic engagement and humanitarian funding.

*Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 53.*

### **Undocumented Irish in the USA**

**72. Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his discussions with US officials in relation to immigration reform, and in particular the plight of undocumented Irish citizens in the United States of America; his plans to meet with US officials in the near future to discuss this further; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2790/17]

**89. Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of times since coming to office he has met with US officials to discuss immigration reform and in particular the plight of the undocumented Irish citizens in America; his plans to meet with US officials on this issue over the next six months; his views on when reform on this issue will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2789/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 and 89 together.

Achieving relief for undocumented Irish migrants in the US and agreement on a facility for future migration between Ireland and the US are longstanding Government objectives. We

continue to be committed to these aims notwithstanding the changed political context in the United States.

The Government has raised the issue of immigration reform with US interlocutors – including at the highest levels – on many occasions. I personally raised the issue when I met then-Secretary of State John Kerry in Co. Tipperary, on 30 October 2016. I also raised it when I spoke to Speaker Paul Ryan by telephone on 23 November 2016.

The Government has also availed of every opportunity to sensitise the incoming Administration to our concerns and interests regarding immigration reform, and the plight of the undocumented Irish in particular. The Taoiseach raised the matter in his separate telephone conversations with President Trump and Vice-President Pence in the days following the Presidential election. Immigration reform will be high on my agenda for my planned visit to Washington DC in early February. Moreover, the forthcoming St. Patrick's Day engagements will provide a further opportunity to express to senior figures in the new Administration and Congress our aims and concerns in relation to the undocumented.

The Government will continue to use high-level visits to and from the US, as well as Ireland's diplomatic representation in the United States, to advance these aims. The Embassy in Washington has worked closely with members of the US Congress - in both the House of Representatives and the US Senate, and on both sides of the aisle – to advance progress on this matter and will continue to do so. We are fortunate to be able to draw on the assistance of the Friends of Ireland in Congress and the many representatives of Irish-America, who appreciate our concerns.

In addition to these political efforts, our Embassy in Washington and our Consulates throughout the United States will continue to engage with Irish community groups in relation to their concerns. In recent days, Ambassador Anderson convened a meeting of senior immigration stakeholders at our Embassy in Washington in order to hear directly from those who work most closely with the undocumented Irish.

We will also continue to support organisations that deliver frontline advisory services and community care to Irish emigrants through the Emigrant Support Programme. More than 70% of the funds allocated through this programme are directed towards welfare services, including in support of the undocumented Irish in the U.S. In the last funding round for the Emigrant Support Programme, organisations in the U.S were allocated more than €2.3 million in funding. The Government, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and our Embassy in Washington continue to work closely with Irish-American community leaders in actively pursuing all viable opportunities to advance immigration reform. We will encourage and promote any realistic possibilities for a solution that may arise.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

**73. Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has contacted the President of the United States of America, Mr Donald Trump; his views on the policies of his administration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3053/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Taoiseach had a phone call with then President-Elect Trump on the day following his election. The Taoiseach was able to raise issues of Irish interest, and President Trump extended an invitation to the Taoiseach to visit the White House on the occasion of St. Patrick's Day 2017. A similar call was also made by the Taoiseach to then Vice President-Elect Pence. A new Administration in



the White House is accompanied by a large number of new appointments at the highest levels of the US Federal Government and institutions. This means there can be a significant period of change – both in terms of policy and personnel - while the shape of the new Administration emerges. Our Ambassador and her team in Washington have been very active in establishing working relationships with the incoming Administration, monitoring the various confirmation hearings in the US Senate and reporting on the preliminary indications of the new Administration's policy agenda, especially on those aspects which directly impact on our bilateral relationship with the US.

I am due to travel to Washington, D.C., at the end of January and expect to have an opportunity to meet with figures in both the Administration and Congress and review with them matters of particular interest to Ireland. These would include recent developments in the Northern Ireland Peace Process – which has been supported by successive US administrations – as well as immigration reform, the unique challenges posed for Ireland by Brexit, and strengthening economic engagement between our two countries.

### **Middle East Peace Process**

**74. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which he will progress the UN resolution 2334 (2016) (details supplied); if he will support the persons of occupied Palestine; and his views on the effect on the viability of the two state solution. [3032/17]

**84. Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the particular efforts being made by the Government to help restart the Middle East peace process; if he envisages any progress on the stalemate in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3038/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 74 and 84 together.

UN Security Council Resolution 2334, adopted on 23 December, was an important and timely re-statement of key international positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and its resolution. The Security Council stated unambiguously its support for a two state solution to the conflict, and focused particular attention on the issue of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory. I welcomed the Council's reiteration that settlements, and actions to alter the demographic balance in the occupied areas, are illegal and an obstacle to peace. These are not new developments: these have been the positions of Ireland, of the EU, of the UN and of the international community as a whole for many years.

The Middle East Conference in Paris on 15 January, which I attended, provided the opportunity for the broader international community in turn to confirm its full support for the two state solution. I have reported in more detail on this Conference in my earlier reply to Question 56.

These two steps have been important and timely precisely because the Middle East Peace process has been effectively suspended for almost three years now. It is fair to say that among the Ministers I met at Paris there was very little optimism about the prospects for restarting the political process at this time. The demands of the concurrent crises in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East are a major factor in this view. Much will depend, as it always does, on the positions and priorities of the new US Administration.

For our part, Ireland will continue to review what additional steps might be taken to encourage political progress and stands ready to support any efforts to restart a political process, as we

have done in the last year to assist the French initiative. In particular, we will continue to argue, as I have done, that the international community as a whole needs to exert more pressure on the parties themselves to re-engage.

### **Human Rights**

75. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the measures his Department has taken in advising Irish companies of the consequences of their activities in Western Sahara while under Moroccan occupation, in view of his commitment to the self determination of the Sahrawi people in Western Sahara. [3033/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Ireland has consistently supported the right to self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. Ireland has not taken a position on the future status of the territory, so long as that status is decided in a genuine exercise of self-determination.

At present, Western Sahara is a non-self-governing territory. Under international law, the economic resources of a non-self-governing territory may only be exploited for the benefit of the people of the territory, on their behalf or in consultation with their representatives. Any exploration and exploitation activities that proceed in disregard of the interests and wishes of the people of Western Sahara would be in violation of the principles of international law applicable to natural resource activities in non-self-governing territories.

I would expect that any Irish company operating abroad would have due regard to the principles of international law and the rights of the inhabitants of the territory in which it is operating. My Department has committed to develop a National Plan on Business and Human Rights, which will assist companies in advancing the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) adopted by the Human Rights Council in 2011.

The National Plan is designed to help Government departments, State agencies, Irish companies, Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) operating in Ireland and Irish enterprises operating abroad adhere to and promote the UNGPs. Following the publication of the Working Outline of the National Plan on Business and Human Rights in late 2015, my Department engaged in an extensive consultation process with the aim of ensuring the broadest possible participation in the development of the Plan. Work on the Plan is nearing conclusion and I expect that it will be published within the next three months.

Ireland continues to engage in EU and UN discussions aimed at promoting the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Most recently, Ireland, together with other EU Member States, reiterated our collective commitment to the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles at the fifth UN Annual Forum on Business and Human rights in Geneva in November 2016.

### **Foreign Policy**

76. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the engagement he and his Department have had with the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in relation to the Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2798/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The preparation

of the new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy was led by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini (HRVP). She consulted closely with the Member States, but presented the Strategy on her own responsibility to the European Council in June 2016 which adopted Conclusions welcoming the presentation of the Strategy and invited the HRVP, Commission and Council to take the work forward. These Conclusions make clear that any implementation of the Strategy will be negotiated and agreed with the Member States.

Ireland has been actively engaged in the consultation and follow-up process for the Strategy, including at senior official and ministerial level. We made a written submission to the consultation process. I discussed the Strategy with the HRVP and my EU colleagues at a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) in May 2016 and again in October 2016.

While supporting the focus of the strategy in promoting peace, security, democracy, prosperity and a rules based global order, I have been clear that any work in the area of security and defence must take place within the scope of the EU Treaties and of the Lisbon Protocol which protects Ireland's military neutrality. This is reflected in the Conclusions of the FAC meeting in November 2016, attended by the Ministers of State for European Affairs and Defence, which reaffirmed that the specific character of the security and defence policy of all EU Member States will be fully respected in the implementation of the EUGS.

The European Council in December 2016 endorsed the work of Council on implementing the EUGS in the area of security and defence, and called for comprehensive follow-up by the HRVP and Member States. It is expected that she will present these proposals in the coming months for discussion with Member States.

### **Humanitarian Aid Provision**

**77. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he, along with EU and UN colleagues, continues to press for humanitarian assistance in the various conflict zones globally; if consideration continues to be given to the provision of safe or protective havens for civilian communities fleeing from war, genocide and terrorism; the extent to which peace keeping interventions are being considered in the most sensitive war zones; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3052/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh)** (**Deputy Joe McHugh**): The provision of effective humanitarian assistance is a key foreign policy priority for the Government. Ireland provided over €150 million in humanitarian funding in 2016, to provide assistance to people affected by crisis and conflict around the world.

Ireland's humanitarian assistance is targeted at where needs are greatest and we ensure a focus on crises and conflicts that are sometimes ignored in the media. We work particularly at EU and UN level to advocate for increased humanitarian access, more effective means of providing assistance, and respect for international humanitarian law.

Ireland contributes strongly to the European Commission's humanitarian action outside the EU, which has an annual budget of approximately €1 billion. Ireland's UN partners lead the coordination of international appeals for humanitarian assistance, including through the UN Central Emergency Response Fund. Ireland is the eighth largest donor to this Fund, which has provided \$4.6 billion in life-saving assistance to people affected by crises since 2005.

In May last year, the UN Secretary General convened the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, in an effort to address the current scale of global humanitarian crisis. I delivered Ireland's National Statement, making a number of commitments on effective humanitarian action,

including through our support to conflict affected states and our approach to peacekeeping. These commitments will remain a top priority in 2017.

Providing safe havens within conflict zones is extremely difficult, especially where civilian protection is not prioritised. Safe havens require UN mandates and robustly-equipped peacekeeping personnel. Political will is lacking in many conflicts today, including from some on the UN Security Council. However, in other places, the UN is active and there are twice as many UN peacekeepers deployed today as 15 years ago. Ireland continues to play its part, with more than 570 personnel in UN-mandated missions overseas.

In 2017, Ireland will remain a strong advocate for a more effective UN response and for respect for international humanitarian law.

### **Extradition Arrangements**

78. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the potential extradition of a person (details supplied) to the United States of America, in view of comments made by President Trump regarding the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3054/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As this individual is a U.S citizen, this is a matter for the United States and the Russian Federation. I do not intend making representations to either Government.

*Question No. 79 answered with Question No. 51.*

### **Military Aircraft Landings**

80. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 710 of 17 January 2017, his views on the fact that there was a sharp increase in the number of requests for landings of military aircraft at Shannon airport in June 2016, the same month in which NATO ran a military exercise in Poland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3058/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Permission granted for landings by all foreign military aircraft at Irish airports is subject to strict conditions. These include stipulations that the aircraft must be unarmed, must carry no arms, ammunition or explosives. The aircraft must not engage in intelligence gathering and the flights in question must not form part of military exercises or operations. The increase in requests received in June 2016 in respect of military aircraft seeking to land at Shannon Airport arose mainly from requests from the US Embassy which has confirmed that the flights in question complied with the applicable conditions. The Embassy have also confirmed that none of the aircraft used in those exercises originated from the United States and furthermore that none of the aircraft that participated in those exercises refuelled in Shannon during that exercise.

### **International Agreements**

81. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has considered the ratification of the Antarctic Treaty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3043/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The question of Ireland's ratification of the Antarctic Treaty and related agreements comprising the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) has been examined in some detail by the Government and Offices concerned.

While the objectives and achievements of the ATS are of considerable importance and the commitment of the signatories is commendable, the direct benefits to Ireland of ratification would be relatively minor. Preparation for ratification by Ireland would impose substantial administrative burdens on several Government Departments, which could not be supported at the present time. In the case of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade this would include the co-ordination of the national approach to accession negotiations via the Inter-Departmental Group on the Antarctic Treaty, the preparation and submission of the relevant Memorandum to Government and the domestic legislation necessary for ratification.

Subsequent to ratification, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade would have responsibility for coordinating the servicing of any meetings of States Parties or related events and conferences.

Government Departments, including my own, must concentrate available resources on core business and areas of priority national interest. At this time, they are not in a position to assume the administrative burden associated with the ATS ratification and ensuing treaty obligations.

### **Northern Ireland**

82. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the contact he has had with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Mr James Brokenshire MP, since the resignation of the Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. [1815/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have been in regular contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire MP, as part of the Government's intensified engagement in recent weeks on the political situation in Northern Ireland. I met in Belfast with the Secretary of State on 14 December, 12 January and 19 January. We have also spoken by phone on a number of occasions. It was clear, immediately following the resignation of the deputy First Minister, that the prospect of a resolution ahead of the triggering of an Assembly election was slim. However both Governments, in their capacity as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, made full use of the narrow window available to ensure that any avenues for resolution between the parties prior to an election were fully explored.

In the event, an Assembly election has been triggered and it is important to emphasise that this eventuality is one covered by the legislation governing the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. When parties in an administration cannot agree, an election is the consequence and the outcome of that is now for the electorate in Northern Ireland to determine.

The Secretary of State and I have agreed that both Governments should continue to work closely together in the weeks to come, looking ahead to the post-election period, when a new power-sharing Executive will need to be formed. We have also urged the parties to approach the election campaign in calm and respectful terms, conscious that polarising rhetoric and frayed relationships will damage the prospects of forming an Executive after the votes have been counted.

We must all be mindful that effective devolved Government, underpinned by a genuine spirit of partnership, is what the people of Northern Ireland voted for in 1998 and what they



expect their politicians to deliver.

After the election, it will therefore fall to the parties to form a power-sharing Executive and this will require the parties to find a way forward on issues which contributed to the calling of the election. The Government is of course always ready to support and assist the parties in any way we can. Our commitment as a co-guarantor of the Agreement is a constant one – in good times and bad.

The Government will continue to work with the British Government and the political parties to support the fulfilment of the full promise of that Agreement and to advance political stability, reconciliation and economic prosperity in Northern Ireland.

*Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 51.*

*Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 74.*

### **Humanitarian Aid Provision**

85. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to increase humanitarian funding for Syria in 2017; his views on the ongoing war and humanitarian crisis in Syria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3050/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh)** (**Deputy Joe McHugh**): We remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis facing the Syrian people. Despite the cessation of hostilities since 30 December 2016, the current situation remains extremely fragile and the humanitarian situation dire for many Syrians. Minister Flanagan and I repeatedly raised our concerns about the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Syria during 2016. We will continue to do so, at all levels, until the humanitarian situation of the Syrian people improves.

The search for a sustainable peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict remains a top foreign policy priority for Ireland and our EU partners. Ireland will continue to support the efforts of the UN Security Council and the EU to end to the conflict. All of our diplomatic and humanitarian actions are in support of a free and peaceful Syria.

Civilians continue to be gravely at risk and humanitarian access is still severely constrained in Syria. Humanitarian access and the protection of civilians are binding legal obligations for all parties and must be observed.

Since 2012, Ireland has provided more than €67 million in humanitarian assistance to Syria and the region, including more than €25 million during 2016. This is Ireland's largest ever response to any humanitarian crisis. Ireland also supports the EU's humanitarian response in Syria, which amounted to €445 million in 2016. The EU and its Member States are collectively the lead provider of international aid to the people of Syria.

We are continuing to monitor the situation closely, and are ready to provide further assistance in support of the Syrian people as needed.

I anticipate that the level of our humanitarian support to Syria at least be maintained during 2017.

*Question No. 86 answered with Question No. 48.*

## **Overseas Development Aid Provision**

87. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will consider developing a roadmap to achieve the 0.7% of GDP ODA target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3040/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh)** (**Deputy Joe McHugh**): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme, and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. Our policy for international development, "One World, One Future", clearly articulates our commitment to the UN target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) in Official Development Assistance (ODA), as economic conditions allow. In the current Programme for Government we have set out our ambition to make progress towards the UN target as resources permit. Progress needs to be made in a sustainable and manageable way, which continues to strengthen Ireland's recognised role as a reliable and effective partner in providing humanitarian assistance and contributing to the fight to end global poverty and hunger.

During the very difficult economic circumstances of recent years, the Government managed to stabilise and largely protect allocations to ODA. Since 2011 we have made annual contributions in excess of €600 million and have cumulatively allocated over of €4.5 billion in the period 2011 to 2017. This represents a remarkable commitment of public funds towards the fight to eradicate global hunger, reduce extreme poverty and provide humanitarian assistance to some of the world's most vulnerable people.

Over the past two year we have again commenced increasing funding allocations for ODA in a sustained and measured way, providing an additional of €40 million in 2016 and a further €10 million for 2017. The total 2017 allocation for ODA will be €651 million.

Based on current Department of Finance forecasts for GNP we anticipate the ODA/GNP percentage outturn for 2016 to be in region of 0.3% with a similar level projected for 2017. The reduction in the percentage has been affected by the step change in the measurement of Ireland's GNP.

We remain committed to making incremental, sustainable progress towards achieving the 0.7% UN target by 2030, over the period of the Sustainable Development Goals.

## **Ministerial Travel**

88. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans for ministerial travel abroad over the course of the Saint Patrick's Day celebrations; if members of the Government and-or a delegation will visit the White House during that time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3095/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan)**: St. Patrick's Day has always offered a unique opportunity to promote Ireland's economic and political interests overseas, with levels of publicity and media attention unmatched by the national day of any other country. Against a background of unprecedented uncertainty and change, Ministerial travel in and around St. Patrick's Day is a particularly valuable opportunity to convey our views and interests to our partners abroad.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will this year, as in previous years, announce a St. Patrick's Day programme of Ministerial visits designed to ensure that we make the best

possible use of this exposure to enhance Ireland's visibility internationally, to deepen bilateral relations, to promote our trade, tourism and investment interests, and to strengthen ties with the Irish diaspora.

In recent weeks my officials here in Dublin, in close consultation with the Embassy network and colleagues in the State agencies and other Government departments, have devised a list of recommended destinations and itineraries for St. Patrick's Day 2017. These have been determined to provide the greatest promotional and political opportunities in line with our current priorities and with our strategic goals. I will be bringing this list of recommendations to Cabinet for consideration shortly and will announce our finalised programme in due course.

Over the St. Patrick's Day period last year, the Taoiseach, Tánaiste, seven Ministers and two Ministers of State undertook an extensive programme of visits to seventeen cities in six countries. As in previous years, Ireland's strong links with North America were reinforced through our St. Patrick's Day celebrations, with 41 political, economic and cultural events hosted by our Embassies and Consulates in thirteen cities across the United States and Canada over the period.

This programme of events included a meeting at the White House between the Taoiseach and the President of the United States, a tradition that in some form dates back to 1952 and is a significant symbol of the warm relationship enjoyed by our two peoples. President Trump has already informed the Taoiseach of his intention to continue this tradition, and the Government is committed to engaging with the new administration in the interests of our long-standing and mutually beneficial ties.

*Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 72.*

### **Northern Ireland**

90. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has raised with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland the commitment contained in the Good Friday Agreement that consideration would be given to the introduction of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland; and if so, the response he has received. [3240/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** A number of elements of the Good Friday Agreement have not yet been fully implemented, including a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The Government's firm position is that the Good Friday Agreement and the successor Agreements must be implemented in full, and this is reflected in the Programme for a Partnership Government. The Agreements, and the principles and values underpinning them, are at the core of the Government's approach to peace, reconciliation and prosperity on this island.

On a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, the Government advanced the view during the 2014 Stormont House talks, that a Bill of Rights could set out precisely and formally the rights upon which a shared society for Northern Ireland could be based. While there was not sufficient consensus to take this forward at that time, the final Agreement did provide that the parties commit to: "serving the people of Northern Ireland equally, and to act in accordance with the obligations on government to promote equality and respect and to prevent discrimination; to promote a culture of tolerance, mutual respect and mutual understanding at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage shared and integrated education and housing, social inclusion, and in particular community development and the advancement of women in public life; and to promote the interests of the whole community towards the goals of

reconciliation and economic renewal”.

The Stormont House Agreement provides for regular review meetings with the participation of the Government, the British Government and the Executive party leaders. At the last two Review Meetings – most recently in December – I specifically raised the outstanding commitments references in the Stormont House Agreement – including on human rights - and suggested regular consideration of them at the Review meetings to ensure that they remain on the political agenda.

The Government recognises the importance of the human rights aspects of the Good Friday Agreement. This is reflected in my convening of a sectoral consultation on 13 February, as part of the All-Island Civic Dialogue on Brexit, on the human rights aspects of the Good Friday Agreement. Human rights are central to the peace process and must be protected and sustained, regardless of the UK’s status in the EU.

The Government views as a solemn responsibility our role and mandate as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement. The Government will continue to work with the British Government and the political parties to fulfil the full promise of the Good Friday Agreement and to advance political stability, reconciliation and economic prosperity in Northern Ireland.

### **Programme for Government**

91. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if all agreements with all Independent TDs that support the Government have been published; and if the liaison unit that was recently established will be required to publish all contacts with all TDs they are in contact with in relation to supporting the Government. [3075/17]

**The Taoiseach:** The Programme for Partnership Government sets out the agreement between the Parties and Deputies who are participating or supporting the Government.

The Parliamentary Unit was established to perform a liaison function to help ensure that Ministers and Government Departments are properly informed of new responsibilities and procedures in the 32nd Dáil. The Unit does not have any function in respect of TDs supporting the Government and therefore there are no contacts for publication.

### **Brexit Issues**

92. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach his views on the British Prime Minister, Ms Theresa May’s speech on 17 January 2017 and in particular her comments on Ireland. [3073/17]

**The Taoiseach:** I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister’s speech provides greater clarity on the proposed approach of the British Government to the Brexit negotiation process.

I note that the Prime Minister has made clear that the UK wishes to secure the closest possible future economic relationship with the EU. That is an objective we share. Prime Minister May made clear that her priorities include maintaining the common travel area and avoiding a return to a hard border with Northern Ireland, both of which are welcome.

From our perspective, our overall negotiation priorities remain unchanged: our economy and trade, Northern Ireland, including the Peace Process and border issues, the common travel area, and the future of the European Union.

I recognise the alignment between our economic and trading concerns and the objective of the UK to have a close, and friction-free, economic and trading relationship with the EU, including with Ireland.

I am under no illusions about the challenges that remain to be addressed.

Both I and Government Ministers will continue to meet and engage with our EU counterparts over coming weeks to emphasise Ireland's concerns and to ensure that they are fully reflected in the EU position once negotiations commence.

This activity is reinforced by extensive engagement at diplomatic and official level. The Government is acutely aware of the potential risks and challenges for the Irish economy and will remain fully engaged on this aspect as the negotiations proceed.

### **Ministerial Responsibilities**

93. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach the current responsibilities of Ministers of State at his Department. [3243/17]

**The Taoiseach:** There are four Ministers of State assigned to my Department. Their responsibilities are as follows:

- Deputy Regina Doherty is Government Chief Whip and Minister of State at my Department, with oversight of the Central Statistics Office;
- Deputy Paul Kehoe is Minister of State at my Department and at the Department of Defence, with special responsibility for the Department of Defence;
- Deputy Dara Murphy is Minister of State at my Department, at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and at the Department of Justice and Equality, with special responsibility for European Affairs, Data Protection and the E.U. Digital Single Market; and
- Deputy Joe McHugh is Minister of State at my Department and at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with special responsibility for the Diaspora and International Development.

### **Refugee Data**

94. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the commitments that the Government has made in terms of accepting refugees and unaccompanied minors to Ireland, in tabular form; the number of persons to date that have been accepted here under the various resettlement and relocation programmes; the number of unaccompanied minors that have arrived here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3288/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton)**  
**(Deputy David Stanton):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established by Government Decision on 10 September 2015 as a direct response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe as a consequence of mass migration from areas of conflict in the Middle East and Africa. Under this programme, the Government has pledged to accept a total of 4,000 persons into the State by the end of 2017, 2,622 through the EU relocation mechanism established by two EU Council Decisions in 2015 to assist Italy and Greece, and 1,040 (519 by the end of 2016 and the remainder in 2017) under the UNHCR-



led refugee resettlement programme currently focussed on resettling refugees from Lebanon.

In a further gesture of humanitarian assistance towards the most vulnerable caught up in the migration crisis and following a debate in the Dáil, the Government also committed to taking up to 200 unaccompanied minors from France who were previously resident in the migrant camp at Calais. Further information in relation to this cohort is being included in the response to PQ No. 95 for answer today. These initiatives therefore leave just a small residual balance to be allocated from the Government decision to take 4,000 persons.

#### Resettlement strand of the programme

Taking account of the situation in the Middle East, and the plight of the refugees, the Tánaiste announced that Ireland would accept 520 persons for resettlement over an 18-month period to the end of 2017. This was almost double the figure proposed for Ireland by the European Commission and was delivered a year ahead of the Commission deadline.

In addition, the Government recently announced that it is extending the resettlement programme to take in a further 520 refugees from Lebanon in 2017, most of whom are of Syrian origin. 260 refugees have already been selected during a selection mission to Lebanon in October 2016 and are expected to arrive in Spring 2017. Most of these refugees are also Syrian. A further selection mission to Lebanon will be arranged in the coming months to select the remaining refugees due to come to Ireland in 2017 under the resettlement programme.

#### Relocation strand of the programme

Ireland has to-date taken in 241 people from Greece. In November, IRPP officials travelled to Athens and interviewed a group of 84 people who, once cleared for travel, are expected to arrive in February. An IRPP mission to interview 80 people took place in Athens from 12 – 16 December. A further mission has already taken place in January which interviewed 61 people. The intention thereafter is to sustain the pace of intakes throughout 2017 at the levels required to allow Ireland to meet its commitments to Greece within the time frame envisaged by the Programme.

Table of Total Numbers under Government Decision

Relocation Strand	Numbers
Council Decision 2015/1523	600
Council Decision 2015/1601	2,022
Total Relocation	2,622
Resettlement Strand	
Government Decision 09/06/15	520
Government Decision 06/07/16	260
Government Decision 29/11/16	260
Total Resettlement	1,040
Total Unaccompanied Minors Calais	200 (up to)
Mechanism as yet undecided	138
Grand Total	4000

#### Unaccompanied minors

In announcing the IRPP, the Government recognised the importance of prioritising family groups and addressing the position of unaccompanied children. A significant number of those who have arrived to date are young children with one or two parents. Ireland has taken in four

unaccompanied minors with another to follow very shortly; we have indicated our willingness to take further unaccompanied minors from Greece under relocation and work continues in this regard. Such minors are placed in the care of Tusla. Unaccompanied minors that Ireland takes from Greece are additional to the commitments made by Ireland in respect those previously resident in the migrant camp in Calais.

The profile of persons taken in to-date under the relocation and resettlement strands of the IRPP is outlined below.

#### Profile for Relocation Asylum Seekers

Total People	Adults	Minors	Age 0-4	Age 5-12	Age 13-17
241	136	105	41	45	19

#### Profile for Resettlement Refugees

Total People	Adults	Minors	Age 0-4	Age 5-12	Age 13-17
519	240	279	85	147	47

### Unaccompanied Minors and Separated Children

95. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress made to date in accepting up to 200 unaccompanied minors from the dismantled Calais camp; if these children are part of or in addition to the 4,000 refugees Ireland has committed to under the various resettlement and relocation programmes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3289/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Government has been proactively engaged with the French authorities in identifying young people previously living in the camp in Calais who may wish to come to Ireland. Following the approval by Government of the appropriate legal mechanism and the identification of considerable resources needed, officials from my Department, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency positively engaged with the French authorities in Paris in early January with a view to identifying these unaccompanied minors. There has also been ongoing contact with the NGO sector.

Subsequent to the officials meeting, the first mission to meet unaccompanied minors took place last week and included representatives of Tusla, which has statutory responsibility for the care and accommodation of unaccompanied minors in the State. The Tusla officials were accompanied by a member of staff from the Irish Refugee Protection Programme Office of my Department and members of An Garda Síochána who carried out security assessments. Four unaccompanied minors were assessed during this initial mission and will be relocated in the near future subject to the completion of the security assessment process. The next mission to another centre in France will take place very shortly to interview another six young people wishing to come here. Irish officials have drawn up detailed questionnaires to rapidly progress the identification of these young people. I also understand that NGO's have this week identified a total of six young people to my Department. Separately, two young people identified by the French Red Cross as having a relative here have already been processed and have arrived safely in Ireland. Although decisions regarding numbers and dates for future missions are matters for Tusla to determine in cooperation with the French authorities, it is anticipated that approximately 60 young people could be identified by the authorities and processed over the course of the coming months as willing to come to Ireland and we have committed to accept all

of these on a phased basis, as soon as resources come on stream and subject to the aforementioned security process. The best interests of the child is central to this partnership process with the French authorities.

The intention is to rapidly process these young people by using some of the yet unallocated numbers included in the original decision to welcome 4000 refugees here and does not impact on the commitments entered into in relation to the EU Relocation or Resettlement Programmes.

### **Garda National Immigration Bureau**

96. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will address concerns and make representations with regard to persons (details supplied). [3290/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Deputy will appreciate that the issues raised are a matter for the Garda authorities in the first instance and I have no direct role.

However, to be of assistance I have made enquiries and I am informed by the Garda authorities that in November 2015, Gardaí attached to the Garda National Immigration Bureau executed a search warrant during which a number of items including documentation, as referred to by the Deputy, were seized. I am also advised by the Garda authorities that if the persons referred to require access to an item which was seized by Gardaí, then contact should be made with the Sergeant-in-Charge, Garda National Immigration Bureau (Operation Vantage) at 01 666 9100 in order to facilitate same.

It is also understood that the items in question are the subject of a Police Property Application which is due before the Courts on 15 February, 2017.

### **Residential Institutions**

97. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if all persons accused by persons (details supplied) with regard to allegations of abuse were interviewed; if all the locations of alleged abuse mentioned in the accounts were visited and investigated; if any of the institutions mentioned are still operating as facilities which care for children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3321/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to this matter and I will contact the Deputy directly when the report is to hand.

### **Departmental Contracts**

98. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if a company (details supplied) which has been contracted to provide services at a hotel to facilitate the establishment of an EROC by her Department is the same company which initially submitted an expression of interest in 2015-2016 and tendered for the contract during 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3355/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton) (Deputy David Stanton):** I wish to inform the Deputy that the company which responded to

the original expression of interest is the company with whom the Department negotiated the contract to run the EROC in Ballaghaderreen. The directors of this company then established a separate company to manage and provide service in the EROC in question. This is normal commercial practice.

### **Property Registration**

99. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the Property Price Register, administered by the Property Services Regulatory Authority, listing of prices includes or excludes VAT; her plans to define whether final prices should all be either including or excluding VAT for this register; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3378/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA) was formally established on 3 April 2012, pursuant to the Property Services (Regulation) Act, 2011. The Residential Property Price Register, available at [www.propertypriceregister.ie](http://www.propertypriceregister.ie), is produced by the PSRA in accordance with the provisions of Section 86 of the Property Services (Regulation) Act 2011. The purpose of the Register is to bring transparency to house prices in Ireland. The Register is a list of property prices and it is not a “property price index”. The details made available on the register are limited to price, address and date of sale and do not include such details as property size or number of rooms. It is simply designed to provide, on an ongoing basis, accurate prices of residential properties purchased at a particular date.

The Register contains information on residential properties purchased in Ireland since 1 January 2010, as declared to the Revenue Commissioners for stamp duty purposes, and forwarded by the Revenue Commissioners to the PSRA for publication. I am informed that VAT at 13.5% is only chargeable on new properties, it is not charged on second hand properties. Stamp duty in respect of new properties is paid on the property price exclusive of VAT. Accordingly, the prices given to the PSRA by the Revenue Commissioners for new properties are VAT exclusive. The Information Note on the first page of the Residential Property Price Register clearly states that if the property is a new property, the price shown is exclusive of VAT at 13.5%.

From the foregoing, it should be clear that the position currently is that all prices on the Property Price Register are VAT exclusive. In other words, the prices quoted on the Register exclude the 13.5% VAT applicable in respect of new properties. As indicated above, VAT is not payable in respect of second hand properties. I understand that there are no plans to alter this at this time, but that the PSRA plans to review the explanatory text on the property price register website with a view to enhancing its clarity for the general public.

### **Garda Data**

100. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of overtime hours allocated to the Garda north Dublin division in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3387/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I have asked the Garda Commissioner for the specific information requested and when it is to hand I will inform the Deputy accordingly.

## Garda Operations

101. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of mandatory alcohol checkpoints that were conducted in the Garda north division between 1 December 2016 and 17 January 2017; the number of checkpoints that were carried out in each of the previous two corresponding years for the same time period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3388/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I would like to thank the Deputy for raising this important issue. I am deeply conscious of the serious issue of road safety and mindful of the increase in 2016 of road traffic fatalities. I am also mindful of the traumatic impact of road traffic collisions on those directly affected and their families, as well as the impact of dangerous driving more generally on the quality of life of residents in local communities across the country.

The Deputy will be aware that I have no direct role in the enforcement of Road Traffic legislation, which is an operational matter for the Garda Commissioner. However, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the following table shows the number of Garda Mandatory Alcohol Checkpoints recorded in the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Garda Division for the period 1 December 2016 to 17 January 2017 and for the same period for 2015 /2016 and 2014 / 2015.

### **Number of Garda Mandatory Alcohol Checkpoints in DMR North Garda Division for the period 1 December 2016 to 17 January 2017\***

2014 / 2015	2015 / 2016	2016 / 2017
124	58	125

**\*Figures are provisional, operational and liable to change and are valid to 23 January 2017**

Road safety is a shared responsibility, one which the Government takes very seriously. Ireland's current Road Safety Strategy (2013 - 2020) aims to place Ireland consistently on the list of safest countries in the EU and beyond. To achieve this, we are continuing to work together in partnership with all relevant stakeholders. I attended a meeting of the Ministerial Committee on Road Safety this month, along with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, the Road Safety Authority, An Garda Síochána, the Attorney General and other agencies. This Committee oversees the implementation of the Road Safety Strategy and provides a forum for high-level discussion of road safety issues. The Committee generally meets later in the year, however, in light of the 2016 increase in road fatalities, the meeting was brought forward to January. The purpose of the meeting was to bring together all stakeholders to see what immediate actions could be taken to reverse the upward trend in road fatalities. During this meeting, An Garda Síochána indicated that there will be an additional 10% increase in the traffic corps during the course of 2017, which should also lead to better outcomes in relation to road traffic enforcement. An Garda Síochána also informed the meeting that it was intended to have a stronger focus on road traffic enforcement in the training provided to new recruits at Templemore.

Following this meeting, my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport announced that his Department will review Section 29 of the Road Traffic 2010 with the intention of ensuring that all drivers, if caught drink driving, will, in future, receive a mandatory disqualification.



## **Policing Co-operation**

102. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 150 of 17 January 2017 and in view of the fact that both the German Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Scottish Government have both made formal requests of the British Government to extend the Pitchford inquiry to their respective jurisdictions (details supplied), the reason she is choosing not to make the same request on behalf of the Irish public; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3389/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The position in respect of this matter remains unchanged and is as set out in my reply to the Deputy's Question No. 150 of 17 January 2017. As I informed the Deputy then, the establishment of the Pitchford Inquiry into undercover policing is a matter for the UK Government and the question of my seeking to have its terms of reference extended does not arise. I would, however, reiterate the point I have made previously that should anything emerge from the findings of the Pitchford Inquiry that would be relevant to policing in this jurisdiction I will consider it fully and take any action that may be required.

## **Anti-Social Behaviour**

103. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to having trains policed by a dedicated police unit in an effort to deter anti-social behaviour for commuters; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3406/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** While I am in regular contact with the Garda Commissioner about all aspects of policing and community safety, the specific deployment of policing resources is a matter for the Garda Commissioner, as is the question on ongoing engagement with public transport operators in relation to the security and safety of the travelling public.

Insofar as the general approach to tackling these issues is concerned, I am advised that Garda management engages extensively with transport operators and a range of regional and local operations have been put in place as required to address issues that have arisen at specific locations. Instances of crime and anti-social behaviour are monitored by local Garda management with the assistance of Garda Síochána Analysis Service, which results in periodic operations aimed at anti-social behaviour on and around public transport routes. I am further advised that there is effective communication with the respective control centres and that access to good quality CCTV has also been of great assistance in the investigation of complaints.

Having regard to the above, I have no plans for the development of separate policing arrangements for trains or transport services generally. Instead, investment is being made in enhancing the resources available for policing generally, including a very substantial provision of €88.5 million for Garda overtime in 2017 which will strengthen the capacity to respond to changing crime trends. Underpinning the Government's approach is the commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. The Government's plan is to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. In 2017, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 new Gardaí and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan within in An Garda Síochána. Approximately 300 appointments will also be made to the

Garda Reserve.

I trust that the Deputy will agree that the increased resources which are now coming on stream will undoubtedly benefit policing in relation to train and other transport services in all areas of the country.

### **Legislative Programme**

104. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 173 of 18 October 2016, when she anticipates the Legal Services Regulatory Authority will commence its work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3408/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I have recently set out the current position in relation to the coming into operation of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority in my Written Reply to Question No. 164 of 17 January 2017 which I shall, therefore, largely reiterate on this occasion. The setting-up of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority has in fact been under way since 19 July 2016 when, under S.I. No. 383 of 2016, I commenced those provisions of Part 1 and Part 2 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 as necessary to get the new Authority up and running, particularly in terms of its membership and appointment. On 29 September 2016, I signed the Order appointing 1 October 2016 as the official “establishment day” of the Regulatory Authority as provided under section 7 of the 2015 Act - S.I. No. 507 of 2016 refers. In conjunction with these initial steps the nomination, approval and appointment procedures for the members of the new Legal Services Regulatory Authority set out in Part 2 of the 2015 Act were also completed. This has included the required resolutions approving such appointment having been passed by each House of the Oireachtas. Dr. Don Thornhill has also been appointed as Chairperson of the Regulatory Authority in accordance with the Act.

The Authority, which has eleven members including a lay majority and lay-Chairperson, held its inaugural meeting on 26 October 2016 and has been meeting monthly since then with its most recent meeting having taken place on 19 January 2017. Initial office accommodation has been provided for the Authority by my Department along with the secondment of an officer at Assistant Principal level in support of its start-up phase. Funding support of €1 million has also been provided to the new Authority by my Department in December on a strictly recoupable basis as the new Authority will be self-funding by levy. In the building up of capacity and resources to become fully operational, the Legal Services Regulatory Authority has recently appointed a person to fulfil the duties of its Chief Executive on a solely interim basis to drive the initial start-up phase. At the same time this will enable the Authority to prepare the way for the public recruitment of a full-time Chief Executive in the coming months having had the opportunity to more clearly identify its existing and future management needs and capacities in real time.

As part of the commencement of Part 2 of the 2015 Act, the Law Society, the Bar Council and the Honorable Society of the King’s Inns have furnished the Legal Services Regulatory Authority with copies of their professional codes as required within one month of the Authority’s establishment under section 23(6)(a). On 5 December 2016, under S.I. No. 630 of 2016, I also commenced sections 118 to 120 of the 2015 Act. These provisions set statutory delivery deadlines for the completion of public consultations and reports on the specified matters concerned. These relate to Legal Partnerships, Multi-Disciplinary Practices and certain restrictions on barristers in relation to direct access on contentious matters and the holding of clients’ monies. The working focus right now is on the managed roll-out of the Authority’s remaining functions

in tandem with the phased commencement during the year of the various remaining Parts and provisions of the 2015 Act.

Against this background, it is intended that the phased commencement of the remaining Parts of the 2015 Act will be implemented in the first half of this year. The current focus includes the phased commencement of respective sections or Parts of the 2015 Act such as those dealing with the introduction of a more transparent legal cost regime, the establishment of a Roll of Practising Barristers and the separate introduction under the Act of Pre-Action Protocols. It also includes the transition of the Office of the Taxing-Master to that of the new Office of the Legal Costs Adjudicator which is a substantial structural reform of an office of the High Court and for which I have also introduced and commenced additional supporting measures under the Courts Bill which was enacted on 28 December 2016. Following these steps the key provisions centred around Part 6 of the Act dealing with the new public complaints and professional conduct and disciplinary procedures, and the appointment of the new Legal Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal, will be commenced.

These are tasks for which I know the new Authority, with the direct engagement of its interim Chief Executive, is actively building up its working resources in the short term. My Department and the new Regulatory Authority will, therefore, continue to liaise closely to ensure that we can successfully coordinate the commencement, from my side as Minister, and delivery, by the Authority as the new independent statutory regulator, of the various provisions concerned.

### **Courts Service Administration**

105. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she can confirm the operation of a digital audio recording system in the justice system; when it commenced; when any refinements occurred; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3432/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that Digital Audio Recording (DAR) is in operation in courts in all jurisdictions. The DAR system was first commenced in 2005 in the Supreme Court and was fully rolled out across all jurisdictions by 2011.

Refinements in DAR technology have taken place over time. In July 2016 a new service provider was appointed following procurement and, as part of the new contract, a technology refresh is being provided to bring both hardware and software up-to-date. All recording units (PCs) in court will be replaced with new PCs and the latest version of recording, playback and note-taking software over the next two years. This process commenced in December 2016, with new systems installed in the Criminal Courts of Justice and the Four Courts, and will be completed in 2018.

### **Garda Station Refurbishment**

106. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of money spent on the refurbishment of the Garda station in Clonmany, County Done-

gal; and the current opening hours of the Garda station. [3433/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works, which has the responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister, I have no direct role in relation to these matters.

I am however, advised by the Garda Authorities that that Clonmany Garda Station was completely refurbished in 2010 at a cost of some €235,000.

The station is, I understand, located in the Buncrana District in the Donegal Division and is open Monday to Friday from 7pm to 8pm subject to the availability of members. It is part of the North Inishowen Rural Community Policing Initiative and its area headquarters is the Garda Station at Carndonagh. When the Garda member attached to Clonmany is not on duty, the sub-district is policed by Gardaí from Carndonagh Garda Station. In addition, the area is patrolled by the district patrol car based in Buncrana and by Detective and Roads Policing Units, also based in Buncrana.

### Direct Provision Data

107. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons under 18 years of age living in direct provision in the Newbridge centre in County Kildare in each of the years 2011 to 2016, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3437/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The current contracted capacity of the Eyre Powell Hotel, in Newbridge County Kildare, is 87 persons. The number of children availing of accommodation in the Eyre Powell with their families at the end of the last six years are set out in the following table:

End of year	Number of children residing in Eyre Powell (with their families)
2011	17
2012	21
2013	21
2014	19
2015	13
2016	5*

The occupancy level of any centre rises and falls with the number of persons availing of State provided accommodation at any given time and the numbers exiting the system. The number of children residing in State provided accommodation is further influenced by the demographic profile of those applying for international protection.

\*\*This figure for 2016 is approximate as the statistics for the 2016 annual report are currently being compiled.

### Direct Provision Data

108. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality

the number of persons living in direct provision in the Newbridge centre in County Kildare in each of the years 2011 to 2016, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3438/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**

The current contracted capacity of the Eyre Powell Hotel, in Newbridge County Kildare, is 87 persons. The number of persons availing of accommodation in the Eyre Powell at the end of the last six years are set out in the following table:

End of year:	Number of persons:
2011	73
2012	81
2013	70
2014	81
2015	71
2016	68*

\*This figure for 2016 is approximate as the statistics for the 2016 annual report are currently being compiled.

The occupancy level of any centre rises and falls with the number of persons availing of State provided accommodation at any given time and the numbers exiting the system.

### Direct Provision Data

109. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of adults and children that have been granted their stamp 4 visa or leave to remain but that remain in direct provision or other non-permanent accommodation funded by her Department on the first day of every month in 2016. [3441/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**

Details of the numbers of persons with a form of status who continue to reside in State provided accommodation is not available on a monthly basis for 2016. Arrangements are now in place to record this information at monthly intervals so monthly returns will be available going forward.

What can be said is that the numbers of persons with some form of status residing in State provided accommodation ranged from approximately 450 persons to approximately 600 persons during 2016. The numbers rise and fall as people are granted a form of status and others with status move into the community. Over 1,900 persons left the State provided accommodation system during 2016. However, it is important to note that not all those leaving State provided accommodation would have done so because they received a form of status. The State provided accommodation system is entirely voluntary and some of those leaving the system were exercising their right to live elsewhere.

### Family Law Cases

110. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 44 of 19 January 2017, if she will clarify that when she states that the experts appointed under section 47 are required to act in accordance with the standards



and codes of conduct of their professional bodies, there may be cases whereby a non-accredited psychotherapist compiling a section 47 report is not required to abide by any standards or code of conduct in compiling that report, thus creating a major accountability gap in a very sensitive area of family law. [3507/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the power under section 47 of the Family Law Act 1995 to order a report in writing on any question affecting the welfare of a party to the proceedings or to whom the proceedings relate, lies with the Court. As the Deputy is aware, the Courts are, subject only to the Constitution and the law, independent in the exercise of their statutory functions and the conduct of any court case is a matter for the presiding judge.

As indicated in response to Parliamentary Question number 44 of 19 January 2017, neither the Courts Service nor the judiciary have any role in relation to the qualifications of psychotherapists in the context of them providing reports under section 47 of the Family Law Act 1995. However, as indicated in response to Parliamentary Question number 98 of 24 January 2017, the investigation of complaints into the professional conduct of psychotherapists who prepare reports under section 47 of the Family Law Act 1995 is a policy matter for the Department of Health who have advised that consideration is currently being given to a proposal to designate counsellors and psychotherapists for regulation under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 which is at an early stage of examination by that Department.

### **NAMA Debtors**

111. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons and corporate entities debtors whose total repaid debts upon exiting NAMA were at certain loan book values (details supplied) with regard to NAMA debtors that have exited the agency up to January 2017, having repaid their debts to NAMA, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3345/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am interpreting the Deputy's question as requesting the number of NAMA debtors who have exited the agency organised by reference to the amount repaid at the time of exit from NAMA as a percentage of the total par debt owed to NAMA. In this regard, I am interpreting your reference to "total original loan book value" in the details supplied to the question as the total par debt owed to NAMA at the time NAMA acquired the loan.

I am also interpreting "exit from NAMA" to include both the establishment of a final agreement with NAMA or the sale of the loan. The percentages provided reflect the amounts which had been repaid to NAMA as a percentage of the original amount owed to NAMA and are calculated at the time a final agreement was reached with NAMA or at the time loans may have been sold by NAMA (i.e. loan sale proceeds are not loan repayments.)

The Deputy will be aware that NAMA originally paid €31.8 billion to acquire a loan book with a par value - that is an outstanding borrowed amount - of €74 billion, comprising 779 debtor connections. These loans had a market value of €26.2 billion, roughly 35% of par.

It was never envisaged that NAMA would recover anything close to the €74 billion par

value of the loans. The average discount was 57%. However, the acquisition discounts varied significantly depending on the underlying quality of the assets.

I am advised that, as at 31 December 2016, 505 debtor connections with a par debt of €27.3 billion had exited NAMA. This comprises debtor connections who had reached a final agreement with NAMA and debtor connections whose loans had been sold. I am further advised that in 61 cases, debtors repaid 100% of the original par debt. In total, the 505 debtor connections have repaid €14.9 billion to the Agency, that is roughly 55% of the original par debt. A breakdown of debtor connections that had exited NAMA by end-December 2016 is presented in the following table.

Debtor Connections Exited NAMA	
% of Original Par Debt Repaid	Count
=100%	61
>=90%	13
>=80%	11
>=70%	23
>=60%	20
>=50%	31
>=40%	53
>=30%	68
>=20%	82
>=10%	92
>=5%	38
< 5%	13
Total	505

### Mortgage Data

112. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of residential mortgages currently held by non-bank entities; the number held by non-regulated vulture funds; the number of non-residential mortgages currently held by non bank entities; the number held by non-regulated vulture funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3396/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I refer the Deputy to the Central Bank's Residential Mortgage Arrears and Repossession Statistics for the period ending quarter three 2016, which was published on 12th December 2016 and which may be viewed at [http://www.centralbank.ie/polstats/stats/mortgagearrears/Documents/2016q3\\_ie\\_mortgage\\_arrears\\_statistics.pdf](http://www.centralbank.ie/polstats/stats/mortgagearrears/Documents/2016q3_ie_mortgage_arrears_statistics.pdf). Details of the number of residential mortgages currently held by non-bank entities, including retail credit firms and unregulated loan owners, are presented in table 4 on page 11 of the Central Bank Q3-2016 bulletin. Details of buy-to-let mortgages held by non-bank entities are presented in table 5 on page 12.

The Deputy will be aware that the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act, 2015 introduced a regulatory regime for a new type of entity called a 'credit servicing firm'. Under the Act, purchasers of loan books must either be regulated by the Central Bank themselves or else the loans must be serviced by a credit servicing firm that is regulated by the Central Bank. The significant point is that that the focus of regulation is directly at the point of contact with the customer. Therefore relevant borrowers, whose loans are sold to third parties, maintain the same regulatory protections they had prior to the sale, including under the

various statutory codes (such as the Consumer Protection Code, Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears) issued by the Central Bank of Ireland and the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 (Section 48) (Lending to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) Regulations 2015 which came into operation in July 2016. It is also important to highlight that the transfer of a loan from one entity to another does not change the terms of the contract or the borrower's rights and obligations under the original contract.

### **Regional Airports**

**113. Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Finance the proposals that have been received or discussed for investment in regional airports, including Waterford, as part of the €335 million connectivity fund established from the proceeds of the sale of the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus in 2015. [3411/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Connectivity Fund was formed to invest the €335 million proceeds from the sale of the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus with the aim of enabling and enhancing Ireland's physical, virtual and energy connectivity.

As the Deputy will be aware, my colleague, the Department for Transport, Tourism and Sport oversees the five-year Regional Airports Programme, covering the period 2015 to 2019. This programme, which provides targeted supports to our four regional airports, covers Donegal, Ireland West Airport Knock, Kerry and Waterford Airports.

The National Aviation Policy, which was published by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport last August, acknowledges the role played by the regional airports in Kerry, Donegal, Waterford and Knock as being important in promoting a level of international connectivity to support the tourism and business sectors in their regions.

Due to commercial sensitivities, the ISIF does not comment on transactions that may or may not be under consideration or in progress. ISIF has informed me that it recently announced the completion of its first two investments from the Connectivity Fund. The combined value of these investments is €57m and includes:

- An initial €22 million equity investment in Aqua Comms DAC, the operator of Ireland's first dedicated subsea fibre-optic network. The cable lands in Killala County Mayo and interconnects New York, Dublin and London. The Aqua Comms network will be used by major multinational technology and telecoms companies to provide fast, secure data connections between Ireland, the US and UK and will enable the continued growth of the Irish digital economy.

- The rolling of an existing (NPRF) commitment in daa plc's public bond, which was issued in 2008 (repayable in 2018), into a €35 million commitment in a new 2028 public bond issuance by daa, the operator of Dublin and Cork Airports. This continues ISIF's role as a long-term, strategic, domestic investor in daa.

The economic impact of all investments by the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), which includes the Connectivity Fund, is outlined in the ISIF economic impact reports, which include regional deployment data. As at 30 June 2016, the ISIF economic impact report demonstrated regionally balanced investments with 58% of jobs supported and 45% of capital invested occurring outside of Dublin. That report is available at <http://www.isif.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/ISIFEconomicImpactH12016.pdf>.

## Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

114. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Finance the transport specific projects that have been assisted to date under the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund. [3412/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund has a dual mandate to invest on a commercial basis and support economic activity and employment in Ireland. To date, the following transport specific investment has been made:

- The rolling of an existing (NPRF) commitment in daa plc's public bond, which was issued in 2008 (repayable in 2018), into a €35 million commitment in a new 2028 public bond issuance by daa, the operator of Dublin and Cork Airports. This continues ISIF's role as a long-term, strategic, domestic investor in daa.

- In addition, the ISIF (and formerly the National Pensions Reserve Fund) provided contingent support for the PPP Project under which the N11 Arklow to Rathnew and N7 Newlands Cross road projects were procured. The ISIF investment related to the construction period and both road projects are now complete and fully operational.

These investments have a combined value of €57m. The economic impact of all investments by the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), which includes the Connectivity Fund, is outlined in the ISIF economic impact reports, which include regional deployment data. As at 30 June 2016, the ISIF economic impact report demonstrated regionally balanced investments with 58% of jobs supported and 45% of capital invested occurring outside of Dublin. That report is available at <http://www.isif.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/ISIFEconomicImpactH12016.pdf>.

Other investment opportunities are currently being assessed under the ISIF's "double bottom line" mandate, which is to seek both commercial return and economic impact. These opportunities include potential investments in air and maritime transport infrastructure.

## Excise Duties Yield

115. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a breakdown of excise returns by category and by month for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3414/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by Revenue that the breakdown of excise receipts by category and by month for 2016 is as shown in the following tables. The "Other Excise" category includes licences and betting.

Please note that the receipts shown for 2016 are provisional and may be subject to revision. For some excise commodities, the month may reflect the timing of the payment of the duty rather than the month of consumption of the product.

2016	Alcohol (€m)	Tobacco (€m)	Oils (€m)	Carbon (€m)	VRT (€m)	Other Excise (€m)	Total (€m)
JAN	€126.8	€1.2	€240.9	€23.0	€158.3	€12.1	€562.2
FEB	€57.1	€100.1	€178.4	€50.8	€109.4	€1.5	€497.4
MAR	€74.9	€112.1	€184.7	€36.7	€103.5	€1.3	€513.1
APR	€105.1	€113.9	€187.8	€48.6	€69.2	€13.4	€538.1
MAY	€89.4	€172.1	€184.6	€35.3	€49.5	€1.3	€532.3

2016	Alcohol (€m)	Tobacco (€m)	Oils (€m)	Carbon (€m)	VRT (€m)	Other Excise (€m)	Total (€m)
JUN	€101.1	€161.4	€184.7	€40.2	€29.7	€1.6	€518.6
JUL	€106.0	€157.8	€177.2	€29.2	€114.6	€14.4	€599.3
AUG	€104.5	€59.8	€184.6	€31.7	€61.2	€1.6	€443.3
SEP	€106.0	€25.0	€188.0	€28.1	€39.0	€5.8	€391.9
OCT	€112.1	€56.5	€177.7	€33.5	€35.2	€15.8	€430.7
NOV	€113.8	€71.0	€185.0	€31.4	€22.8	€2.8	€426.8
DEC	€108.1	€65.3	€107.3	€39.4	€20.0	€1.0	€341.2
Total	€1,205.0	€1,096.1	€2,181.0	€427.9	€812.3	€72.6	€5,794.9

### Banking Operations

116. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 80 of 19 January 2017, if he will publish or provide the legal advice he and his officials received in relation to the legal action; the extent to which the legal action impacted on his department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3459/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** Further to parliamentary question number 80 of 19 January 2017, I can confirm that all legal advice taken by the Department of Finance in relation to this matter is both legally privileged and confidential so therefore it would not be appropriate to provide the requested information.

### Schools Building Projects Status

117. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project (details supplied) in County Donegal; if a design team has now been appointed to the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3300/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is currently awaiting the appointment of a Design Team. This process of appointment is expected to commence this week. My Department's officials will be in contact directly with the Board of Management regarding the next steps in the process. This project was included in the six year programme announced in November 2015 and is scheduled therein to proceed to tender and construction in 2019-21.

### Special Educational Needs Data

118. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of special needs children in counties Roscommon and Galway that have SNA support in a primary and secondary school setting for 2015 and 2016, in tabular form; the numbers in both counties that are currently awaiting approval or assessment for SNA support for 2016/2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3305/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) which is an independent statutory agency is responsible, through its



network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports including Special Needs Assistant (S) support. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support, as set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014.

Responsibility for deciding on the quantum of educational supports and resources to be allocated to schools to support individual pupils rests with the NCSE.

The NCSE has published details of S allocations to schools on a county per county basis, including allocations for Roscommon and Galway for 2015 and 2016 which is available on its website at: <http://ncse.ie/statistics>.

Information relating to the numbers that are currently in receipt of S support or who are awaiting approval or assessment for S support is a matter for the NCSE and this matter has been referred to the NCSE for direct reply.

### **School Transport**

119. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration has been given to representations in relation to school transport on behalf of persons (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in replying to the query; when it is likely a full and comprehensive reply will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3385/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

During the 2015/16 school year in the region of 114,000 children, including some 10,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in approximately 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Under the terms of my Department's Post Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest post primary school/education centre as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Bus Éireann has advised that the children in question are eligible for school transport but the family did not submit their payment details before the deadline date; the service is operating to capacity for the current school year.

### **Foireann Roinne**

120. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an dtabharfaidh sé soiléiriú maidir leis an Aonad nua Gaeltachta; an bhfuil sé bunaithe agus ag feidhmiú mar a gealladh i gCoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus na nOileán ag an gcuinníú deireanach a bhí acu roimh an Nollaig; cá bhfuil an tAonad nua lonnaithe; cad é líon na foirne; an bhfuil Gaeilge ag gach duine acu; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [3418/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Bunaíodh Aonad nua tiomnaithe, An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta san Roinn go luath in Eanáir 2017 chun maoirsiú agus tacaíocht a thabhairt do chur i bhfeidhm an Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022

a foilsíodh in Deireadh Fómhair 2016. Beidh maoirsiú á dhéanamh ag an Aonad don Oideachas Gaeltachta ar raon beart a chur i bhfeidhm chun an soláthar oideachais sna scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán na Gaeilge a fheabhsú sa Ghaeltacht.

Is í Príomhchigire Cúnta atá mar Cheann an Aonaid agus tá Príomhoifigeach Cúnta agus Ardoifigeach Feidhmiúcháin ag obair san Aonad chomh maith. Beidh roinnt cigirí ag dul i mbun oibre ar bhonn páirtaimseartha san Aonad. Déanfar, freisin, oifigeach cléireachais a dháileadh ar an Aonad go luath. Beidh baill an Aonaid ag feidhmiú agus ag déanamh a gcuid gnó trí mheán na Gaeilge. Tá cumas inniúlachta sa Ghaeilge ag gach oifigeach atá i mbun oibre agus beidh siad lonnaithe in oifigí éagsúla de chuid na Roinne. Beidh an tAonad ag obair go dlúth le Rannáin ábhartha na Roinne Oideachais agus Scileanna agus le heagraíochtaí éagsúla ar nós COGG agus leis an Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreacht, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta. Gheobhaidh an tAonad seo cuidiú ó Chigireacht na Roinne a thacóidh le scoileanna agus a dhéanfaidh monatóireacht agus tuairisciú ar thionchar an Pholasaí.

English version

Can the Minister for Education and Skills provide clarification on the new Gaeltacht Education Unit. Has the Unit been established and is it in operation, as promised at the last meeting of the Committee of the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Islands held before Christmas? Where is the Unit located? How many on the team and has each person competence in Irish? Can the Minister make a statement on the matter?

The Department established a dedicated Gaeltacht Education Unit in January 2017 to oversee and support the implementation of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022, which was published in October 2016. The Gaeltacht Education Unit will oversee the implementation of a range of measures to improve educational provision in schools operating through the medium of Irish in the Gaeltacht.

The Head of the Unit is an Assistant Chief Inspector and an Assistant Principal Officer and a Higher Executive Officer are also working in the Unit. A number of inspectors will work in the Unit on a part-time basis. A clerical officer will also be assigned to the Unit shortly. The staff of the Unit will operate and carry out their duties through the medium of Irish. All of the staff of the Unit have Irish-language proficiency and are located in various offices of the Department. The Unit will work closely with relevant sections within the Department of Education and Skills and other organisations such as COGG and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The Unit will be supported by the Department's Inspectorate who will support schools and monitor and report on the impact of the Policy.

### **Summer Works Scheme**

**121. Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he expects the details of the 2017 summer works programme grant recipients to be published; the categories of works he expects to be covered in 2017; the amount of grant aid available; the way in which this compares with 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3435/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that nearly 50% of schools have applied for inclusion under the Summer Works Scheme (SWS) which reflects a very high demand. Details of successful school applicants in respect of Categories 1 and 2 were announced in April last and are published on my Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

Assessment of valid projects in further categories is now being undertaken by my Depart-

ment, subject to the overall availability of funding, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the scheme as outlined in Circular Letter (0055/2015), which may be accessed on my Department's website. I expect to be in a position to announce a further round of the SWS in due course.

As the assessment process is currently underway it is not possible to indicate at this time the categories of works that the Department expects to grant aid. In that regard it is anticipated that the level of allocation for this round will be similar to the previous round in 2016, i.e. in the region of €30 million.

### **State Examinations Commission**

122. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students that made applications for reasonable accommodations to the SEC for the junior certificate for each of the years 2010 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3439/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

### **State Examinations Commission**

123. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students that were granted reasonable accommodations by the SEC for the junior certificate for each of the years 2010 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3440/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

### **School Accommodation Provision**

124. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position in relation to the application to provide additional accommodation and infrastructural facilities at a school (details supplied) and in particular to replace the pre-fab accommodation and provide additional parking and sporting facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3530/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department has no record of receiving an application for capital funding from the school referred to by the Deputy. Any application received will be assessed in the context of current competing priorities and the need to prioritise available funding for essential classroom accommodation where additional teachers are being appointed.

## **Freedom of Information**

125. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he can facilitate requests for information under freedom of information to county councils to make all inspection records and applications, in relation to dog breeding establishments, available in unredacted form, apart from mobile phone numbers being redacted, in order that persons and animal welfare groups can have full and comprehensive information for their submissions to the consultations taking place on the amendment of the guidelines under the Dog Breeding Establishment Act. [3390/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The regulation of dog breeding establishments is a matter for local authorities in accordance with the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010. Each local authority must maintain for public inspection a register of dog breeding establishments in its functional area, which must include the name and address of the applicant seeking entry onto the register, the address of the dog breeding establishment and the maximum number of breeding bitches that may be kept at the dog breeding establishment or premises. Access to information contained in the register, including information sought under Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation, is solely a matter for the relevant local authority, which is obliged to comply with FOI legislation, and I have no function in the matter.

More generally, details of the public consultation currently underway in relation to the draft revised dog breeding establishment guidelines are available on my Department’s website at <http://www.housing.gov.ie/review-dog-breeding-establishments>.

## **Mortgage to Rent Scheme Data**

126. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of households on the mortgage to rent scheme, by local authority; the number of applications pending approval and the number of applications rejected in 2016 indicating the grounds for rejection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3397/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Up to 31 December 2016, a total of 3,575 cases have been submitted under the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme, which was introduced in 2012 for borrowers of private commercial lending institutions. Of these, 2,723 were ineligible or terminated during the process, 217 have been completed and 635 are being actively progressed. The reasons why a case has not progressed are varied and can depend on the lender, the property, the household and the ability of the Approved Housing Body sector to increase their involvement in the scheme. Statistical information relating to the Mortgage to Rent Scheme since its inception, including statistics on cases that have been terminated and the reasons for same and a breakdown of cases per County, is available on the Housing Agency’s website at the following weblink: <https://www.housingagency.ie/Our-Services/Housing-Supply-Services/Mortgage-to-Rent.aspx> .

A number of amendments were made to the MTR Scheme in July 2015 to enable more properties to qualify and to make the scheme more flexible and accessible to borrowers.

Notwithstanding the amendments already made, the Government is committed to supporting households in long-term mortgage arrears to remain in their homes and has included a review of the MTR Scheme as an action in Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. The review, now in its final stages, is examining how the scheme can work

better for borrowers; details of the outcome of the review will be announced in due course.

### **Wind Energy Guidelines**

127. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the process of revising the wind planning guidelines; when a further announcement is expected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3533/17]

146. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the revised wind planning guidelines in view of the length of time that has elapsed since the process of revision began; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3532/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 and 146 together.

In December 2013, my Department published proposed draft revisions to the noise, setback distance and shadow flicker aspects of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. These draft revisions proposed:

- the setting of a more stringent day- and night-time noise limit of 40 decibels for future wind energy developments,
- a mandatory minimum setback distance of 500 metres between a wind turbine and the nearest dwelling for amenity considerations, and
- the complete elimination of shadow flicker between wind turbines and neighbouring dwellings.

A public consultation process was also initiated on these proposed draft revisions to the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines, which ran until February 2014. The Department received submissions from 7,500 organisations and members of the public during this public consultation process.

In light of the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to finalise the Guidelines and on-going policy and legal developments in this area, my Department is continuing to advance work on the Guidelines and related matters in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, in order to bring the various issues to a conclusion as early as possible. I expect to be in a position to make a statement on the matter in the coming weeks, outlining the timelines for implementation of the various elements.

### **Planning Issues**

128. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the planning outcomes he envisage from draft LAPs that must continue to accommodate underutilised and over projected planned capacity targets in order to be consistent with the county development plans and the regional planning guidelines (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3245/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I refer to the reply to Question No 274 of 24 January 2017 which sets out the position on this matter.



### **Planning Issues**

129. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of planning enforcement notices and actions taken against owners of housing units that have put these units into a company (details supplied) and are acting as bed and breakfasts, by local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3252/17]

130. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of planning applications received by local authorities to change housing units to bed and breakfasts in the past year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3253/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 129 and 130 together.

Planning statistics are submitted by planning authorities on an annual basis and are subsequently collated by my Department. Such statistics include information on the number of planning applications received and the number of applications which were granted or refused permission by each planning authority.

However, the detailed information sought in relation to the number of enforcement notices issued or action taken in particular cases by planning authorities, or the number of change of use planning applications received in relation to a particular class of development, is not available in my Department.

### **Housing Issues**

131. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will provide a copy of all correspondence to the local authorities from his Department in relation to a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3254/17]

132. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department carried out any research in relation to the number of housing units that are now operating similar to a company (details supplied) and resulting in a loss to the rental stock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3255/17]

133. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department carried out any research in relation to the number of housing units that are now operating similar to a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3256/17]

134. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the action he intends to take to prevent any further loss of rental stock to a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3257/17]

135. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he raised the issue of the loss of housing units to a company (details supplied) with the four chief executive officers to the four Dublin local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3258/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 131 to 135, inclusive, together.

In publishing the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Government has set out a practical and readily implementable set of actions to create a functioning and sustainable housing system. The Plan is available at the website [www.rebuildingireland.ie](http://www.rebuildingireland.ie). The Plan is divided into five pillars, with each targeting a specific area of the housing system for attention.

On 13 December 2016, Government approved the publication of a Strategy for the Rental Sector, which delivers on a commitment made under Pillar 4 of Rebuilding Ireland. The strategy is structured around 4 key areas: security, standards, supply and services. The measures under these four headings will be implemented through the 29 actions contained in the Strategy.

In terms of supply, the focus in the strategy is on maintaining existing levels of rental stock and encouraging investment in additional supply. The overarching objective of the strategy is to increase supply and support the development of a stable, strong and viable rental sector offering true choice for households, investment opportunities for providers and reflecting the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords.

There are shortages in the supply of rental accommodation in key locations, particularly in urban areas. In some of these areas there is also significant demand for transitory short-term accommodation. In this context, easier access to short term rentals at higher prices may be an attractive option for landlords.

However, a recent determination by An Bord Pleanála in a particular case has determined that the exclusive use of a residential apartment for short-term holiday lettings is a material change of use requiring planning permission.

My Department has, by way of Circular letter PL12/2016 of 22 December 2016, brought this determination to the attention of all planning authorities to ensure that they are aware of:

- the grounds on which the Board reached its decision,
- the planning implications in terms of the requirement for such commercial use of residential units to be the subject of an application for planning permission, and
- the importance of a proactive approach to planning enforcement generally in this regard.

A copy of the Circular letter is available on my Department's website at the following link: [http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/pl\\_12-16\\_aph\\_6-16\\_recent\\_an\\_bord\\_pleanala\\_decision\\_on\\_short\\_term\\_lettings.pdf](http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/pl_12-16_aph_6-16_recent_an_bord_pleanala_decision_on_short_term_lettings.pdf).

The implications of this case have raised a number of regulatory and other related issues, such as tax liability, residential tenancy regulation, support for tourism, and planning. The issue was considered in the preparation of the recently published Strategy for the Rental Sector and, with a view to providing more information on the scale and nature of the issue and full clarity regarding the appropriate regulatory approach to be adopted by relevant statutory authorities in relation to short-term tourism-related lettings, my Department, as provided for in the strategy, is establishing a working group, comprising representatives of relevant stakeholders including local authorities, relevant Departments, public bodies and other interests in the area, to consider the disparate issues involved and report in Quarter 2 2017.

## **Library Services**

**136. Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and

Local Government his plans to outsource a large part of the national book tender for libraries to a UK supplier; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3314/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department has no role in relation to the procurement of book-stock for public libraries. The provision of public library services, including the procurement of books, is a matter for each local authority in its capacity as a library authority under the Local Government Act 2001. In this regard, a national tender for book stock procurement was run recently by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) on behalf of local authorities. The tender process concluded recently and contracts were signed with the successful tenderers. I understand that Irish companies were successful in four of six lots.

It is expected that the new contracts will come into effect in the coming months as the existing contracting between suppliers and library authorities expire. The new national framework will deliver an improved outcome in terms of stock ordering and servicing, securing greater efficiencies, better value-for-money and the best choice of material for our public libraries.

### Local Authority Housing

137. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if a county or city manager can pass a review of differential council housing rents without the consent of the council members. [3315/17]

138. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the proposed review of differential local authority housing rents postponed by the previous Minister. [3316/17]

139. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to any review of differential council housing rents in Cork county council. [3317/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 to 139, inclusive, together.

The making and amending of rent schemes is the responsibility of local authorities as an integral part of their housing management functions, subject to broad principles laid down by my Department in Circular letter HRT 3/2002 of 6 March 2002. The making or amending of such schemes is not a reserved function and does not require the approval of the elected members. There is no requirement for local authorities to inform my Department when reviewing a rent scheme.

Section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 allows the Minister to make regulations in respect of various matters to be included in a rent scheme, including the sources of household income that may be assessed for the purpose of determining rent levels. Considerable work has been carried out by my Department in developing a draft framework for a harmonisation of the approach to be taken by *local authorities in regard to various aspects of rent schemes*. This work is now being examined further in the light of the broader commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, to review the disparate systems of differential rents for social housing in place across local authorities. The overall objective is to ensure that housing supports are fair and sustainable, prioritise those on lowest incomes and avoid creating social welfare traps that may prevent people from either returning to work or to the private housing market. I expect the review to be completed during Quarter 2 2017.

### **Foreshore Licence Applications**

140. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when his Department will issue the foreshore licence, which he approved in principle in December 2016, to Sligo County Council in respect of the development of the proposed pier and pontoon scheme in Rosses Point, County Sligo; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the council requires the foreshore licence as a matter of urgency in order to allow it make an application for grant aid for the project to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3350/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The draft foreshore licence concerned issued to the Council's legal services on 12 January 2017.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

141. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Sligo County Council purchased a house in 2015 to house a family (details supplied); if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the council sought approval for funding from his Department in October 2015 to construct an extension to the house in compliance with the recommendation of the HSE's occupational therapy service; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the family will not be allowed to move into the house until such time as the extension is constructed; if it normally takes 15 months for his Department to process and approve funding for such extensions, when it is expected that a decision will be made on the council's submission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3351/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department received a submission from Sligo County Council on 31 March 2016 seeking funding for the proposed extension referred to in the Question. Following assessment by my Department's inspectorate, approval in principle to proceed was issued to the Council on 15 August 2016. I understand from the Council that the provision of the extension is being prioritised within their projects on hands and that the Council will expedite the design and planning phase so as to allow construction to begin as soon as possible.

### **Ambulance Service**

142. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to change the delivery of Dublin's ambulance service; if he has discussed the future of this service with the Minister for Health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3379/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The provision of health services in Ireland, including the provision of ambulance services, is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive (HSE), operating under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Health. Within my Ministerial remit, fire services in Ireland are provided by local authorities in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003. Dublin City Council provides fire services for the city and county of Dublin which are resourced by the four Dublin Local authorities, through Dublin Fire Brigade (DFB).

Dublin City Council through Dublin Fire Brigade also provides an ambulance service on behalf of the HSE. This service is provided under section 25 of the Fire Services Act 1981 which enables local authority fire services to carry out or assist in any operations of an emergency nature. However, it does not provide a legislative basis for fire services to provide a substitute or alternative ambulance service operating outside of the State's health services provided by the HSE.

A Health Information and Quality Authority ( HIQA ) report of December 2014 highlights patient safety issues arising from two ambulance services operating in the same domain and points clearly to the need for enhanced integration of service provision in the greater Dublin area between DFB and the National Ambulance Service (NAS).

While I have not discussed this matter directly with my colleague the Minister for Health, discussions are taking place between our Departments. Both Departments have requested implementation/action plans in relation to service and governance issues that could be expected to arise from the need to meet HIQA's concerns, while continuing to meet statutory fire service requirements.

While I have no remit in relation to the provision of ambulance services, from my perspective, as Minister with responsibility for fire safety and the provision of fire services by local authorities, I am concerned that local authority and fire services resources are not diverted from their statutory fire service and fire safety responsibilities where they are providing assistance for another public body. Available local authority resources should be prioritised for community and other fire safety initiatives as well as their statutory fire service response functions.

By placing the citizen in need of medical services at the centre of considerations and with flexibility from all the stakeholders concerned, I am confident that a robust over-arching plan can be put in place which will see the infrastructure and staff of Dublin Fire Brigade in a position to provide commissioned ambulance services on behalf of the HSE in the Dublin area on the basis of cost recovery and appropriate governance arrangements, while still meeting their range of fire service responsibilities as a priority.

### **Private Rented Accommodation**

143. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the rights of tenants under the rent a room scheme in view of the fact it appears there are no procedures in place to protect the tenant. [3407/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Residential Tenancies Act 2004, as amended, regulates the tenant-landlord relationship in the private rented residential sector. The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Act to operate a national tenancy registration system and to facilitate the resolution of disputes between landlords and tenants.

The Act applies to every dwelling that is the subject of a tenancy, subject to a limited number of exceptions. The dwellings to which the Act does not apply are set out in section 3(2) of the Act, and include for example-

- a dwelling that is used wholly or partly for the purpose of carrying on a business;
- a dwelling within which the landlord also resides;
- a dwelling the subject of a tenancy the term of which is over 35 years.



In these cases the RTB does not have any function in relation to the agreements or arrangements on which they are based.

In circumstances where it is unclear as to whether a dwelling is the subject of a tenancy to which the Act applies, the RTB can adjudicate on the question and has done so in the past. Where it finds that a tenancy is unregistered due to the landlord's wrongful claim that the Act does not apply to the dwelling, the RTB can serve a notice requiring registration and failure to comply is an offence.

Where the owner of a dwelling, residing in that dwelling, lets a room, that letting is not considered to be a tenancy within the meaning of the Residential Tenancies Act.

### **Tenant Purchase Scheme**

144. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to affect changes to the tenant purchase scheme introduced in 2016 due to the significant restrictive terms of eligibility attached which prevents long-term tenants and long-term social welfare recipients from purchasing the house they live in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3463/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the Scheme is determined by the relevant housing authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the 2014 Act. In the determination of the minimum reckonable income, housing authorities can include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income.

In order to ensure the sustainability of the scheme, it is essential that an applicant's income is long-term and sustainable in nature. This is necessary to ensure that the tenant purchasing the house is in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period, in compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the local authority to the tenant.

In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, my Department is currently carrying out a review of the first 12 months of operation of the scheme. Details of how to get involved in the public consultation process which will inform this review can be found on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/tenant-purchase-scheme/public-consultation-review-tenant-incremental-purchase>.

I expect the review to be completed by the end of Quarter 1 2017.

### **Housing Provision**

145. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the persons and or the groups on the departmental working group on vacant properties; the number of times this working group has met; and when the the working group is going to report back. [3531/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Pillar 5 of the Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland is specifically focussed on *Utilising Existing Housing Stock*, with a key objective of ensuring that the existing vacant housing stock throughout the country and across all forms of tenure, in both the public and private sectors, is used to the optimum degree possible. In this regard, Action 5.1 of Rebuilding Ireland commits to developing a National Vacant Housing Re-Use Strategy by the first quarter of 2017, informed by Census 2016 data, to –

- inform the compilation of a register of vacant units across the country,
- identify the number, location and reasons for longer-term vacancies (i.e. over 6 months) in high demand areas, and
- set out a range of actions to bring vacant units back into reuse.

The Housing Agency, which has lead responsibility for co-ordinating the development of the Strategy, established a working group in September 2016 comprising senior representatives from my Department, local authorities, the Irish Council for Social Housing and from the Housing Agency itself to inform the Strategy. The Working Group is chaired by the Housing Agency.

The Working Group held its inaugural meeting on 30 September 2016 and has met three times since in October and November 2016, and most recently on 13 January 2017. It is due to report by the end of Q1 2017.

*Question No. 146 answered with Question No. 127.*

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

147. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for refusal of a disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); if it will be reviewed as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3294/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The application for disability allowance (DA) from this lady, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and the person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 9 January 2017.

On the basis of the request by the Deputy, this decision is currently being reviewed by a deciding officer. The person in question can expect a decision on the review of her DA application shortly. If the decision to refuse the allowance is confirmed following review, the person concerned will have the right to appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

148. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Social Protection when payment of an

invalidity pension will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3340/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 14 January 2016 at the maximum personal rate of €193.50. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on the 09 February 2017. Any arrears due from 14 January 2016 to 08 February 2017 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue in due course. The lady in question was notified of this decision on the 23 January 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **State Pension (Contributory)**

149. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason persons aged under 60 years of age in receipt of a widow's contributory pension are unable to qualify for the household benefits package and mortgage interest supplement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3347/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. My Department will spend approximately €232 million this year on HHB for over 424,000 customers.

The package is generally available to people living in the State aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to some people under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments. Therefore anyone aged less than 70 years of age must be in receipt of a qualifying payment from the Department or satisfy a means test in order to qualify for HHB.

People in receipt of HHB aged under 66 are generally in receipt of payments such as Invalidity Pension, Disability Allowance or Carers. These payment types mean that the recipients are unable to work full time and earn additional income. This is not the case for people in receipt of widow's contributory payment who are aged less than 66. These recipients are of working age and may take up full-time employment, at any level of remuneration, without losing entitlement to their widow's contributory payment.

In general, widow's pension only becomes a qualifying payment for HHB once the recipient reaches the age of 66 (State pension age) to ensure alignment with secondary benefits that are available to people in receipt of the State pension.

The concession whereby widows aged between 60 and 65 years, whose late spouse/civil partner received HHB from my Department, may qualify for the package was introduced at a time when State pension age was 65 and this cohort of widows were seen as less likely to be in a position to take up employment than those of a younger age.

Any decision to extend the concession to widows aged less than 60 or to allow recipients of widow's pension of any age to qualify for HHB would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations. It would also be necessary to consider whether they would be a priority group for the extension of such benefits ahead of other groups such as the unemployed or lone parents.

The mortgage interest supplement (MIS) scheme was closed to new entrants from 1 January 2014.

The original purpose of the MIS scheme was to provide short-term support to eligible people who were unable to meet their mortgage interest repayments in respect of a house which was their sole place of residence. It is important that people experiencing difficulty meeting their home mortgage repayments engage with their lender to explore sustainable solutions.

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service, under the aegis of the Citizens Information Board, assists people who are over-indebted and need help and advice in coping with debt problems, in particular those on low incomes or living on social welfare payments. As part of its free services, MABS provides a dedicated mortgage arrears advisory service to help and advice those in mortgage arrears and a court mentoring service to assist those facing repossession proceedings. Additionally, the Government has recently put in place a scheme, known as Abhaile, to help people who are insolvent and in mortgage arrears on their home to access free, independent, expert advice. Borrowers can access one or more of the free financial and legal advice and assistance services by contacting the MABS helpline 0761072000 or any MABS office.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Appeals**

150. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will confirm that the appeal for a carer's allowance has been successful for a person (details supplied); if so, when the appeal was resolved; the length of time it took from the original application to be resolved, including the appeal period; and when the person involved in the action will be reimbursed and begin to finally access the financial allowance. [3371/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I can confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on 16 February 2016. This application was refused on the grounds that the disability of the care recipient was not such that there was a requirement for full-time care and attention as prescribed in regulations.

The person concerned was notified on 20 June 2016 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned appealed this decision and the case was submitted to the Social Welfare Appeals office for determination on 18 August 2016.

An Appeals Officer (AO), having fully considered all of the available evidence, allowed the appeal and the application was awarded on 21 January 2017. The first payment is due to issue to the person's nominated Post Office on 26 January 2017.

Arrears of allowance due from 18 February 2016 to 25 January 2017 have issued by cheque to the person concerned on 21 January 2017. The person concerned was notified of these details on 21 January 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Delays**

151. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average waiting time for a successful applicant for carer's allowance to receive their allowance; and the average waiting time for an applicant to receive their allowance and be reimbursed following a successful appeal. [3372/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

The average waiting time for new carer's allowance (CA) applications at the end of December 2016 was 11 weeks. At the end of December, there were 3,490 CA applications awaiting decision. The volume of CA claims on hands are a consequence of continued strong claim intake and the delays in processing are frequently caused by the customer failing to fully complete the claim form or failing to attach the supporting documentation that is requested on the application form.

Applications for CA in 2016 were 20% higher than in 2015. Nevertheless, my Department has seen a significant reduction in CA average processing times, from 22 weeks at the end of May 2016 to 11 weeks at the end of December 2016. Processing times are expected to further improve this year.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) advises that the current average time taken to decide a CA appeal summarily is 17.6 weeks and 21.6 weeks for oral hearings. This represents a continuing improvement in appeal processing times compared to 2015, when the average times taken were 20.6 weeks and 25.9 weeks respectively for summary and oral hearing appeals.

Where a customer appeal is successful, every effort is made to implement the Appeals Officer's decision within 3 weeks of notice of the decision being received from the SWAO.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

152. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an invalidity pension application in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3430/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. The department received a claim for IP for the gentleman concerned on the 10 March 2016. He was refused IP on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. He was notified on the 03 June 2016 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

He requested a review of this decision and submitted further medical evidence in support of his request. Following a review of all the information available the DO is now satisfied that the medical conditions for the scheme are satisfied. His claim will be finalised as quickly as possible and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Emergency Accommodation Data**

153. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of adults and children in emergency accommodation funded by his Department on the first day of every



month in 2016. [3442/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme is considered the “*safety net*” within the overall social welfare system in that it provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance for those in need who do not qualify for payment under other State schemes.

Under SWA, my Department can make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure, which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. The Government has provided €31.5 million for the exceptional and urgent needs schemes in 2017.

Under the ENP scheme payments can be made to support temporary accommodation where required. Statistics are not maintained on the numbers of adults and children supported with accommodation costs through the ENP scheme. There are many reasons why a person might seek support with temporary accommodation costs, for example when travelling with a family member to access medical treatment in another location.

The overall responsibility for the response to homelessness rests with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and the local authorities. There are some historical arrangements in place in some areas of the country, for example in Cork City, where Community Welfare Service staff co-ordinate access to homeless accommodation on behalf of the local authority. These cases are recorded on the PASS system.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Services for People with Disabilities

154. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the details of the work his Department is carrying out to improve access and opportunities for employment for those persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3447/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Department of Social Protection (DSP) provides a wide range of services and supports for people with disabilities, both in the area of income support and in providing assistance with finding and taking up employment where a capacity exists.

These play an increasingly important role in supporting increased participation in the labour force by people with disabilities. They also support the implementation of the Government’s commitments contained in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) for People with Disabilities, which seeks to address the multiple barriers faced by people with disabilities in obtaining employment.

Under the CES, the Department is progressively rolling out its full Intreo service to people with disabilities who wish to avail of the service on a voluntary basis. In such cases, people with disabilities who present at an Intreo Centre will be offered an interview by an employment support officer with a view to agreeing a suitable action plan. To date, over 60 officers in Intreo Centres have received training to enable them to interact effectively with people with disabilities.

The DSP also provides a wide range of work related supports for people with disabilities.

One of the principal supports is the EmployAbility service, which provides job coach support to people with disabilities in accessing jobs in the open labour market. Other supports include the provision of employment subsidies through the Wage Subsidy Scheme, Workplace Adaptation Grants and specialist training courses that are specially designed for people with disabilities. Funding is also provided to AHEAD (Association for Higher Education Access and Disability) for the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) programme, an employment placement programme for graduates with disabilities.

Most recently, Budget 2017 provided funding of €2 million for projects which will deliver pre-activation supports for people with disabilities. This is a new scheme, the objective of which would be to help bring people with disabilities who are not work-ready closer to the labour market through engagement in training and personal development activities. This would be followed by an incremental exposure to suitable work.

On aggregate, employment related supports for people with disability provided by DSP are estimated to cost almost €55 million in 2017. Furthermore, people with disabilities have access to most of the standard employment supports available to other jobseekers such as the Community Employment Scheme and Springboard.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **JobPath Implementation**

155. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the provisions within the JobPath rules for persons to be precluded from selection for JobPath again if they have already completed a full 52 week course of the scheme. [3508/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is an employment activation service for people who are long-term unemployed (LTU) and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment.

Clients are randomly selected for participation and the protocols for selection currently preclude the selection of anyone who has already completed JobPath within the previous six months.

However, an immediate re-referral to JobPath will be facilitated where a person asks to be returned to JobPath at the end of the 52 weeks and the JobPath provider confirms that the person, with an additional period of support has a strong chance of progressing into a full time sustainable job.

### **Disability Allowance Appeals**

156. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a disability allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) who has been without a payment since August 2016 when their original application was refused. [3509/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The application for disability allowance (DA) from this man was disallowed by a deciding officer (DO) who decided that he does not satisfy the medical conditions for the scheme. Notification of this decision and the reason(s) for it issued to the person on 28 October 2016.

The person in question has lodged an appeal with the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). All the relevant papers requested by that Office are being prepared and will be submitted by the Department shortly. The SWAO will be in touch with the person in due course in relation to the progress of the appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Military Aircraft Landings**

157. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if an aircraft (details supplied), that passed through Shannon Airport on 17 January 2017 and again on 18 January 2017, was contracted to the US military; if there were troops on board on either occasion; the reason the plane switched call sign on the next leg of its journey after Shannon, from Athens to Qatar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3359/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft) Order 1952, made under the Air Navigation and Transport Act 1946, gives the Minister for Foreign Affairs primary responsibility for the regulation of activity by foreign military aircraft in Ireland. The practical implementation of this provision is guided by and reflects Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality.

Primary responsibility for the regulation of foreign civil aircraft in Ireland rests with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

### **Human Rights**

158. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to case of a person (details supplied); his views on whether nurses must be allowed to deliver certain services to those in need, without differentiation as to their status, and allowed express the views of their colleagues in relation to the delivery of health services; and if he has raised the case with his Bahraini counterpart. [3363/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am aware of the case in question, and have had representations made on behalf of this person to my Department by members of the public.

I strongly support the right to freely and peacefully express opinion in all circumstances, regardless of a person's status, profession or role in society. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right. There have been worrying developments in Bahrain of late, with widespread reports of a crackdown on those who express dissent or criticism of the Bahraini Government. Bahrain has been vocal in stating its commitment to improving its human rights record, but developments over the last few months would suggest that this is not being implemented in practice.

My Department has made known Ireland's position on these developments. In the Item 4 Statement (Human rights situations that require the Council's attention) at the Human Rights Council in Geneva last September, Ireland expressed concern about "restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association aimed at silencing the voice of civil society and human rights defenders in countries including Bahrain". Further, Ireland's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, who is accredited to Bahrain as we do not have an Embassy there, recently met with the Bahraini Deputy Minister for International Affairs, Abdullah Bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, and they

discussed human rights.

My Department will continue to advocate for freedom of expression to be respected, in Bahrain and elsewhere.

### **Safety of Irish Citizens Abroad**

159. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of a case of a person (details supplied); if he has seen a video clip which lasts for over two minutes and was released to the Irish media ahead of Christmas; and if he has discussed the case with his Filipino counterpart recently. [3364/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am very aware of the extremely difficult circumstances in which this individual and his family find themselves. I have personally raised my concerns about the case, and about the health and wellbeing of the individual concerned, with my Philippines counterpart, most recently at the UN in New York last September.

As the individual himself makes clear in the video clip released before Christmas, this is an ongoing legal case. It is for the citizen's legal representatives to advise him and to act on his behalf in matters before the courts. The Irish Government does not and cannot interfere with a trial in another jurisdiction, just as we would not tolerate a foreign government seeking to interfere in a judicial process in Ireland.

Beyond doing what is possible to ensure that Mr Ó Cochlain has legal representation, what the Government can do, and what we have been consistently doing, is emphasising very strongly to the Philippines authorities our serious concerns for the rights and welfare of our Irish citizen, explaining and underlining the humanitarian considerations, and seeking the cooperation of the relevant executive and administrative authorities in expediting the scheduling of the appeal on those grounds.

As the individual states in the video clip, his appeal is waiting to be filed at the Supreme Court.

This is why the current priority focus of our Embassy in Singapore is on follow up to the request to seek to have the appeal process expedited on humanitarian grounds. This request was reiterated at a meeting earlier this month with senior Philippines Foreign Ministry officials.

Let me assure you that my Department continues to prioritise this case and that Department officials in Dublin, our Embassy in Singapore and our Honorary Consulate in the Philippines will continue to provide all appropriate consular assistance to this individual and to his family.

### **Human Rights**

160. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the health and safety of a person (details supplied); and if he will raise the case with his Turkish counterpart. [3365/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers. I understand that there are worrying suggestions that this individual's safety in prison may be under threat. The security measures surrounding prisoners are, of course, a matter for the Turkish authorities. I have asked my officials to raise the concerns

that have been brought to my attention with the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Dublin. As we approach the 18th anniversary of the detention of this individual, I would like to reiterate my call to all parties concerned in the Kurdish issue to return to dialogue so that the political process to resolve this issue can be resumed.

### **Passport Applications**

161. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the supports that were put in place to deal with increased demand for Irish passports in view of the fact that 733,060 Irish passports were issued in 2016 an increase of 9% on 2015; and if he expects a similar demand in 2017. [3366/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** To respond to the seasonal spike in demand as well as a more general increase in passport application numbers, a total of 233 Temporary Clerical Officers were employed by my Department last year. This was an increase of 62 officers compared to 2015. It is expected that passport application volumes will continue to increase in 2017. To effectively manage rising volumes, including via timely processing of applications and related customer service functions, the Passport Service aims to recruit a similar number of Temporary Clerical Officers this year.

The Passport Service continues to advance the upgrade of technology systems and business processes under the Passport Reform Programme. The introduction of an on-line passport application channel for adult renewals planned for the coming months will result in significant savings in passport processing time and increased productivity.

As part of the Reform Programme, an improved on-line tracking service was launched at the end of 2016. This allows the customer to accurately track the progress of their application in a visually dynamic way, and provides an estimated date of issue based on current turnaround timeframes. This should reduce the volume of customer queries to the Passport Service and allow more staff to be allocated to application processing.

Public messaging on the Passport Service website and in media contacts has been revised to underline the importance of applying at least six weeks in advance of travel and reminding that the Passport Express service is still the cheapest and most efficient means of applying for a passport.

My Department will continue to closely monitor the volume of applications. Resources will be re-deployed as needed to deal with any significant increases and the need for additional resources will be kept under active review.

### **Human Rights**

162. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that on 6 January 2017, the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi government in Turkey issued three new decrees expelling 8,398 more public employees and 649 academics, and banning 83 more civil society organisations (details supplied); and if he has raised his concern over these decrees and purges with his Turkish counterpart. [3367/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am aware that the state of emergency, which has been in place since 20 July, was extended for the second time this month, and that three new decrees have already issued which provide for the dismissal of



public sector workers, the closing of some 80 civil society organisations, increased powers for the security forces to investigate online activity and increased government powers of appointment in the military. This further deepens my grave concerns about human rights, democracy, the rule of law and freedom of expression in Turkey.

While I have not had the opportunity to raise the most recent decrees with my Turkish counterpart, I have been explicit about my concerns regarding the situation in Turkey and I have detailed them at every opportunity, including at the specially-convened meeting of the Council of Europe in September, at which Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu was present.

My concerns are eased only slightly by my understanding that new decrees issued on 23 January go some way to reversing or lessening some of the more extreme measures taken under the state of emergency - for example, the period for detention without charge has been reduced to 7 days, and a commission examining complaints regarding arrests, detentions and closures of organisations, including media organisations, has been established. The state of emergency involves a derogation from the European Convention on Human Rights, which is allowable under the Convention in these circumstances.

We do not underestimate the challenges facing Turkey: the attempted coup in Turkey of 15 July 2016 was a criminal act and an attack on democracy, and the country also been the victim of dozens of horrific terrorist attacks, carried out predominantly by the outlawed PKK, their affiliates or ISIS. While the Turkish authorities clearly need to defend their democratic institutions and combat terrorism vigorously and effectively, they must also maintain a measured and proportionate response which adheres to democratic principles.

### **Cyprus Reunification**

163. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the recent Cypriot reunification talks in Geneva, Switzerland (details supplied); and his views on the talks. [3368/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Ireland fully supports the achievement of a mutually acceptable and comprehensive settlement in Cyprus, based on a bicomunal, bizonal federation with political equality, as set out in the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

Our Ambassador in Nicosia reports very regularly on developments, as do our Embassies in Athens and Ankara, and my officials are also in touch with the Embassy of Cyprus here.

On his State Visit to Ireland last October, President Anastasiades expressed his hope that real progress would soon be made, and in that context, I have been very pleased to see positive movement in the talks on the Cyprus question, the most recent round of which concluded in Geneva earlier this month. There was no expectation of a final deal, but considerable advances have been made, including a first exchange of maps on territorial distribution between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Leaders, as well as a first discussion between the Leaders and the three guarantor powers (Greece, Turkey and the UK) on international security guarantees. Some technical issues have been referred to experts for their consideration. I very much hope to see decisive progress in future talks.

I wish both Leaders well in their on-going negotiations, and hope that the goodwill expressed on both sides results in a sustainable, peaceful solution.

### **Middle East Peace Process**

164. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide a report on the conference on the Middle East peace process hosted by France on 15 January 2017; if there are plans for any future conference; and if his Department, in line with a motion passed unanimously by Dáil Éireann on 10 December 2014, will recommend that Ireland should officially recognise the state of Palestine. [3369/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I refer the Deputy to my reply today to Oral Question 56, in which I reported in detail on the Paris Conference.

The effort was certainly worthwhile, in bringing together the international community to re-state its support for the two state solution to the conflict, at a time when other crises in the region have dominated international attention. But it has not been possible as yet to inject renewed momentum into the peace process.

The statement agreed by the participants provides for the possibility of further meetings, but it is not possible at this point to anticipate when such further Ministerial conferences might take place.

There may still remain some continuing work on areas highlighted during the Paris meetings, including a proposed civil society forum, arising out of a working group on the role of civil society, in which Ireland has been participating.

The question of national recognition by Ireland of a state of Palestine is a separate issue. As I have reported to the Dáil, I keep under continuous review the question of whether and when an immediate recognition by Ireland might be helpful, bearing in mind the positive and negative arguments which I have previously outlined.

### **Foreign Conflicts**

165. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the bombing of a refugee camp by the Nigerian military (details supplied); and if he has raised the case with his Nigerian counterpart. [3370/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I share the great concern about the loss of life and the injuries caused as a result of the bombing carried out last week by the Nigerian military at Rann camp for displaced people in Northeast Nigeria. I acknowledge the expressions of regret by the Nigerian Government, including by President Buhari, and I welcome their commitment to a thorough investigation into the incident. I wish to express my deepest sympathy to the Nigerian people on the loss of life of their fellow citizens in such a tragic situation.

Internally Displaced People are among the most vulnerable people in the world. They depend on camps such as the one at Rann, for shelter, protection and security. This tragedy underlines the challenge of protecting vulnerable civilians, as well as humanitarian workers, during conflict, crises and emergency situations.

Our Embassy in Abuja is monitoring developments closely and, together with our EU partners, is working with the Nigerian Government to address the humanitarian crisis in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin. The Embassy is in close contact with other key partners, including humanitarian organisations operating in Northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region. Ireland will continue to address the crisis through diplomatic engagement and humanitarian funding.

## Human Rights

166. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Ecuador's Ministry of the Interior announced plans to shut down one of the country's leading environmental groups (details supplied); and his views on the group's call for the creation of an environmental truth commission to investigate environmental destruction and violations of the rights of indigenous communities in the Cordillera del Condor and other areas affected by mining activities. [3373/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am aware of recent developments concerning the Ecuadorian non-governmental organisation, Acción Ecológica, and of the difficult situation which currently pertains for environmental rights defenders in Ecuador and in many parts of Latin America today. Environmental degradation and the rights of indigenous communities to be consulted in regard to development projects which affect them have emerged as recurring challenges in the human rights field in the region.

I urge the Government of Ecuador to fully respect the legitimate exercise of freedom of association, as well as the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published a statement in December 2016 regarding the case of Acción Ecológica, criticising the closure of the group by the Ecuadorian authorities and calling for a reversal of the decision. I support the statement made by the OHCHR, an organisation to which Ireland continues to be a leading donor.

Ireland also recently contributed €50,000 to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), whose mission is to promote and protect human rights in the American hemisphere. Ireland's contribution will directly address the backlog of cases being faced by the Commission and in so doing improve the access to justice of those who face human rights violations in the Americas.

My officials will continue to monitor the human rights situation in Ecuador in consultation with our EU and UN partners.

## Human Rights

167. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the assassination of a person (details supplied); and if he will raise the case with his Mexican counterpart. [3374/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** My attention has been brought to the specific case to which the Deputy refers, namely the tragic killing of Mr. Isidro Baldenegro López on 15 January. Mr. Baldenegro is the second recipient of the Goldman environmental prize to be killed in the space of 12 months, and in that context I would also like to pay tribute to the memory of Berta Cáceres, the Honduran activist and Goldman prize recipient, who was killed in March 2016.

The trend towards violence against environmental rights organisations in parts of Latin America is of great concern and is being monitored closely by my Department. My officials engage regularly with civil society partners, including from the Latin American region, on these issues. I do not hesitate to condemn any intimidation or violence perpetrated against human rights defenders in Mexico or elsewhere.

On 20 January 2017, the European Union Delegation in Mexico along with the Ambassadors of EU Member States resident in Mexico, including Ireland's Ambassador Hyland, issued a statement expressing their sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Mr. Baldenegro López and urging the Mexican authorities to make every possible effort to expedite the investigation into his murder and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Ireland and other EU Member States engage with the Mexican authorities on human rights on an ongoing basis. In particular the EU uses the High-Level Dialogue on Human Rights, the High-Level Political Dialogue and the Security and Justice Dialogue, to raise issues related to human rights, rule of law and security with the Mexican authorities in open and frank discussions.

EU Member States including Ireland are to the fore in funding projects led by national and international NGOs aimed at improving the protection of human rights in Mexico. Ireland has also provided support to civil society and missionary organisations for development projects to improve, amongst other things, the human rights situation in Mexico. In addition, since 2005 my Department has provided over €1.2 million in funding to the IACHR, whose mission is to promote and protect human rights in the American hemisphere.

### **Brexit Issues**

168. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he continues to liaise with his EU colleagues to ensure the best possible position for Ireland, the need to remain at the heart of the European Union and use influence in a positive way in the course of future negotiations on Brexit to facilitate traditional trade with the UK without tariffs and maintain the operation of an all-island entity in terms of the Single Market and customs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3510/17]

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he remains assured that all other EU member states remain on side in supporting Ireland's position in negotiations on Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3511/17]

170. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to his discussions with his counterparts in other EU member states, if he remains satisfied with their support in the course of the Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3512/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 168 to 170, inclusive, together.

The Government's preparations for the upcoming negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU have been extensive. From the outset of our preparations we have been clear about our priorities, which remain: minimising the impact on trade and the economy; protecting the Northern Ireland Peace Process; maintaining the Common Travel Area; and influencing the future of the European Union.

A critical part of our work is ensuring that our priorities are heard and understood across Europe and are reflected in the EU's position for the forthcoming negotiations. To that end, an extensive programme of engagement with all other EU Governments and the EU institutions, including the European Commission's Brexit Negotiations Task Force, is under way. To date, there has been over 60 engagements at either political or senior official level.

The Taoiseach is in regular contact with EU leaders and travelled to Madrid last week for a meeting with the Spanish Prime Minister. He will visit Warsaw on 9 February for a meeting with the Polish Prime Minister. For my own part, I have spoken with each of my EU Foreign Minister counterparts in the period immediately following the result of the referendum in the UK. I have now began a second round of discussions with my EU colleagues. Most recently, I met with the Spanish Foreign Minister and I am planning to have bilateral discussions with my Luxembourg and Finnish counterpart in the weeks ahead. Minister of State Murphy is visiting Romania and Greece on 30 January to 1 February while meetings with France, Poland, Slovakia, Latvia and Lithuania at senior official level will take place in the coming weeks.

Engagement with the European Commission's Task Force on Brexit and the Commission's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, has also been a central part of the Government's programme of engagement. The Government's position on Brexit was outlined in meetings with Mr. Barnier in Dublin on 12 October. Engagement with the Commission's Task Force at a technical level has been regular and is ongoing. There have been a number of exchanges on key aspects of the negotiations process and the Irish-specific aspects, including on the Common Travel Area and on border issues.

Feedback to date from this comprehensive engagement has been very encouraging. There is as sound understanding among EU partners of the unique circumstances which pertain on this island and a strong willingness and openness to work closely with Ireland on addressing our issues. As a clear demonstration that the Government's efforts are working, I would note that in his first official comments, Michel Barnier, the lead negotiator for the Commission, highlighted the need to address Ireland's issues.

### **Brexit Issues**

171. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which his EU counterparts are aware of the precarious position here in the geographical context post-Brexit, that Ireland's position off the western shores of Europe places it at a distinct disadvantage from a trading point of view for access to the Single Market and that compensatory measures are required as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3513/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Government is under no illusion about the nature and scale of the Brexit challenge. A critical part of our work is ensuring that our particular position and priorities are understood across Europe: therefore engagement with our EU partners and with the EU institutions is critical. This programme of intense engagement at political and official level is continuing to ensure that the EU's approach to the forthcoming negotiations reflects our priorities. Ireland looks forward to working with our fellow Member States to deliver the best possible result for Ireland and for the EU.

A central part of this programme of engagement is meetings with the European Commission. In addition to meetings with the chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, intensive bilateral discussions to the taskforce working with him continue. In our engagement with the Taskforce we have made them aware that Brexit is already having an impact on the Irish economy, and of the disproportionate consequences posed by Brexit to the Irish economy overall in comparison to other Member States. This message has also been emphasized in more than sixty meetings at political and official level with other Member States.

In working to minimize the damage to Ireland our first priority is to contribute to the achievement of a close and mutually beneficial relationship between the EU and UK.



Second, we recognize that the economic challenge posed by Brexit, while very great in itself, also one of a number of factors to be taken into account in our overall economic policy. State agencies are actively pursuing opportunities for increased investment, business and job creation in Ireland, while as chair of the Export Trade Council, I am working to support Irish companies to expand and diversify their markets, including through support from our Missions.

The Government is also committed to pursuing a opportunities for Ireland which might arise from Brexit. Therefore, work continues on bids for the relocation of the European Medicines Agency and the European Banking Authority from London to Dublin. Preparatory work on both is advancing within the relevant Government Departments.

### **Human Rights Cases**

**172. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he will have an opportunity to discuss the release of a person (details supplied) with the Egyptian authorities with a view to the person's early release having particular regard to the repeated adjournments of their case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3514/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** This consular case continues to be a top priority for the Government and substantial resources and time are being devoted to it, by the Taoiseach, by me as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, by officials in my Department, by our Ambassador and his team in Cairo, and by the entire Irish diplomatic network. The Government is doing everything it possibly can to ensure that the Egyptian authorities are in no doubt about our determination to see this young man returned to his home and his family.

The Taoiseach has spoken directly and personally with Egyptian President el-Sisi on numerous occasions now calling on him to exercise his powers under Egyptian law to resolve this case and return this young man to Ireland. He has done so in face-to-face meetings on two occasions and also by telephone and by letter. The Taoiseach most recently wrote to President el-Sisi about the case in November. For my part, I have engaged continuously on this case with my Egyptian counterpart, Foreign Minister Shoukry, and I once again raised this case with him when I met him in Paris at the Middle East Peace Conference on Sunday, January 15th.

The trial in which our citizen is a defendant along with more than 400 others was back in court for a further hearing on 17 January. The hearing saw witnesses called and cross-examined for the first time since the trial began. This may be an indication that the trial has now, at last, moved into a substantive phase and that a conclusion may finally be in prospect. The Irish Government has been present at and has observed every hearing in the trial to date and our Embassy was again represented at the hearing on 17 January. The next hearing will be on 14 February and the Embassy will once again be present on that occasion to observe the proceedings.

The Egyptian President has consistently advised us that the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary must be respected, and that the Egyptian Government cannot intervene while the case remains before the courts. The President has also consistently made clear to us that he is anxious to resolve this issue as soon as he can, and that he will be able to intervene in the case once the trial has ended.

I and my colleagues in Government and our officials at every level will continue to do everything possible and appropriate to engage with the authorities in Cairo on this citizen's behalf both directly and through and with EU and international partners.

## European Security Strategy

173. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent of consideration given to European defence and security for the future in the context of a diminution in US support through NATO or otherwise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3515/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The EU Global Strategy sets out a vision for the EU's foreign and security policy, and commits the EU to promoting peace, prosperity, democracy and the rule of law. It provides a timely and welcome framework through which to develop outward-looking policy settings which encompass foreign and security policy and which mobilise all aspects of the EU's external action in pursuit of concrete and meaningful objectives grounded in the Treaties. These objectives are to be pursued through a comprehensive approach using the range of instruments available to the European Union, including political, diplomatic, economic development, trade, peace-keeping and crisis management tools.

Five priority areas have been identified for implementation of the EU Global Strategy. These include strengthening the EU's capacity, through its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), to promote international peace and security within a rules-based global order underpinned by the United Nations.

Since the presentation in June 2016 of the EU Global Strategy by the High Representative/Vice-President (HRVP), Federica Mogherini, work has been taken forward in the Council.

The June European Council welcomed the presentation of the Strategy and invited the HRVP, the Commission and the Council to take the work forward. Implementation of the Strategy in the area of security and defence was discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council meetings in October, and again in November when Foreign Ministers met in joint session with EU Defence Ministers.

The European Council in December 2016 endorsed the work of Council on implementing the EU Global Strategy in the area of security and defence, and called for comprehensive follow-up by the HRVP and Member States.

Ireland is a strong supporter of initiatives, through the CSDP, which improve the capacity of the Union to contribute to international peace and security, particularly in support of the UN. We support cooperation with international partners where this adds value and contributes to the achievement of these objectives.

The discussion of the Global Strategy, and cooperation with other organisations in this area is grounded within the EU Treaties, and the Lisbon Protocol which protects Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality.

## Western Balkans Issues

174. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the situation in the western Balkans continues to be monitored with particular reference to continued peace and security and membership of the European Union for the various states in the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3516/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** There are currently five countries which have EU Candidate Status, including four in the Western Balkans – Mon-

tenegro, Serbia, the Republic of Macedonia, and Albania. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are potential candidate countries.

Ireland is a strong supporter of the enlargement process, and views it as a transformative driver for peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

The European Commission continues to work actively to support prospective member states in implementing reforms in order to make progress on their respective EU paths. The Commission publishes regular reports on each of the candidate and potential candidate countries. These provide a ‘state of play’ assessment on the preparations for Union membership in each individual accession country across the *acquis communautaire*, highlight the remaining challenges and set out guidelines on key reform priorities. Ireland welcomed the 2016 reports, which were published on 9 November and discussed extensively by Ministers at the General Affairs Council in December 2016, at which Minister of State Dara Murphy represented Ireland.

Ireland, along with our European partners, will continue to monitor and encourage progress in implementing reforms across range of areas covered by the *acquis*.

### Syrian Conflict

175. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which international relief is accessing the various sensitive areas in Syria; if a greater degree of co-ordination and co-operation is taking place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3517/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh):** We remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis facing the Syrian people. Despite the cessation of hostilities since 30 December 2016, the situation remains extremely fragile and the humanitarian crisis persists for many Syrians. Humanitarian access and the protection of civilians are binding legal obligations for all parties and must be observed.

Since 2012, Ireland has provided €67.5 million in humanitarian assistance to Syria and the region, including more than €25 million during 2016. This is Ireland’s largest ever response to any humanitarian crisis. Ireland’s support is channelled through UN, Red Cross and NGO partners, who are best placed to respond and ensure that Irish funding goes to those who need it most. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in particular has proven capacity and expertise in reaching the most vulnerable communities in conflict situations and gaining access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, where other organisations cannot operate. During 2016 alone, Ireland’s funding supported the work of the ICRC to carry out 55 cross-frontline operations to bring food, clean water and essential aid to millions of Syrians.

In line with a coordinated, “Whole of Syria” approach, bringing together international humanitarian efforts inside Syria and those in the neighbouring countries of Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) sets out annually the principal needs and objectives of the humanitarian response, and monitors progress towards these objectives. These are to save lives and alleviate suffering, enhance the protection of civilians and build their resilience. Ireland’s support to the UN in Syria has been provided through pooled funding managed by OCHA in Syria, Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. The Jordan and Turkey funds in particular prioritise cross-border assistance to vulnerable communities, supporting local partners to target hard-to-reach areas.

Ireland also supports the EU’s humanitarian response in Syria, which amounted to €445 million in 2016. The EU and its Member States are collectively the lead provider of international

aid to the people of Syria. Since the launch of the EU's Humanitarian Initiative for Aleppo on 2 October 2016, the EU has a leading role in ensuring minimum conditions for humanitarian access and for the security and safety of medical staff and humanitarian workers.

We continue to monitor the situation closely, and are ready to provide further assistance in support of the Syrian people as needed.

### **Humanitarian Aid Provision**

176. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the UN and EU can co-ordinate their efforts in respect of the refugee crisis arising from various conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3518/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The European Union is fully committed to effective multilateralism and this commitment, with the UN at its core, is a central element of the approach to external action as set out in the EU's new Global Strategy.

The EU works closely with the UN system on the issues and challenges which face the world today, including on the migration and refugee crisis.

The UN system, notably the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, and the International Organisation for Migration, which is now more closely integrated with the UN system than in the past, clearly have leading roles in addressing the crisis. In 2016 approximately one third of the contributions to UNHCR came from the EU. The EU recognises and is supportive of the work of these agencies in helping vulnerable people on the move and in assisting the EU and its Member States in meeting the needs of these people. For example the EU will contribute a total of €62 million in humanitarian funding over the 2016-2017 period to UNHCR, to support its work with the Greek government in providing protection and assistance to refugees and migrants in mainland Greece.

In broader terms, the EU and its Member States are the world's leading providers of development and humanitarian assistance and this assistance, including through the UN system, is crucial in addressing the root causes of forced displacement. Ireland plays a strong role in policy terms, through our aid programme and through our bilateral and multilateral development assistance. The EU is also a major contributor to UN peacekeeping, and EU military capabilities play an essential role in permitting UN peace operations to engage more effectively around the world. This type of collaboration is clearly fundamental to addressing the conflicts that are at the origin of major flows of refugees and displaced people.

In addition to being a key EU partner the UN is an indispensable global forum for tackling these global challenges. Ireland, through our role as co-facilitator, played a central role in last year's UN discussions on how to address this and similar crises in the future, in a long-term and sustainable manner. The outcome of those discussions was adopted at last September's UN Summit on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants. The EU is now working with the rest of the international community to implement the outcome of the Summit.

### **Humanitarian Aid Provision**

177. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the

extent to which the top ten flash points globally with the most serious abuses of human life, starvation, war and famine continue to be identified; if enhanced UN or global aid operations are in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3519/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The world is facing an unprecedented level of humanitarian need. In 2017, the UN estimates that 92.8 million people are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance, over 65 million people are displaced from their homes across the world, and \$22.2 billion is needed to fund the global humanitarian response.

Ireland's humanitarian response has been consistent to some of the world's most severe crises, some rarely mentioned in the media, such as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, as well as the crises in Syria, Yemen and Iraq. The core objective is to save and protect lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity. Our assistance is focused on where needs are greatest, providing support to the most vulnerable and hard to reach populations, and we place particular emphasis on gender equality and protection.

In 2016, Ireland provided over €150 million in humanitarian assistance, reaching people affected by conflict and natural disasters. This amount includes Ireland's contribution to the European Commission's humanitarian action outside the EU, which has an annual budget of approximately €1 billion.

Ireland works with a range of partners to deliver our humanitarian assistance including NGOs, the UN and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Ireland's UN partners lead the coordination of international appeals for humanitarian assistance, including through the UN Central Emergency Response Fund. Ireland is the eighth largest donor to this Fund, which has provided \$4.6 billion in life-saving assistance to people affected by crises since 2005. Ireland is also a strong supporter of the UN pooled funds located in countries of particularly severe crisis in Africa and the Middle East.

The international community came together at the World Humanitarian Summit in May last year to reflect on how donors can deliver on the then Secretary General's 'Agenda for Humanity' and the Sustainable Development Goals. Over 3,140 commitments were made by Governments and implementing partners, to strengthen humanitarian action, create sustainable solutions for those affected by crises, and ensure adequate humanitarian financing. I delivered Ireland's national statement at the Summit making 35 specific commitments to achieve more sustainable and effective humanitarian action. We will continue to work closely with our international partners to ensure that the global humanitarian response is increasingly coordinated and effective.

### **Humanitarian Aid Provision**

178. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community has responded to the various natural disasters over the past five years such as earthquakes and tsunami; if all commitments entered into initially have been honoured in respect of locations such as Haiti; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3520/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Ireland provided over €150 million in humanitarian assistance in 2016, focused on where needs are greatest, in countries affected by conflict or devastation caused by natural



disasters. In 2017, the UN estimates that 92.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, with over 65 million people displaced by conflict worldwide.

Ireland's humanitarian response is channeled through UN, Red Cross or NGO partners who are best placed to respond. Ireland is the eighth largest donor to the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund. It enables UN agencies to swiftly allocate funds to sudden crises, such as earthquakes and tsunamis, in order to kick start emergency responses. Ireland also supports the European Commission's relief efforts through our EU budget allocation.

Ireland has responded swiftly and effectively in recent years to devastating natural disasters. Ireland was one of the first countries to respond to Typhoon Haiyan, which hit central Philippines in November 2013. More than US\$865 million was contributed by the international community, including €40 million from the European Commission. Ireland provided €7.1 million.

More recently, Ireland responded to the earthquake in Nepal in 2015, allocating €1.65 million to NGO partners and distributing 100 tonnes of emergency supplies. In total, the international community contributed over \$533.8 million, exceeding the UN appeal of \$421 million. This included €22.6 million from the European Commission.

Ireland provided a total of €25.9 million in humanitarian and development funding for Haiti between 2010 and 2016. This includes over €2 million in response to Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and nearly €14 million in assistance following the Haiti earthquake in 2010. The European Commission has provided a total of €273 million since 2010 to assist victims of the earthquake.

Significant progress has been made in recent years to improve the scale and effectiveness of the international community's response to major disasters and humanitarian crises. Lessons learnt from previous crises such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2010 Haiti earthquake have informed the improvement of systems under the leadership of the UN, to ensure the most effective, efficient and rapid delivery of aid possible.

## UN Reform

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if consideration has been given to restructuring of the UN with a view to enhancing its capacity to intervene and create safe havens in areas of conflict thereby minimising loss of life, torture and abuse of human rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3521/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The United Nations plays a critical role in the maintenance of international peace and security and in the resolution of conflicts, which are at the root of the migration and humanitarian crises facing the world today. It does this primarily through the UN Security Council which has a variety of tools at its disposal to address threats to international peace and to contribute towards the resolution of conflicts: it has the power to authorise military action, deploy peacekeeping and political missions, and to impose sanctions against non-compliant States.

The blockages at the Security Council in recent years have prevented the international community from acting together in a way that would allow civilians in conflict zones to be afforded greater protection. I believe that, in addition to the terrible consequences for civilian populations, this inaction has resulted in considerable damage to the standing of the Security Council.

As a member of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) group of states, Ireland advocates for reforms to the membership and working methods of the Security Coun-

cil, including the use of the veto which, on some occasions, has led to inaction by the Security Council at critical moments. Ideally, Ireland would like to see the veto rights of the existing permanent members of the Security Council ended. In 2015, Ireland associated itself with a declaration presented by France and Mexico calling on permanent members of the Security Council to voluntarily waive their right to exercise their veto in cases of mass atrocity.

While decisions of the Security Council, which are key to the maintenance of international peace and security and the welfare of civilians in conflict zones, are the preserve of Member States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Guterres, who took office on 1 January, has announced a number of measures aimed at improving the working of the peace and security architecture of the UN Secretariat.

These measures include steps to remove structural and bureaucratic barriers in the UN Secretariat with the objective of better integrating the efforts of staff who carry out work in relation to conflict zones. Mr. Guterres is to appoint an internal team to take stock of the recommendations from three major peace and security reviews which were completed in 2015. Ireland engaged fully with all three reviews, calling for the recommendations to be discussed and implemented as part of our broader calls for UN reform. We will continue to engage on these reviews in the period ahead. Mr. Guterres has also announced that he intends to enhance the role of the UN Operations and Crisis Centre so that this crisis hub can better collate and consolidate information from across the UN system in a timely manner.

Ireland will continue to advocate, including with the new Secretary General, for reform of the UN to ensure that it is equipped to respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century and to fulfil its critical role in the prevention, reduction or resolution of conflict, and more broadly in the maintenance of international peace and security.

### **Foreign Conflicts**

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the activities of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab are being contained by the international community or the African Union; if the release of girls and women kidnapped over the past number of years continues to be pursued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3523/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Over the past months the Nigerian Government has led efforts in the region against Boko Haram. These efforts have been supported by the international community. The EU has pledged up to €50 million in support of the Multinational Joint Taskforce, which supports 8,700 troops from Nigeria and neighbouring countries to promote regional security. Despite recent progress by Nigerian and regional armed forces, violence by Boko Haram remains a serious threat to the peace and security of Nigeria and the wider Lake Chad region. Ireland has consistently condemned the violence and human rights violations perpetrated by Boko Haram. Last year, we provided €3.1m in humanitarian assistance for the crisis in the region, and our Embassy in Abuja has been active in monitoring developments.

The release of women and girls kidnapped by Boko Haram continues to be a priority for the international community. Ireland has consistently called for the release of the Chibok schoolgirls who were abducted in April 2014. We welcomed the news in October 2016 of the release of 21 girls following talks facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Swiss Government. Since then, the Nigerian army has also reported finding another schoolgirl in the north of Borno state. These girls should be provided with all possible assistance to sup-

port their full reintegration into society and their return to education.

The group Al-Shabaab remains a threat to the peace, stability and prosperity of Somalia and neighbouring countries in the Horn of Africa. The international community plays an important role in containing the violence and instability caused by its actions.

The United Nations, African Union and European Union are all engaging actively in Somalia. The African Union peacekeeping Mission in Somalia, AMISOM, is mandated by the UN Security Council to reduce the threat posed by Al-Shabaab and to enable the gradual handover of security responsibility to Somali security forces. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) is tasked with supporting peacebuilding and state-building in Somalia. The EU contributes through the funding of AMISOM, as well as supporting two missions in Somalia, the EU Training Mission in Somalia and EUCAP Somalia, which aims at strengthening Somalia's maritime security and capacity to effectively govern its waters.

Ireland has responded consistently to humanitarian needs in Somalia. Last year, we contributed just under €6 million in humanitarian assistance to Somalia. During my visit to Kenya last month, I held discussions in Nairobi on the situation in Somalia and the wider region and on the assistance which Ireland might provide in the future.

## EU Issues

181. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia continue to receive co-operation and support from the European Union; the extent to which Ireland's trade with such countries can be enhanced post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3524/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Eastern Partnership Initiative provides a framework for cooperation between the EU and six countries in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, including Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia. The aims of the Eastern Partnership are to promote peace and stability in the region and to enhance economic and political integration between the participating countries and the EU. The model of cooperation with each of the participating states has been tailored to meet their needs and priorities and those of the EU.

The EU provides substantial support to Ukraine, and has committed €3.14 billion to the country in macro-financial assistance since 2014. At the most recent EU-Ukraine summit in November, the EU agreed on a support package for reform in Ukraine worth over €300 million. The EU also provides practical support to Ukraine through programmes such as the EU Advisory Mission on civilian security sector reform. Cooperation can be expected to deepen upon entry into force of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, the trade part of which is provisionally in force since 1 January 2016. Ukraine is already seeing the economic benefits of the free trade area which has resulted in a 7.5% increase in trade volumes between the EU and Ukraine in one year.

Georgia signed an Association Agreement and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU in 2014 which entered into force on 1 July 2016. By removing customs tariffs and quotas and by comprehensively approximating trade-related laws and regulations to the standards of the European Union, the Agreement offers Georgia a framework for boosting trade and economic growth. As part of this process, Georgia has committed to undertaking a number of reforms, including on democratic development and fundamental freedoms, on constitutional and parliamentary reform, and anti-corruption reforms.

In December 2015, negotiations began on a framework agreement between the EU and Armenia covering political, economic and sectoral cooperation. This will replace the current EU-Armenia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement which dates from 1999. Armenia receives considerable funding from the EU, including between €140 and €170 million for the period 2014-2017. This is focused on supporting private sector development, and reforms in public administration and justice systems.

Post-Brexit, Ireland will remain a committed member of the EU and of the Eurozone. Now, more than ever, our membership of the EU must remain at the heart of our engagement with the world. Continuing access to a Single Market of 500 million consumers is vital to the well-being of the Irish people and EU membership has been central to Ireland's economic and social development. To this end, membership of the EU also includes trading arrangements with third countries such as those with Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia.

One of the consequences of Brexit for the Irish economy will be the need for Ireland to diversify its markets. The Government is committed to pursuing any opportunities for Ireland which might arise from Brexit. €3m has been allocated specifically to Enterprise Ireland and IDA to help market diversification and new investments.

### Middle East Issues

182. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he, in conjunction with his EU colleagues, can continue to combat the rise of ISIS in the Middle East; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3525/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The issue of how best to respond to the threat posed by terrorism, and particularly by Daesh, has been and remains high on the EU agenda. Foreign Ministers have consistently underlined that ultimately there will be no defeat of Daesh without a political solution to the crisis in Syria. This is reflected particularly in the comprehensive conclusions on a '*Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Daesh threat*', which were adopted by the Council in May last year.

Foreign Ministers have also focused on the contribution that the EU can make through external action to preventing and countering terrorism. Engagement with third countries to prevent violent extremism and to strengthen their capacity to detect and prevent terrorism, in full compliance with international law and human rights, is at the heart of the EU's strategy and is reflected in a substantial increase in assistance to third countries in this respect.

The EU's approach is guided by, and is consistent with, the approach taken by the UN to countering Daesh and by the principles and measures set out in relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, including UNSCR 2161 (2014) on freezing funds and other assets of terrorist groups, and UNSCR 2178 (2014) on measures to suppress the recruiting, organising, transporting or equipping of individuals who travel to another State to plan or carry out terrorist acts or training.

The former UN Secretary General's comprehensive *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*, presented in January last year, and his related reports are an important and welcome contribution to addressing the threat posed by Daesh, and to highlighting the measures being taken against them in areas such as countering their financing, preventing and disrupting the travel of foreign terrorist fighters, countering recruitment and preventing violent extremism.

Ireland supports the comprehensive approach being taken at EU level to preventing and countering terrorism. At meetings of the Council, I have stressed the need to tackle underlying

factors that contribute to radicalisation and terrorism and in particular the importance of the link between security and development. I have also emphasised the need to ensure a joined-up approach in relation to the discussions of Foreign Ministers and those of our Justice and Home Affairs counterparts.

Increasing the effectiveness of information and intelligence-sharing and enhancing border security have been priority themes at recent meetings of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council. A series of measures is being rolled out to strengthen cooperation and to develop the EU's legal framework for information-sharing, combating terrorism and controlling illegal fire-arms. Ireland is fully engaged in pursuing these developments.

### EU Issues

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the European Union remains committed to the principle of unity of purpose in respect of economic, monetary, political and social institutions notwithstanding the emergence of extreme political viewpoints; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3526/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Europe has been through some difficult years. We have seen deep economic crises which have affected a number of member states, including Ireland; there have been terror attacks in some of our major cities which have caused appalling suffering for individuals and communities. The Continent has been grappling with the biggest movement of people seen in peacetime coming from our southern neighbourhood and further afield. Parties from the far-right have made electoral inroads in a number of EU states and for the first time in the Union's history, a member state has decided to leave.

Despite these enormous challenges, Europe has not disintegrated. 27 Heads of State and Government meeting in Bratislava in September issued a declaration stating that the Union was "indispensable" for them and pledging to offer EU citizens in the upcoming months a vision of an attractive EU they can trust and support. The Future of Europe which will be on the agenda of EU Heads of State and Government meeting in Valletta on 3 February and for the 60th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome in Rome in March. Ireland will work with its partners, as a committed EU member, to bring the vision promised at Bratislava to fruition. We will succeed only if we maintain the unity of purpose to which the Deputy refers.

### Public Sector Pay

184. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the recourse available to those public sector workers whose pay was cut as part of the FEMPI legislation, but have now retired before the legislation is unwound and so cannot claw back money through their pay; if such money can be clawed back through pension payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3307/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Pay reductions effected by the FEMPI legislation have played and continue to play a vital role in securing stability for the public finances. These pay reductions are now being partially reversed or restored by way of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road Agreement and FEMPI 2015. The pay increases thereby arising benefit affected public servants from the due dates, and on that basis no payment of what the Deputy refers to as claw back money arises, whether through pension payments or otherwise.



## Data Collection

185. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the measures his Department is taking to improve data collection, maintenance and access across the public service as part of its reform programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3461/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Public Service ICT Strategy, prepared by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer in my Department, and published in 2015, recognises data as a critical enabler, and that improved data management on a whole-of-government basis is crucial to supporting better decision making, increasing simplicity of engagement, driving efficiency and delivering a range of new digital services to citizens and businesses. In addition, action 45 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan targets improving how data is collected, managed and shared by the Public Service.

Work is ongoing in a number of areas in line with these strategic objectives. My officials are currently engaged with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel to progress the drafting of the Data Sharing and Governance Bill. The purpose of this Bill is to promote and encourage data-sharing between public bodies by providing a statutory framework for data sharing for legitimate and clearly specified purposes that are compliant with Data Protection legislation; and to improve the protection of individual privacy rights by setting new governance standards for data sharing by public bodies. Also, work is ongoing to build on and promote the use of common data models across Government, such as the Public Service Identity dataset and Eir-codes, that underpin our data protection obligations, the provision of digitised and streamlined services, and the linking of data to improve decision making.

My officials are also progressing the Open Data initiative across the public sector. The concept of Open Data is about making data held by public bodies available freely and easily accessible online for reuse and redistribution. The initiative aims to create an environment where, by opening up Government data, new opportunities for research, innovation, transparency, engagement and greater efficiency are delivered and realised by public bodies, businesses, researchers and citizens. Measures to achieve this include development of a centralised Open Data portal, *data.gov.ie*, which provides access to official data in open format, development of a Technical Framework to underpin the publication of such data in line with best practice internationally and to ensure it is interoperable, establishment of an Open Data Governance Board to lead the initiative, outreach and engagement with public bodies and other stakeholders.

Lastly, the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and I are preparing a joint memo to go to Government to seek approval for the implementation of a Public Service Records Management Plan to assist coherent and comprehensive records management within the Public Service. This plan will support both the improved management of day to day records within Public Bodies, and also to protect and develop the processes that support the function of the National Archives in preserving state record.

## Superannuation Schemes

186. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the spouses' and children's scheme is mandatory for public sector workers; if not, the way in which a public sector employee may opt out of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3464/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** A revised

scheme for spouses and children was introduced for the Civil Service in 1982 and membership was made mandatory for all new entrants after 1 September 1984. A scheme which mirrors this was introduced for the wider Public Service on a sector by sector basis in the following years. Anyone recruited to the Public Service since the introduction of the revised scheme automatically became members of this scheme and makes appropriate contributions. There is no facility to opt-out of this scheme.

### Ministerial Meetings

187. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has met ICTU recently. [38482/16]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In the context of the Labour Court Recommendations on Garda pay, and the potential wider implications for the Lansdowne Road Agreement, I met with representatives from ICTU on the 7th of November to listen to their views and inform considerations on these matters by Government.

Officials from my Department met with the Public Service Committee of ICTU under the framework provided by Section 6 of the Lansdowne Road Agreement to address an anomaly issue arising in the context of Labour Court Recommendations (CD/16/321 & CD/16/322) in respect of the Garda Associations.

These negotiations successfully concluded last week with the announcement of an increase in annualised salaries of €1,000 for the period 1 April 2017 to August 2017 inclusive for:

- those on annualised salaries up to €65,000;
- who are parties to the Lansdowne Road Agreement; and
- who do not stand to benefit from the Labour Court Recommendations (CD/16/321 & CD/16/322).

### UN Sustainable Development Goals

188. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has engaged with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade regarding Ireland’s development aid budget plan of reaching 0.7% GNI; and the timeframe for doing so. [1730/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Responsibility for overseas development aid rests with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in the first instance.

The Government is strongly committed to Ireland’s overseas aid programme and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. Our policy for international development, “One World, One Future”, clearly articulates our commitment to the UN target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) in Official Development Assistance (ODA) as economic conditions allow.

In the current Programme for Government we have set out our ambition to make progress towards the UN target as resources permit. It is important that this progress is made in a sustainable and manageable way, which continues to strengthen Ireland’s recognised role as a reliable and effective partner in providing development assistance.

### **Home Care Packages Provision**

189. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a home care package will be facilitated in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3339/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

### **Medical Card Reviews**

190. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE is withdrawing medical cards, as happened in the case of a person (detailed supplied) based on notices of assessments; his plans to instruct the HSE to draw its attention to this matter in order not to cause unnecessary stress to elderly persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3244/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

### **Hospitals Building Programme**

191. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the funding and investment that is being allocated for the completion of a new community hospital and day centre in Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim; the projected completion date of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3246/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The Capital Programme announced in January 2016 provides for the replacement and refurbishment of 90 public nursing homes across the country over the next five years including St Patrick's Hospital, Carrick-on-Shannon. Under this Programme it is proposed to deliver a new build 100 bed community nursing home by 2021. This will replace existing beds where the physical environment requires significant improvement.

Significant work has been undertaken by the HSE in determining the most appropriate scheduling of projects over the 5 year period from 2016 to 2021, within the phased provision of funding, to achieve compliance and registration with HIQA. All healthcare infrastructure developments, including this development, must comply with DPER guidelines and EU directives and will require a lead-in time to complete the various stages. These stages include ap-

praisal, project brief, design feasibility, detailed design, some of which may overlap, the review of costing estimates and finalisation of financing.

In the meantime, phased interim works are underway at St Patrick's Hospital. Works on the Sheemore ward were completed before Christmas. Works on the McGarry ward are in progress and are currently projected to be completed late Q1 2017. The Rivermeade ward works will follow. Currently, these are projected to be completed in Q2 2017.

### **Hospital Accommodation Provision**

192. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the expansion capacity of the St James's Hospital site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3247/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the specific issue raised by the Deputy, as this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **National Children's Hospital**

193. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the considerations which have been given to the adequacy of parking spaces at the St James's Hospital site; the company or organisation which will manage car parking services following construction of the new national children's hospital and relocation of the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital; if his attention has been drawn to existing parking issues at the site; the measures which will be implemented to resolve these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3248/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The issue of access to the children's hospital is of great importance to everyone associated with this project. The design of the hospital has recognised the need of most parents to access the hospital by car, and ample parking has been provided for families based on current and projected future demand. The parking system will also allow families to reserve spaces ahead of arriving to the hospital, and emergency drop-off spaces are also being provided. St. James's Hospital campus is also better served by public transport than any other hospital in the country. An Bord Pleanála was satisfied with the measures proposed to mitigate traffic issues around the campus, and provide for parking (675 for families, 325 for staff), while also noting that no other site enjoys such connectivity with public transport.

In relation to the specific query raised on managing car parking services following construction of the new children's hospital and existing car parking issues, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **National Children's Hospital**

194. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the way in which ambulance access will be prioritised at the new national children's hospital in view of existing congestion issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3249/17]

195. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether access to the new national children's hospital through a single entrance at each end of the campus is sufficient; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3250/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 194 and 195 together.

The issue of access to the children's hospital is of great importance to everyone associated with this project. The planning application submitted to An Bord Pleanála by the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board, the statutory body responsible for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children's hospitals, to build the hospital on the St James's campus included an Environmental Impact Statement detailed "traffic and parking" which included a traffic management and traffic mobility plan, endorsed by the National Transport Authority and Dublin City Council, for the construction and operational phases of the hospital. A ten-day oral hearing took place in December 2015 in which traffic evidence was presented in detail and allowed for cross-questioning by those who had concerns. An Bord Pleanála granted planning permission without change to the proposed traffic and mobility plan.

In relation to ambulance access for the new children's hospital, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Hospital Services**

196. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when the required orthopaedic surgery for scoliosis will be provided in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3285/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Ambulance Service**

197. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that his immediate predecessor as Minister for Health gave an undertaking in a statement in Seanad Éireann on 10 March 2015 relating to the ambulance service in Dublin that the staff would be fully consulted before any changes were implemented; if he will honour this undertaking; if he will ensure that meaningful consultation will take place with the staff involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3291/17]

198. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the joint review by the HSE and Dublin City Council of the Dublin ambulance service referred to in his replies to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 143, 144, 178, 179, 180 and 181 of 14 December 2016, was completed without consultation with the staff or trade unions involved; the reason for this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3292/17]

199. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn



to the fact that his immediate predecessor as Minister for Health, speaking in Seanad Éireann on 10 March 2015, clarified the position for statutory responsibility for the Dublin Ambulance Service when he said that, historically, the Dublin Ambulance Service had been provided by the Dublin Fire Brigade under fire services legislation, and that statutory responsibility for the service therefore rests with Dublin City Council and consequently comes within the ambit of the Minister for the Environment and Local Government; if this is still the position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3293/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 197 to 199, inclusive, together.

Statutory responsibility for Dublin Fire Brigade (DFB) rests with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in the first instance. DFB provide emergency ambulance services in Dublin city and county, by arrangement between Dublin City Council and the HSE.

I understand that the Review of Dublin ambulance services has been completed and is under consideration by the HSE and Dublin City Council, who commissioned the Review.

I fully accept the need for full engagement with staff on any proposed changes and in this context I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy detailing the level of engagement with staff to date.

### **Health Services Access**

200. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive an appointment for physiotherapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3298/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

201. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [3302/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Psychological Services**

202. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in County Roscommon for 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017 on the waiting list for an assessment with a child psychologist; the period of time they have been waiting and the expected timeframe for an appointment, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3306/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Medical Records**

203. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange for an independent review of the case files of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3309/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As the particular issue raised by the Deputy relates to the case files of specific individuals, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

204. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) is likely to receive treatment at Beaumont Hospital; and when the person will receive botox treatment at St Vincent's Hospital. [3312/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Departmental Reviews**

205. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3319/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

### **HSE Properties**

206. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange to have a HSE property renovated (details supplied). [3320/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Hospital Services**

207. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that a person (details supplied) has an operation. [3322/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Home Help Service Provision**

208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if required home help will be facilitated in the case of persons (details supplied); when same may be facilitated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3337/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

### **Irish Blood Transfusion Service**

209. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will provide a room to the IBTS for its services in the new Balbriggan primary care centre when it opens; if he or the HSE will engage with the IBTS on the way in which the new primary care centres can be used for this purpose to avoid having to use hotels and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3338/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Primary Care Centres**

210. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the new primary care centre (details supplied); the proposed completion date of this project; the plans in place for the recruitment of staff; the factors influencing the recruitment of staff; when the recruitment process will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[3341/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Primary Care Centres**

211. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the expected opening date for the new primary care centre being built (details supplied) in County Sligo; the services which will be available in the centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3342/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Health Services Provision**

212. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the plans in place for maintaining and improving existing day care services for older persons and incorporating them, from the beginning, into a new primary care centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3343/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of health care projects. Therefore the Executive has been requested to reply directly to you on this matter.

### **Hospital Services**

213. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 138 of 17 January 2017, if he has received a business proposal from the HSE in relation to the designation of part of a campus (details supplied) as an acquired brain injury unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3349/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Further to my reply to the Deputy to Parliamentary Question 1140 of 17th January last, responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services rests with the Health Service Executive (HSE), under the Health Act 2004.

As part of their National Service Plan for 2017, the HSE intends to finalise and progress implementation of the framework for the Neuro-rehabilitation Strategy in 2017. This will be led by a National Steering Group, which is chaired by the Head of the HSE's Disability Reform Team.

I understand that the HSE are aware of the proposal for an acquired brain injury step-down unit in Longford. However, the HSE is obliged to consider proposals for specialised residential services for people with acquired brain injury, including the proposal referenced by the Deputy, in the broader context of the finalisation of the implementation framework for the Neuro-rehabilitation Strategy.

## **Hospital Services**

214. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health his plans for carrying out essential repairs at a district hospital (details supplied) in County Mayo; if emergency works will be carried out in view of the results of inspections carried out in July 2016; the projected time-frame of such works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3354/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

## **Services for People with Disabilities**

215. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when an assessment of needs will be carried out on a person (details supplied). [3358/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

However, as the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

## **Hospital Services**

216. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange a meeting with this Deputy to discuss the implementation of the anomaly scan at Cavan General Hospital.

[3361/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE National Service Plan 2016 committed to the planning and development of equitable access to antenatal anomaly screening in all maternity units in the context of emerging maternity networks. In addition, the National Maternity Strategy is clear that all women must have equal access to standardised ultrasound services. The Strategy will be implemented on a phased basis over the coming years and this work will be led by the National Women & Infants Health Programme.

## **Medical Aids and Appliances Expenditure**

217. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the cost of a flash glucose monitoring system (details supplied); if this monitoring system is available to persons here with diabetes; his plans to have this device added to the long term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3376/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and



direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Disease Incidence**

218. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons here with type 1 diabetes by age group under 18 years of age, 19 years of age to 64 years of age and over 65 years of age; the number of persons here with type 2 diabetes by age group under 18 years of age, 19 years of age to 64 years of age and over 65 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3377/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Clinical Programmes for Diabetes and Paediatrics estimate that the total child and adolescent population with type 1 diabetes in Ireland was approximately 2,700 in 2015.

The prevalence of diabetes in Ireland is estimated to be approximately 5% of the adult population. There are approximately 190,000 adults with diabetes in the Republic of Ireland of which some 30,000 have type 1 and 160,000 have type 2.

The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) analysis indicates that the prevalence of type 2 diabetes for those aged 65 and over is 14.2% - significantly higher than for younger age cohorts. This estimate is based on TILDA Wave 2 from 2012. More recent estimates available from TILDA Wave 3 is expected to be available later this year. A breakdown of type 1 and type 2 will also be available from this study.

### **Health Services Access**

219. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health if he has received correspondence from a person (details supplied) regarding an ongoing issue concerning bus and cab operators in County Louth and their arrangements with the HSE. [3392/17]

220. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health if he can confirm that the HSE had been operating bus services in County Louth with local operators without contracts between the years 2005 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3393/17]

221. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that local bus operators without contracts in County Louth were fulfilling services for the HSE for as little as €1 per mile on the promise that prices would improve in future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3394/17]

222. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health his views on the grievances felt by local operators who were unable to fulfil tender criteria in view of the loyal services they had provided based on a verbal agreement with the HSE; the remedies that might be available to them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3395/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 219, 220, 221 and 222 together.

I wish to inform the Deputy that I have not received the correspondence referred to regarding bus and cab operators in County Louth.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

## Hospital Services

223. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to address the recent misdiagnosis of cancer in patients in Wexford General Hospital; the measures his officials are undertaking to ensure that such misdiagnosis does not occur again in any area of health screening across the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3398/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The report of the HSE Serious Incident Management Team published last week outlines the look-back process and actions taken by the HSE following the identification of probable missed cancers at Wexford General Hospital. In line with good practice, an external review will now be undertaken as a follow-up to the Serious Incident Management Team report. This review will examine how the incident was identified, escalated and managed, and its outcome will include recommendations relating to governance, accountability and authority at each level involved.

While the BowelScreen programme has led to the early diagnosis of cancers and better outcomes for patients, a number of actions have been identified to ensure the quality of the service provided. These include the development of a professional competency framework for all colonoscopists and endoscopists in screening units, the implementation of a new policy for managing adverse incidents within the National Screening Service and the review of BowelScreen's quality assurance indicators to ensure that all units, and the individual clinicians delivering colonoscopy services on behalf of BowelScreen, are doing so at the highest standard.

## Health Services Data

224. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a full list of health centre locations in County Wicklow and a breakdown of the services provided in each of the health centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3400/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

## Hospital Services

225. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a full list of the services available at the three district hospitals in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3401/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

## Ambulance Service Data

226. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health the current ambulance response times for County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3402/17]

227. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulance bases in County Wicklow; the number of ambulances stationed at each of these bases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3403/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 226 and 227 together.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

228. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on outpatient waiting lists with a County Wicklow address; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3404/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) has advised that as of 30 December 2016 there were 9811 outpatients on the waiting list (with status of “Has Appointment” or “No Appointment”) with a patient area of residence of Wicklow.

As the Deputy may be aware, in December 2016, I granted approval to the NTPF for the first tranche of funding, in the region of €5m, for an initiative focusing on daycase procedures. The NTPF anticipates that around 3,000 of the longest waiting daycase patients will be treated under this initiative with the aim that no patient would be waiting over 18 months for a daycase procedure by June 2017. It is expected that the outsourcing of treatment will commence shortly.

In December 2016, the Department wrote to the HSE requesting that it submit in January, a Waiting List Action Plan for 2017 in respect of both the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List and the Outpatient Waiting List. The focus of these plans should be to ensure that no patient is waiting more than 15 months on either list by the end of October 2017. The HSE has been requested to develop the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List Action Plan in conjunction with and supported by, the NTPF’s proposal for utilisation of the remaining €10m of 2017 funding for patient treatment. I expect to make known the details of both plans in the coming weeks.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

229. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with a person (details supplied) to discuss various issues pertaining to their case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3415/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** At the outset, I would like to offer my sincerest condolences to the family involved for the traumatic situation they experienced and their loss.

As Minister for Health, I am always open to meeting individuals and organisations who request it; however, due to the busy nature of Oireachtas and Government business, it is not always possible. Should the family wish to request a meeting regarding their experience, they may wish to seek a meeting with the HSE.

The HSE National Service Plan 2016 committed to the planning and development of equitable access to antenatal anomaly screening in all maternity units in the context of emerging maternity networks.

In addition, the National Maternity Strategy is clear that all women must have equal access to standardised ultrasound services. The Strategy will be implemented on a phased basis over the coming years and this work will be led by the National Women & Infants Health Pro-

gramme.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme Eligibility**

230. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his proposals to improve the terms and conditions applicable to the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3431/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings. A financial assessment is carried out by the HSE to determine how much a participant in the Scheme will contribute to the cost of their care.

Participants in the Scheme contribute up to 80% of their assessable income and a maximum of 7.5% per annum of the value of assets held. In the case of a couple, the applicant's means are assessed as 50% of the couple's combined income and assets. The first €36,000 of an individual's assets, or €72,000 in the case of a couple, is not counted at all in the financial assessment. The capital value of an individual's principal private residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care. This is known as the three year cap.

The Scheme has a number of important safeguards built into the financial assessment which ensures that:

- Nobody will pay more than the actual cost of care;
- An applicant will keep a personal allowance of 20% of his/her income or 20% of the maximum rate of the State Pension (non-Contributory), whichever is greater. This is in recognition of the fact that, although the NHSS covers core living expenses, residents can still incur some costs in a nursing home, such as social programmes, newspapers or hairdressing;
- If an applicant has a spouse/partner remaining at home, he/she will be left with 50% of the couple's income or the maximum rate of the State Pension (non-Contributory), whichever is greater;
- If both members of a couple enter nursing home care, they each retain at least 20% of their income, or 20% of the maximum rate of the State Pension (non-Contributory), whichever is greater;
- Certain items of expenditure, called allowable deductions, can be taken into account for the financial assessment, including health expenses, payments required by law, rent payments and borrowings in respect of a person's principal private residence;
- A person's eligibility for other schemes, such as the Medical Card Scheme or the Drug Payment Scheme, is unaffected by participation in the Nursing Homes Support Scheme or residence in a nursing home.

In addition to these safeguards, where an applicant's assets include land and property held in the State, the contribution based on such assets may be deferred and collected from their estate. This is known as the Nursing Home Loan (Ancillary State Support), the purpose of which is to ensure that a person does not have to sell their home during their lifetime to pay for long-term

nursing home care. A nursing home resident can apply for this deferral at any stage.

When the Nursing Homes Support Scheme commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. A number of key issues have been identified for more detailed consideration across Departments and Agencies, including recommendations in relation to improving and simplifying the application process, and recommendations relating to the treatment of business and farm assets for the purposes of the financial assessment element of the Scheme.

An Interdepartmental/Agency Working Group has been established to progress certain recommendations contained in the Review. This Group is chaired by the Department of Health and includes representatives from the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the HSE, the Revenue Commissioners, and when required, the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF).

Significant progress has already been made in relation to the implementation of recommendations relating to the administrative reforms to the Scheme. The IFA made a submission to the Working Group on the treatment of farms for the purpose of the Scheme. These proposals are currently being considered.

### **National Drugs Strategy**

231. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the Government's policy on drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3434/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** Government policy on tackling the drug problem is set out in the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016. The Strategy is a cross cutting area of public policy and service delivery, which requires a coordinated response to tackling the drug problem, involving the statutory, community and voluntary sectors. The overall objective of the Strategy is to tackle the harm caused to individuals and society by the misuse of drugs through a concerted focus on the five pillars of supply reduction, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and research. Prevention programmes constitute a significant part of the Government's response to the drug problem, particularly among young persons.

As the nature and extent of the drug problem has changed since the commencement of the current Strategy in 2009, Government is committed to putting a new drugs strategy in place this year, when the current policy expires. A Steering Committee has been established to advise me on a new Strategy, with a view to developing an integrated public health approach to substance misuse, defined as the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illegal drugs.

Significant progress has been made in developing the evidence-base for the new Strategy. This includes a high level review of the current Strategy by an international panel of experts, a review of systematic evidence reviews of interventions to tackle the drug problem and a trends analysis of the drugs situation in the past 10 years. In addition, multi-stakeholder focus groups have given their views on measures to address gaps in the current response to the drugs problem and a public consultation process has taken place, which has resulted in over 2000 submissions.

It is envisaged that the new Strategy will be based on a health-led approach to the drug problem and build on progress achieved under previous drug strategies. I understand that the Steering Committee is continuing with its deliberations and is expected to submit its final report to me by the end of March. I hope to be in a position to bring my proposals to Government on



the new Strategy thereafter.

### **Health Strategies**

232. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on eligibility criteria and guidelines for pre-exposure prophylaxis to be defined by the national sexual health strategy, either listed criteria or a release date for when the criteria will be released; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3448/17]

233. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details of the implementation group for the national sexual health strategy specifically pertaining to making pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) available; the persons on the implementation group; the frequency they meet; the timeframe to their objective regarding PrEP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3449/17]

234. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details of the demonstration project testing pre-exposure prophylaxis; the timeframe for same; the number of participants that will be involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3450/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 232 to 234, inclusive, together.

The National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020 was launched in October 2015. The strategy was developed in response to a recommendation of the National AIDS Strategy Committee on the need to establish clear leadership within the health sector around the area of sexual health. The Strategy contains 71 recommendations that address all aspects of sexual health and a Sexual Health Action Plan for 2015-2016 that contains 18 priority actions for immediate attention.

One of the priority actions identified in the Action Plan for 2016 is to 'Prioritise, develop and implement guidance to support clinical decision making for STI testing, screening and treatment and on the appropriate use of antiretroviral therapy in HIV prevention'. An Implementation Group has now been established within the HSE as an outcome of this action. This group will make recommendations on the appropriate use of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) in the overall context of the national approach to HIV prevention.

As the matters referred are service issues, these questions have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

235. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details of the State's spend on HIV prevention since 2005, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3451/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Departmental Funding**

236. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details of the State's subsidy to the gay men's health service since 2005, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3452/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

237. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3456/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Health Services Staff Recruitment**

238. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health when the position of physiotherapist for south Connemara, County Galway will be filled; the reason for the delay in filling the position which has left the area without an essential service since August 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3457/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

239. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if negotiations have taken place between his Department and a pharmaceutical company (details supplied) with a view to having the price of the drug Respreeza significantly reduced in order to ensure that it is made available to persons who suffer with emphysema caused by severe Alpha-1 here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3529/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In reaching its decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant in its view for the decision (including the information /dossier submitted by the Company) and will take into account such expert opinions and recommendations which may have been sought by

the HSE at its sole discretion (for example, from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics).

In considering an application, the HSE will also have regard to Part 1 and Part 3 of Schedule 3 of the 2013 Act. Part 3 requires the HSE to have regard to the following criteria:

1. the health needs of the public;
2. the cost-effectiveness of meeting health needs by supplying the item concerned rather than providing other health services;
3. the availability and suitability of items for supply or reimbursement;
4. the proposed costs, benefits and risks of the item or listed item relative to therapeutically similar items or listed items provided in other health service settings and the level of certainty in relation to the evidence of those costs, benefits and risks;
5. the potential or actual budget impact of the item or listed item;
6. the clinical need for the item or listed item;
7. the appropriate level of clinical supervision required in relation to the item to ensure patient safety;
8. the efficacy (performance in trial), effectiveness (performance in real situations) and added therapeutic benefit against existing standards of treatment (how much better it treats a condition than existing therapies); and
9. the resources available to the HSE.

I am informed that the HSE received a request and economic dossier from the manufacturer of Respreeza for maintenance treatment of emphysema in adults with documented severe alpha1-proteinase inhibitor deficiency.

In June of this year the HSE asked the NCPE to carry out a health technology assessment on the cost effectiveness of this treatment. The NCPE completed its assessment and made a recommendation on 9 December 2016. The NCPE determined that the manufacturer failed to demonstrate cost-effectiveness of the drug and did not recommend it for reimbursement.

A summary of the health technology assessment has been published on the NCPE website and is available at: [http://www.ncpe.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/NCPE-website-summary\\_Final.pdf](http://www.ncpe.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/NCPE-website-summary_Final.pdf).

The HSE will consider the NCPE assessment, and other expert advice, as part of its decision-making process for reimbursement. This decision will be made on objective, scientific and economic grounds by the HSE in line with the 2013 Act.

### **Departmental Investigations**

240. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has concluded his investigation into the matter of the felling of approximately 30 specimen oaks between 60 and 80 years old, with some older, in a heritage woodland (details supplied) in County Longford without a licence, which was indicated on 24 November 2016 was being undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3454/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Depart-

ment Officials are currently completing an investigation into the matter and a more complete response will issue to the Deputy shortly.

### **Departmental Investigations**

241. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will confirm that in a heritage woodland in which specimen oaks were felled (details supplied) the licensee was instructed, when issued with the licence on the basis of the National Parks and Wildlife Service conditions, to replant the field not with the sitka spruce as planned but with broadleaves, in view of the fact the area was capable of carrying broadleaves but that the licensee did not do so, replanting again with sitka spruce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3455/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department Officials are currently completing an investigation into the matter and a more complete response will issue to the Deputy shortly.

### **Basic Payment Scheme Applications**

242. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue under the 2016 basic payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3295/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted a 2016 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint schemes application on 9 May 2016. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases Remote Sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing inspection. The inspection was completed and no area over-declarations were determined. Payments due under the Basic Payment Scheme issued to the nominated bank account of the person named on 25 October and 1 December 2016. Processing of the application under the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme is currently being finalised with the intention of issuing any monies due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

### **GLAS Data**

243. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers in counties Roscommon and Galway that have received GLAS payments for 2016; the outstanding number that have yet to receive payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3303/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue.

The following table outlines the number of farmers in Roscommon and Galway actively participating in GLAS 1 and 2 that are due a payment in respect of the 2016 scheme year and the numbers of farmers that have not received a payment in respect of 2016.

Scheme	Number of active applications for Roscommon	Number of applications not paid for Roscommon	Number of active applications for Galway	Number of applications not paid for Galway
GLAS 1	1,551	325	3,144	900
GLAS 2	566	128	1,350	522

Work on processing cases which did not pass the required pre-payment checks is on-going with a view to effecting payment as quickly as possible.

### Basic Payment Scheme Applications

244. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an appeal against an administrative fine issued to a person (details supplied) in relation to the single farm payment; and when this payment for 2016 will issue. [3304/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) was received from the person named on 29 April 2015. During processing of the application, dual claim errors arose on three of the parcels declared. Following an examination of these errors, it was established that the person named did not have the right to declare this land.

The Terms and Conditions of the Basic Payment Scheme provide that where the difference between the area declared and the area found is greater than 50% of the area found no BPS payment is made for the scheme year in question and an additional penalty based on the payment that would have been payable on the rejected area, will be offset against any EU payment due to the applicant.

Following a review, the decision to apply an administrative fine still stands in this case and the person named has been advised of their right to appeal this decision to the Agriculture Appeals Office.

### Food Exports

245. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which Irish agricultural products will be marketed to other nations outside of the United Kingdom in view of the UK referendum to leave the EU; the steps he is taking in the development of plans for individual food sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3323/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is of course an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming decade. Indeed, this is all the more relevant after the UK's decision to leave the EU, which presents significant new challenges for the agri-food sector in particular.



Food Wise 2025 outlines the huge potential for growth in agri-food exports to new and emerging markets, particularly in Asia, Africa and the Gulf region. This is where our efforts will be focused for the foreseeable future, particularly given the need to diversify our markets and to reduce our reliance on traditional destinations such as the UK.

In keeping with the priorities outlined in Food Wise 2025, I and Minister Doyle led trade missions to China, Singapore, Vietnam and South Korea in September 2016. In November I also led a trade mission to Morocco which was extended at senior official level to include Algeria. Earlier in 2016, senior officials accompanied a Bord Bia trade mission to Iran, and travelled on to Turkey and met with officials to discuss trade of live animals.

I will lead a Trade Mission to the Gulf Region at the end of February. This will cover the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. My Department is currently working with Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland to finalise the arrangements for this mission, which will include participants from across the agri-food sector and will feature extensive trade contacts as well as political discussions with my counterparts in the host countries.

The mission will serve to enhance and improve our existing levels of market access in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. It will also promote Ireland's reputation as a producer of high quality, safe and sustainably produced meat and dairy products in the Gulf region. I am also considering a range of other destinations for the remainder of 2017, although no decision has yet been made in terms of content or timing. Again, markets in Asia, Africa and America are likely to feature prominently in these considerations, and I am of course ready to respond as appropriate to other opportunities that may arise.

### **Brexit Issues**

246. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to protect agricultural producers from currency value shifts between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom following the UK referendum to leave the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3324/17]

247. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ensure smooth agricultural trade between the Border region, notably counties Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Donegal, and Northern Ireland under the possibility of a hard Border with the Republic of Ireland following the UK referendum to leave the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3325/17]

248. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to protect farmers and other agricultural producers under the possibility of a hard Border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, especially in counties Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Donegal, following the UK referendum to leave the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3331/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 246 to 248, inclusive, together.

I am acutely aware of the potential risks and challenges that arise in the agri-food sector from the Brexit vote, including in counties Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Donegal. My Department's ultimate goal in relation to the agri-food sector is to be able to continue to trade freely with the UK in both directions. This trade should be carried out without tariffs and with minimal additional customs and administrative procedures.

The most immediate impact of the vote on Irish farming has been the effect of exchange rate volatility, with sectors such as mushrooms and forestry particularly exposed due to their high dependence on the UK market. In response, my Department and its agencies have implemented a range of measures, including the new low-interest agri-cash flow fund of €150m, agri-taxation measures, increased funding of Bord Bia and BIM, investment in R and D and innovation, and increased expenditure on the Rural Development Programme and the Seafood Development Programme.

A number of additional issues arise over the longer term, mainly in the context of the potential future trading relationship between the UK and the EU, but also in the related areas of standards, and veterinary and certification requirements. There is a particular North-South dimension to these issues which will need to be addressed also and there are separate, and potentially severe, implications arising from the loss of the UK contribution to the EU budget, and from future access to fisheries stocks.

I consider it vitally important that our key message of remaining as close as possible to the current trading arrangements is heard and understood across Europe, and for that reason the extensive consultations currently being undertaken with our EU counterparts at political and official levels will continue, and indeed intensify, over the coming months.

### **Agriculture Scheme Payments**

249. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3344/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named is also a participant in the Burren Programme, and because of the synergies between the two schemes the processing of his Organic Farming Scheme application could not be progressed until it was clear what his precise eligibility for payment would be in respect of both these schemes. A determination has now been made on this and I am happy to say that a letter of approval and first payment under the Organic Farming Scheme will issue shortly.

### **Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility**

250. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will reinstate area aid for a person (details supplied). [3348/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 20 October 2015, thus incurring 100% late penalty as per the Terms and Conditions of the 2015 Scheme. My Department has been in contact with the representatives of the person named on numerous occasions and a letter has issued to him outlining the position and informing him of his right of appeal.

### **GLAS Payments**

251. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason payment has not issued under GLAS 1 to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; when payment is likely to issue; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [3357/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015.

The application has not successfully completed the 2015 prepayment checking process, due to issues identified with the Basic Payment Scheme application and issues found with the Commonage action. Department officials are examining these issues with a view to resolving and further processing the application for payment at the earliest opportunity.

Following the issue of payment in respect of the 2015 scheme year, the prepayment checks will get under way for 2016.

### **Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments**

252. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason payment has not issued under the agri-environment option scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; when payment is likely to issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3360/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1 September 2011. Payments have issued in respect of the 2011-2015 Scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. As all AEOS 2 participants will be receiving their final payments under the scheme, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. Officials are working through these files and payment will be made as soon as possible.

### **Scéimeanna Talmhaíochta**

253. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht faoin Scéim Buníocaíochta/Scéim na Limistéar faoi Shrianta Nádúrtha, don bhliain 2016, le feirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí leis seo); cén fáth go bhfuil moill ar an íocaíocht seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [3362/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Fuair mo Roinn iarratas faoi Scéim Buníocaíochta 2016 ón duine ainmnithe ar an 2 Meitheamh 2016. De réir na dTearmaí agus Coinníollacha a bhaineann leis an scéim, gearradh pionós 13% ar an iarratas seo as ucht é a bheith déanach. I mí Eanáir 2017, íocadh an t-airgead faoin Scéim Buníocaíochta go díreach isteach i gcuntas bainc ainmnithe an iarratasóra. Níl aon taifead ann gur chuir an duine ainmnithe isteach ar Scéim na Limistéar faoi Shrianta Nádúrtha. Rachaidh oifigeach ó mo Roinn i dteagmháil leis an duine ainmnithe chun an scéal a mhíniú.

### **GLAS Applications**

254. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for a farm payment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [3445/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full entitlements in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

The 2016 prepayment checking process was not successfully completed due to issues identified with the Natura and Protection of Watercourses from Bovines actions. The cross checks with the Basic Payment Scheme found that the Crop Code/parcel usage for both the Natura and Protection of Watercourses from Bovines actions were not in accordance with scheme specifications and therefore requires further examination. Department officials are actively working to resolve these issues to allow further processing of the application for 2016 payment.

### **Afforestation Programme**

255. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the planting of forestry on a commonage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3446/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Commonage land is not automatically excluded from the Afforestation Grant and Premium Schemes. However, all shareholders must be identified and each must give their consent to the application. Further information on ownership and commonages may be obtained from Section 3 the Forestry Schemes Manual.

All applications for Afforestation are subjected to a screening process to determine if an Environmental Impact Assessment is required. In some cases, applications will be screened for an appropriate assessment to ascertain if there could be a potential adverse impact on a designated Natura 2000 site. National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) may be requested to provide their observations, particularly when a proposed site is close to a SAC. Any restrictions would depend on many factors, such as the location, size and type of site, and information received during the consultation process.

### **Afforestation Programme**

256. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding planting a commonage with forestry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3462/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Commonage land is not automatically excluded from the Afforestation Grant and Premium Schemes. However, all shareholders must be identified and each must give their consent to the application. Further information on ownership and commonages may be obtained from Section 3 the Forestry Schemes Manual.

All applications for Afforestation are subjected to a screening process to determine if an Environmental Impact Assessment is required. In some cases, applications will be screened for an appropriate assessment to ascertain if there could be a potential adverse impact on a designated Natura 2000 site. National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) may be requested to provide their observations, particularly when a proposed site is close to a SAC. Any restrictions would depend on many factors, such as the location, size and type of site, and information received

during the consultation process.

### Alternative Energy Projects

257. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the use of biomass at Ireland's peat burning power stations, Edenderry, Loughree, and west Offaly; the percentage of biomass used in co-firing at the three peat power stations; the tonnage and percentage of biomass supplied from Bord na Móna willow plantations, Coillte Teoranta and a company (details supplied); the outlook for expanding willow production and Coillte Teoranta sourced biomass; if straw from agricultural tillage is being considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3308/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** Within the Programme for Government, there is a commitment to further decrease Ireland's dependence on imported fossil fuels through the use of indigenous renewable energy resources. This commitment builds upon the recognition in the 2015 Energy White Paper of the long-term strategic importance of diversifying Ireland's energy generation portfolio and largely decarbonising the energy sector by 2050. Ireland's transition to a low carbon energy future will ultimately involve moving to lower emissions fuels (e.g. moving initially from peat and coal to gas), and ultimately towards a greater reliance on renewable energy, including biomass. It is important to note, however, that the fuel used in power stations is a matter for the operators involved and I have no role or function in this regard.

However, I am aware that there is substantial co-firing of biomass with peat taking place at the Edenderry plant operated by Bord na Móna. Currently, this plant is receiving support under REFIT 3. I have been informed that in 2016 the total biomass usage at the Edenderry Power Plant was 317,962 tonnes, of this 99,022 tonnes was imported. The two ESB operated plants cited by the Deputy are not presently receiving support under REFIT 3, yet I understand that they have been undertaking trials with different forms of biomass.

The Bioenergy Scheme administered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine previously provided once-off capital grants to facilitate the establishment of willow for use in renewable energy production. However, uptake on the Scheme was poor and attracted only four applications in 2015. The continuation of a support scheme to grow bioenergy crops is now under review.

In addition, Bord na Móna and Coillte Teoranta are presently developing proposals to establish a partnership, to be known as Bioenergy Ireland, which would seek to stimulate both the demand and supply sides of the biomass market with a range of company-led initiatives.

In 2016, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) published its report 'Bioenergy Supply in Ireland 2015-2035' in which a number of bioenergy resources were examined in detail, including straw. This report can be downloaded from the SEAI website at [http://www.seai.ie/Publications/Renewables\\_Publications\\_/Bioenergy/Bioenergy-Supply-in-Ireland-2015-2035.pdf](http://www.seai.ie/Publications/Renewables_Publications_/Bioenergy/Bioenergy-Supply-in-Ireland-2015-2035.pdf)

### Broadband Service Provision

258. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans for extending broadband in areas (details supplied) in County Longford. [3346/17]



**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I refer to the reply to Question Number 1481 of 17 January, 2017 in which I advised that the business referred to falls within the AMBER area, which is the target area for the State Intervention and will, therefore, be included in the State Intervention procurement process which is now underway.

### **Waste Management**

259. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that waste from the former Bray town council dump at Bray Harbour is being washed into the Irish Sea; if so, the action being taken to rectify this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3399/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** In accordance with the provisions of the Waste Management Act 1996, the preparation and adoption of a waste management plan is the statutory responsibility of the local authority or authorities concerned, and under section 60(3) of the Act I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance by a local authority, in particular circumstances, of a statutory function vested in it.

However, I am aware of the former Bray Municipal Landfill which was operated by Bray Urban District Council (now part of Wicklow County Council) at North Beach, Bray. This site is located largely within the county boundary of Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and has been the subject of on-going erosion by winter storms at sea over a prolonged period. The majority of this site is now in the private ownership of Woodbrook Golf Club.

At the end of January 2016 the Environmental Protection Agency advised Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council to carry out an Environmental Risk Assessment, including site investigations.

On foot of this advice, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council appointed Fehily Timoney & Company to carry out the necessary work. A detailed site investigation has been carried out and a technical report is currently being considered by Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, Wicklow County Council and the EPA.

The purpose of this technical report is to identify any remedial measures that may be required to protect the environment in the immediate area of the former landfill. Regular monitoring and inspections of the beach are being carried out by Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, Wicklow County Council and Woodbrook Golf Club. In addition Woodbrook Golf Club has assigned one of their staff members to do a regular clean-up of any debris found on the beach.

### **Electricity Generation**

260. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider instructing the appropriate semi-State companies under his Department that are engaged in electric power generation to engage with the liquidator of a company (details supplied) to determine whether any of the semi-State companies could complete this project and operate it. [3409/17]

261. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment if he will instruct his Department to engage with the liquidator of a company (details supplied) in County Mayo to determine the assistance the State could lend to ensure this project is completed in view of the fact that it will provide some much needed employment in County Mayo and assist greatly in marketing the area, in conjunction with the fiber optic cable that came on shore in Killala, as a place for technology companies and potentially data centres to locate. [3410/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 260 and 261 together.

As Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I have overall responsibility for several commercial semi state companies a number of whom are involved in renewable electricity generation. However, the issues the Deputy raises are an operational matter for the Board and management of each company and one in which I have no direct function.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

262. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3453/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed broadband services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated.

A key principle of the NBP is to support and stimulate commercial investment through policy and regulatory measures. Commercial investment since the publication of the NBP has considerably exceeded expectations. To date, the commercial telecommunications sector has invested over €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of high speed broadband and mobile telecoms services.

Currently, approximately 1.4m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband from commercial service providers and investment by the telecoms sector is continuing to expand this footprint.

The proposed State intervention under the NBP represents a potentially very significant capital investment project for the State and the Government is firmly committed to delivering this investment, as evidenced in the National Broadband Plan itself and in the Programme for Government, the Action Plan for Jobs and the Statement of Government Priorities.

The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie) shows the current extent of the State Intervention area. The map shows Ireland with two colours, BLUE and AMBER. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services. The AMBER areas on the map show the target areas for the State intervention which are the subject of the current procurement process. It is intended that premises within this area will have access to services of at least 30 megabits per second when the procurement process is completed and the network rolled out.

Under EU State Aid rules, public investment in a commercial market has to be targeted at

areas where there is evidence of market failure. Therefore, the Government's proposed investment under the NBP will apply to those parts of the country that are unlikely to be served commercially.

A formal procurement process is now in train to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area. The procurement process is being intensively managed, to ensure an outcome that delivers a future-proofed network that serves homes and businesses across Ireland, for at least 25 years. Intensive dialogue with bidders is continuing and the three bidders have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution. This provides for a future proofed solution for the 25 years of the contract and beyond. A fibre-to-the-home solution means that householders and businesses may get speeds not just of 30 Megabits per second but much higher, potentially up to 1000 Megabits per second.

The timeframe for the procurement continues to be dependent on a range of factors including the complexities that may be encountered by the procurement team and bidders, during the procurement process. During the Department's extensive stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated a 3-5 year timeline to rollout a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP. As part of the competitive process, the Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best rollout strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and/or high demand. This will need to be balanced with the most efficient network rollout plan. A prioritisation programme will be put in place in this regard, in consultation with the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. A detailed rollout plan for the network will be published once contract(s) are in place.

The Programme for Government also commits to measures to assist in the rollout of the network once a contract is awarded. In this regard, Minister Humphreys is leading on the establishment of two regional action groups, working with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices and other relevant agencies to help accelerate the broadband network build in rural Ireland, once a contract(s) has been awarded.

In a further positive initiative, last July, I established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce with my colleague Minister Humphreys to address immediate issues in relation to the quality of mobile phone and broadband coverage. The Taskforce report which was published in December, is available at the following link:<http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx>

I recently signed Regulations allowing ComReg to proceed with the allocation of spectrum in the 3.6GHz band, in early 2017. This will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services. I have also secured €8m for RTE which will allow it to free up the 700MHz spectrum band, to provide enhanced mobile services.

These investments should assist in significantly improving the coverage and quality of broadband and mobile voice and data services throughout the country, including Co Kerry.

### **Coras Iompair Éireann**

263. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the surplus or deficit for the year after public service obligation payments and after exceptional items for each of the years 2010 to 2016; and the accumulated deficit or surplus at start and end of the year respectively for each of the CIÉ constituent companies. [3251/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The information re-

quested is publicly available through the published accounts of the CIÉ Group and its subsidiary companies. However in order to assist the Deputy I have forwarded the Deputy's question to CIÉ for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Road Projects Status**

264. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of Transport Infrastructure Ireland's study into the current capacity of the N4 and N7; when this report will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3311/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme.

The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Sports Capital Programme Data**

265. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of capital sports grants allocated to local authorities and all sports capital grant payments to local authorities since 2006, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3313/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** Details of all allocations under the Sports Capital Programme, including those referred to by the Deputy, are published on the Department's website [www.dttas.ie](http://www.dttas.ie). Details of all payment made since 2008 are also published on the Department's website. Payments prior to 2008 are contained in the Appropriation Accounts published by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General [www.audgen.gov.ie](http://www.audgen.gov.ie).

### **Vehicle Registration**

266. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review and address the concerns of a company (details supplied) in relation to a matter; his future plans to ease the pressure on this type of business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3318/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** With regard to the registration and entry into service of newly imported motor vehicles in Ireland, Ireland's *European Communities (Road Vehicles: Entry into Service) Regulations 2009 – S.I. 157 of 2009* give effect to the requirements set out in Directive 2007/46/EC (as amended) on vehicle type approval, and to each of the separate EU Directives and Regulations in relation to same.

Currently, I have no proposals to amend the existing Entry into Service Regulations as suggested in the details supplied with the Deputy's Question.

## Brexit Issues

267. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure ease of transit and continued transportation for those persons who live in the Border region, notably counties Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, and Donegal, and who commute to work in Northern Ireland, under the possibility of a hard Border with the Republic of Ireland following the UK referendum to leave the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3335/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Government has been very clear on Ireland's priorities in the preparing for the UK exit from the EU. These are:

- economic and trading arrangements,
- the Northern Ireland Peace Process including border issues,
- the common travel area, and
- the future of the European Union.

In her speech last week, Prime Minister May highlighted the closeness of the relationship between Britain and Ireland and indicated that her priorities include maintaining the common travel area and avoiding a return to a hard border with Northern Ireland. The challenge is to see how this can be achieved.

My Department has and will continue to undertake extensive consultations with sectorial stakeholders on the implications of the UK exit and the actions that both industry and the Government need to take to mitigate these impacts. Minister of State O'Donovan and I hosted All-Island Sectorial Dialogues for Transport and Tourism in Dundalk on Monday last in which some 200 interested parties from both sides of the border participated. The importance of the freedom of movement across the border was a major issue for all involved and re-inforced the priority that the Government is giving to this matter.

The Government has fully engaged with our EU partners, including the Barnier negotiation team, on our priorities. Our negotiation positions have been prepared while risks and mitigation measures are being identified.

## Road Projects

268. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the review to be carried out by his Department on a submission from Kildare County Council regarding the Athy ring road before the project goes to An Bord Pleanála; if this process will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3352/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As you know the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads, such as the Athy Distributor Road, is the statutory responsibility of Kildare County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides that a number of schemes, including the Athy Distributor Road, targeting bottlenecks in the road network will be progressed subject to necessary approvals. In this context the project has to meet the requirements of the Public Spending Code and my Department's Common Appraisal Framework for Transport Projects as well as obtaining planning approval. It is a matter for Kildare



County Council to progress the scheme through the approval process.

As regards the planning approval process, the Council has advised my Department that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Screening report has been prepared and it concludes that an EIS is required. I understand that the Council has sought An Bord Pleanála's direction under Clause 50(1) (b) of the Roads Act, as amended, for the preparation of an EIS. The Council is to inform my Department when a direction from An Bord Pleanála is received.

In relation to the project appraisal process, the Council has submitted the project Business Case and Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) documentation for consideration by my Department. Consideration of the project appraisal documentation involves a number of steps. As the project has an estimated cost in excess of €20 million, my Department's Economic and Financial Evaluation Unit in liaison with the Central Expenditure and Evaluation Unit (CEEU) in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will need to review the CBA for compliance with the Public Spending Code and my Department's Common Appraisal Framework. The overall Business Case will then need approval.

The project appraisal procedure will be progressed as soon as possible taking into account available resources. I can confirm my support for this project and have made available an allocation of €1 million as part of yesterday's announcement on Regional and Local roads grants to progress this project.

### **Road Improvement Schemes**

269. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will ensure that funding is provided in 2017 towards the provision of necessary road improvement works on a national route (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3375/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme.

The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Transport Infrastructure Ireland**

270. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of the provisions in the contract between Transport Infrastructure Ireland and a company (details supplied) with regard to the construction of Dundalk bypass whereby TII could instruct contract variations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3380/17]

271. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated amount of compensation that would have to be paid to a company (details supplied) for any loss of income as a result of the dismantling of the Drogheda slip road tolls; the number of years the compensation would cover; if he will provide the compensation broken down by year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3381/17]

272. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the

methods by which his Department would calculate the estimated amount of compensation in relation to any possible loss of income to a company (details supplied) as a result of the dismantling of the Drogheda slip roads; the variables and formula to be used; the rationale for the variables; the source for the information for the variables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3382/17]

273. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the person or body that has the power to levy tolls on national roads to make toll bye laws and to enter into agreements relating to tolls on national roads; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3383/17]

274. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the costs of operating the slip road tolls at the Donore exit in Drogheda; the operational costs, staffing costs and all other associated costs broken down by year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3384/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 270 to 274, inclusive, together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Furthermore, the statutory power to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into agreements relating to tolls on national roads is vested in Transport Infrastructure Ireland under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 as amended.

As indicated previously to the Deputy, the contractual arrangements relating to M1 tolls are, therefore, matters for TII. As part of the contract, the PPP Company is entitled to charge tolls in line with the approved toll scheme. The approved toll scheme provides for tolls on the main motorway and the Donore Interchange ramps. My understanding is that the Donore ramp toll plazas were installed to mitigate possible “rat running” with the adverse impacts that would have on local communities. In response to concerns expressed at the time about the possible impact on business in Drogheda, the approved toll scheme stipulates that where a vehicle exits the motorway, having paid a toll, and re-enters within three hours, no further charge is payable.

As the contractual provisions relating to the operation of the M1 and Donore ramp toll plazas, including the contract variation provisions, are matters for TII, I have referred the Deputy’s Question to TII for reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Driver Test Centres**

275. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of driving tests conducted at the Finglas and Raheny driving test centres, Dublin, for each of the years 2014 to 2016; the number of driving instructors based at each of those driving test centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3386/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority.

I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to

contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

### **Road Tolls**

276. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the annual levels of commuter and commercial traffic non HGVs and HGVs that used the N25 Waterford City bypass toll bridge in 2015 and 2016; and the total revenue raised by these toll stations in each of these years. [3413/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and operation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Furthermore, the statutory power to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into agreements relating to tolls on national roads is vested in TII under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 as amended.

As the Deputy's question relates to a matter directly within the responsibility of TII, I have referred the question to them for their direct reply. Please advise my Private Office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Roads Maintenance Funding**

277. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the money that will be allocated to the R312 for upgrade works in 2017; his Department's long-term plan for this vital road connecting Erris to Castlebar in which the county's main hospital is situated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3436/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in Mayo is the statutory responsibility of Mayo County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

My Department received an application in 2015 in respect of the R312 under the Strategic Grant Programme. As a result of the substantial cutbacks in grant funding for roads during the financial crisis, the Strategic Grant Programme had to be curtailed in order to protect funding for road maintenance and repair and Mayo County Council was, therefore, notified in July 2015 that the Department was not in a position to provide an allocation for the proposed major upgrade scheme.

Further contacts between my Department and Mayo County Council officials last year resulted in a number of targeted measures to address issues with specific sections of the R312. These measures covered rehabilitation and resurfacing works together with a specific project to address the bottleneck at Glenisland Bridge. Provision is being made for the continuation of the Glenisland bridge project in 2017.

## **Brexit Issues**

278. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to protect general trade between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland especially in counties Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Donegal under the possibility of a hard Border following the UK referendum to leave the EU; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3328/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** Promoting cross-border trade in light of the potential impacts of Brexit is a key priority for the Government as a whole.

It is, of course, hard to predict at this stage what the impact of Brexit will be for all of Ireland, including the border counties. Much will depend on the nature of the deal that will be negotiated between the UK and the EU. This Government will seek, during that process, to highlight our unique economic ties with Northern Ireland.

It is clear that the cross-border market on the island is a particularly important one for SMEs, with nearly two thirds of Northern Ireland small firm exports going South and one sixth of Ireland's small firm exports going North.

Inter Trade Ireland has initiated a research project being undertaken by the ESRI to examine the impact of differing trade regimes which may emerge in the post-Brexit environment. This study will include an analysis of tariff rates to look at the range of possible impacts for products currently traded between both jurisdictions. It will also analyse data on the extent and concentration of Cross Border Trade as well as barriers to exporting.

Inter Trade Ireland has also undertaken a series of events for SMEs to raise awareness of Brexit issues, with more planned. They have published information material for their companies setting out key challenges posed by Brexit. Further initiatives by Inter Trade Ireland on this issue are also being developed for roll out later this year.

I am engaged strongly with Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland to ensure that Irish jobs are maintained and created. I am in constant communication with these agencies, and chair a Brexit Coordination Group, which includes the senior management of my Department and the CEOs of the agencies. As part of the Government's ongoing dialogue with interested parties, I have organised a stakeholder engagement event on the 30th of January, in Carrick on Shannon, Co Leitrim. This will be an important event to hear the views of stakeholders, both directly and through representative bodies.

Enterprise Ireland is working with its 1,500 clients who export to the UK, looking at the individual challenges faced by companies in every county in Ireland and also on a sectoral level, as some sectors are more exposed than others.

From a strategic perspective, Enterprise Ireland has a two pronged approach. It is working to assist companies to maintain and grow UK exports and extend their international reach. It is also supporting companies in enhancing their competitiveness to protect and grow Irish exports and jobs. In this regard, EI is assisting clients to improve their processes to drive efficiencies and cost reductions and undertake R&D and innovation with a view to improving existing products and processes or developing new ones.

## **Legislative Process**

279. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

when the Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016 will be enacted; when the sections dealing with accounting for micro companies will be enacted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3391/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** The Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016 completed Committee Stage in the Dáil on 22 November 2016. Enactment of the Bill remains a legislative priority for the Government. Accordingly, I hope Dáil Report Stage will be scheduled as soon as possible. Clearly, the timing of enactment thereafter will depend on the availability of parliamentary time.

The Bill introduces financial reporting provisions for a new category of micro company, which is a subset of the category of small company. It is intended to commence these provisions shortly after enactment of the Bill.

### **Brexit Issues**

280. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which her Department has examined new markets both inside and outside the European Union for Irish products in order to compensate for the consequences of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3522/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** To drive the export led growth strategy, the Government through Enterprise Ireland is focused on a two key priorities to;

(1) intensify its work with clients to maintain and grow UK exports and extend their reach into international markets,

(2) reinforce the competitiveness of clients with ambition by strengthening their productivity, innovation and management capability to become more competitive in international markets.

I launched Enterprise Ireland's new Strategy 2017 – 2020 on Monday 9th January 2017. This Strategy sets out very ambitious targets to grow the level of exports by €5bn to €26bn per annum with over two-thirds of those outside of the UK.

EI's export strategy is twofold – it has a specific focus on consolidating exports in the UK and it will remain an important market for Ireland. EI will be implementing a UK Market Development plan which focusses on sustaining exports in key sectors such as construction, agritech, aerospace and engineering and also identifying new growth opportunities in financial services, infrastructure/public sector. EI's trade mission programme, which will be launched in the coming weeks, outlines a number of trade missions to the UK focussing on some of these key sectors. EI is also working with companies heavily focussed on the UK, at a sector by sector and one to one basis, through its UK office, on improving their competitiveness and innovation capabilities to sustain and grow exports.

The second part of the strategy focuses on increasing exports to markets beyond the UK. EI's plans have a specific emphasis on markets, including the Eurozone, where it plans to increase exports by 50% to 2020, the USA/Canada, Asia and the Middle East. EI's international trade & events programme, which will be launched shortly, focusses on trade missions, market study visits and inwards buyer visits from markets with specific sectoral opportunities.

To drive this strategy, 39 posts will be created in a number of Enterprise Ireland's overseas



offices and in the Irish based team. On foot of 2015 export figures, there is immediate opportunity and potential for strengthening our foothold in existing established markets and for diversified export growth. In 2015, sales to North American grew by 27%, Northern Europe by 8% and Asia-PAC by 11%.

Extra staff will be placed in EI's overseas offices with sectoral knowledge and expertise such as in engineering, food, life sciences and construction. This will drive export growth to other international markets where there are known opportunities and reduce reliance on the UK.

Nevertheless, the UK will continue to be a priority market due to Ireland's size, geographic proximity and cultural ties. EI will focus on increasing international sales with existing buyers while also supporting companies to develop new strategic relationships and avail of emerging opportunities, particularly in the engineering and construction sectors.

In 2017, EI will also rollout the 'Global Ambition Campaign' which is a communications campaign to promote Irish companies and their products and services to international buyers.

### **Trade Agreements**

281. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the progress in respect of any other transatlantic trade agreements with the EU; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3527/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** The EU has successfully concluded a number of important trade agreements and is in the process of negotiating or upgrading agreements with many more trading partners. Free Trade Agreements are designed to create opportunities by opening new markets for goods and services thereby increasing export and investment opportunities.

On the 30th October 2016, the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement was signed at the EU-Canada Summit in Brussels by representatives from Canada, the EU and the Member States. After signature, the European Parliament must now give its consent to CETA for it to enter into force provisionally.

There have been 15 rounds to date in the EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership Agreement negotiation. Following the recent US Presidential election and the change of administration there is now a natural pause in the negotiation rounds until the new US administration is appointed in 2017.

In 1997, Mexico was the first Latin American country to conclude an Economic Partnership, Political Coordination and Cooperation Agreement with the EU ('the EU-Mexico Global Agreement'). The agreement included trade provisions that were developed into a Free Trade Agreement that entered into force in October 2000. On 25th May 2016, the EU and Mexico launched negotiations to modernise the EU-Mexico Global Agreement including the trade and investment pillar.

The EU has a comprehensive Trade Agreement with Colombia and Peru which has been provisionally applied since the 1st March 2013 with Peru and 1st August 2013 with Colombia. The EU together with Ecuador, Colombia and Peru, signed the Protocol of Accession of Ecuador to the Trade Agreement on the 11th November 2016.

The EU is also currently negotiating a trade agreement with Mercosur, encompassing Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, as part of the overall negotiation for a bi-regional As-

sociation Agreement which will also cover a political and a cooperation pillar.

### **Manufacturing Sector**

282. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to the efforts being made by a company (details supplied) to establish a facility in Dublin; her views on whether the project is worth supporting; if so, her plans to advance the delivery of this project which already has been specifically highlighted in the Dublin Region Action Plan for Jobs; her further views on whether Dublin and Ireland will be disadvantaged as a result of the continuing absence of said facility from the manufacturing innovation ecosystem here at a time when there are a myriad of supports, facilities and investments all catering narrowly for the software sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3460/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** My Department has previously engaged with the promoters of this facility in connection with a request for financial support to facilitate its possible development in Dublin. There are, however, a number of significant financial, legal and logistical issues that remain to be addressed before further consideration can be given to the proposal.

More broadly, I very much recognise the importance of the manufacturing sector in Ireland. I also want to emphasise that the range of supports offered by my Department and its Agencies to enterprise extend far beyond the software sector.

### **Child and Family Agency Data**

283. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of adults and children in Tusla funded domestic violence refuges and the number of adults and children in Tusla funded domestic violence step down accommodation on the first day of every month in 2016. [3443/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** In 2016, Tusla provided €20.6 million in funding to support the provision of domestic, sexual and gender based violence services. This included funding for some 60 services throughout the country comprising:

- €12.0 m for emergency refuge and support services,
- €4.6m for community based domestic violence support services, and
- €4.0m for Rape Crisis Centres.

The provision of domestic violence refuge spaces nationally in 2016 was 155 family units, comprising 147 emergency refuge family units and 8 emergency non-refuge family units.

Tusla data indicates that in 2015, 1,736 women and 2,621 children were forced to leave their homes as a result of domestic violence and were accommodated in domestic violence accommodation. Data on the numbers of women and children who used these services in 2016 will be available later in the year. Tusla does not routinely collect information in respect of the numbers of women and children who use funded domestic violence refuges and step down accommodation on a month by month basis.

I have emphasised to Tusla the priority that I attach to the provision of services for those impacted by domestic violence. In 2017, Tusla is giving priority to implementing actions contained in the second National Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Strategy, in preparation for ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), which includes improving access to services geographically, including the provision of additional short-term and safe, emergency accommodation for women and children.

### **Adoption Services Provision**

284. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the facilities which will be provided to help adopted persons to trace their relatives under new legislation. [3286/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Adoption (Information and Tracing Bill) was published in November 2016. The Bill states that Tusla - the Child and Family Agency will provide an information and tracing service to persons affected by adoption that will incorporate support and guidance, facilitate contact, provide the information specifically referred to in Part 4 of the Bill and locate an individual if requested.

The Government recently published its Spring/ Summer legislative programme and the Adoption (Information and Tracing) is on the Seanad order paper for Second Stage.

### **Residential Institutions**

285. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department has considered introducing a help line for survivors of institutional abuse. [3287/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** There are no plans for my Department to introduce a helpline for survivors of institutional abuse. However, a range of supports are already available to survivors of institutional abuse.

Caranua, originally known as the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board, was established in 2013 to improve the quality of life and well-being of Survivors of the Irish institutional care system and is an independent state body and aims to get Survivors access to the services they require to enhance their health and well-being. The Caranua fund comes from religious congregations who committed €110 million for Survivors of institutional abuse.

The HSE also provides counselling services for survivors of institutional abuse. Its National Counselling Service (NCS) is a professional, confidential counselling and psychotherapy service available free of charge in all regions of the country. The service provides professional, confidential counselling and psychotherapy services free of charge in all regions of the HSE for adults who have experienced trauma and abuse in childhood with priority given to adult survivors of institutional abuse.

In relation to the Deputy's specific question regarding a helpline, survivors of institutional abuse seeking information may telephone the HSE National Information line: Lo Call 1850 241850 Monday - Friday 9 am - 5 pm and they will be connected to a local support service.

### **Legislative Programme**

286. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when she expects the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 to come before Dáil Éireann; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3296/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Adoption (Information and Tracing Bill) was published in November 2016. The Government recently published its Spring/Summer legislative programme and the Adoption (Information and Tracing) is on the Seanad order paper for Second Stage.

### **Child and Family Agency Data**

287. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of childminders that have registered with Tusla since 1 September 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3297/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Officials from my Department have made enquiries with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, on this matter. I can confirm that since the 1st September 2016 Tusla have received two childminder registrations.

### **Proposed Legislation**

288. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when she expects to publish the heads of a Bill for the Child Care (Amendment) Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3299/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As you the Deputy will be aware, my Department has been working to develop proposals for the reform of Guardian *ad litem* arrangements in child care proceedings under the Child Care Act, 1991. The public consultation carried out by my Department with a wide range of stakeholders has informed the development of policy proposals in this regard.

I am pleased to advise you that on 17 January, Government approved the draft Heads and General Scheme of a Bill to bring about significant reforms in this important area and that this is now available on my Department's website. I intend to submit the General Scheme immediately to the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs for pre-legislative scrutiny.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education**

289. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the loophole in the ECCE scheme which is discriminating against children when it comes to the provision of child care; her plans to close this loophole and rectify this situation for thousands of parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3301/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As the Deputy is aware, the initial Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme had one entry point (September) from when children could begin pre-school and children had to be aged between 3 years and 2 months and 4 years and 7 months by the September to avail of the free pre-school year (i.e. 38 weeks). The programme was then expanded by reducing the age of eligibility to 3 years and by increasing the number of entry points to three throughout the programme year

(September, January and April). This means that children can begin to avail of their free place on the pre-school programme as soon as possible after they reach the age of 3. Eligibility for the ECCE programme is bounded at the upper end by the requirement that children begin primary education from the age of 6. Providing free pre-school for children from the age of 3 was a key recommendation of the *Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy*.

We must also be cognisant of children's levels of development, as the scheme contains both a care and education component. Participation in ECCE provides children with their first formal experience of early learning, the starting-point of their educational and social development outside the home. Children who avail of pre-school are more likely to be ready for school and a formal learning and social environment.

I would also note to the Deputy that plans are currently in train to provide for a new national scheme of financial support for parents towards the cost of their childcare entitled the Affordable Childcare Scheme, which will replace the existing targeted childcare subsidisation schemes with a single, streamlined and more user-friendly scheme. The new scheme will provide a system from which both universal and targeted subsidies can be provided towards the cost of childcare. In the case of targeted subsidies, these will be payable for children from 6 months of age up to 15 years of age. The level of subsidy will depend on the investment available and on a family's income. The new Affordable Childcare Scheme does not replace ECCE as it is intended to provide "wraparound" care for pre-school and school-age children.

### Departmental Schemes

290. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of plans for the single affordable childcare scheme announced in budget 2017; the way in which it is intended to allocate the funding provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3310/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Following the decision in Budget 2017, a new Affordable Childcare Scheme will be introduced later this year which will provide financial support for parents towards the cost of childcare. The new Scheme will provide a system from which both universal and targeted subsidies can be provided towards the cost of childcare. This new Scheme will replace the existing targeted childcare programmes with a single, streamlined and more user-friendly scheme and will include "wraparound" care for pre-school and school-age children.

The universal element of the Scheme will be available to all families with children between the age of 6 months and 36 months (or until the child qualifies for the free pre-school programme if later than 36 months). The targeted element of the scheme will involve a progressive system of income-related subsidies for parents with children between 6 months and 15 years, with eligibility based on net parental income. The Scheme will be available in childcare providers who are registered with Tusla, including both centre-based childcare providers (e.g. crèches, preschools and daycare centres) and child-minders.

The Scheme is designed to be flexible, with the ability to adjust income-thresholds and subsidy rates over time as additional state investment becomes available. The policy paper on the Scheme was approved by Government in October 2016. A report on the national public consultation on the scheme, which was carried out in November 2016 and yielded 4,000 responses, will be completed in February 2017. The Heads of Bill and General Scheme were approved by Government on 24th January 2017. Work will now commence on the drafting of legislation in line with the Heads of Bill and General Scheme.



## **Child Care Services Funding**

291. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason for the delay from her Department regarding the issuing of transitional funding to support the impact to community child care services regarding the exclusion of community employment trainees, without level 5 qualification, from adult-child ratios; if her attention has been drawn to the impact this has on the sustainability of the community child care sector; and if her Department will be focusing on such issues when tackling potential sustainability challenges in the development of the single affordable childcare programme. [3353/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Following receipt of a status report in late December, my Department is currently finalising a package of support for services who have engaged with Childcare Committees Ireland and established through this process that their sustainability is impacted by the full implementation of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016. This is the final stage of a process that has been ongoing since early 2016 focused on sustainability issues directly related to the impact of the childcare regulations, whereby Community Employment workers without FETAC Level 5 qualifications in childcare are no longer counted towards staff:child ratios in services.

Good-faith engagement of services with this project, including completion of all project documents, is an absolute requirement in order for funding to be considered, and my Department cannot assess incomplete applications, or applications for funding, falling outside these criteria.

The Affordable Childcare Scheme sets out to provide for a childcare subsidy to parents that will support an affordable childcare cost at different income thresholds. It is envisaged that the scheme will make a significant positive contribution towards the sustainability of many community childcare services, particularly because the proposed maximum subsidy under the scheme will be significantly greater than the current maximum subsidy under the Community Childcare Subvention. It is estimated that 77% of beneficiaries of current targeted schemes will receive the maximum subsidy rate under the new scheme.

Given the importance of financial sustainability for the provision of quality childcare, the Irish Programme for Government commits to conducting and publishing an independent review of the cost of providing quality childcare in Ireland. This commitment aligns closely with work on the design and development of the Affordable Childcare Scheme and is currently being progressed in that context.

Department officials are reviewing previous published research and analysis on the cost of childcare provision, are assessing available data sources and are scoping the precise requirements for the independent review. Issues that the review may consider include (1) the total average cost of quality childcare provision, (2) variation in cost and the reasons for same, (3) the link between cost and quality, (4) the cost of providing childcare services in disadvantaged communities and (5) the likely impact of future cost pressures, including the ongoing professionalisation of the sector.

## **Youth Services Provision**

292. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the provision of a much needed dedicated youth officer for County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3444/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people and involve approximately 1,400 youth work staff in 477 projects and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country. In 2016, funding of €51m was provided to my Department for these schemes. As the Deputy is aware, Budget 2017 has provided an additional €5.5m in current funding to my Department to support the provision of youth services. This will bring the total youth funding in 2017 to €57.4m. This additional funding will be used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services. My Department is working with national organisations and local services to identify service development needs for 2017 and to agree the 2017 allocations. Every effort will be made to complete this process as soon as possible.

In 2016, an amount of €500,405 was allocated for the projects and services under Kildare Youth Services, which operates under Youth Work Ireland. My Department provides funding to Kildare Youth Services under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme in respect of six local youth projects in Athy, Naas, Leixlip, Newbridge, the Curragh and Kildare town and a Youth Information Centre in Naas.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department is currently engaging with Kildare Wicklow ETB with regard to the provision of a full time youth officer for County Kildare. In the interim, the county shares a youth officer with Wicklow, who is very active in both counties.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education**

293. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the details of and terms of reference for the cross-Border early childhood care and education consortia; and the way in which a person can apply for access to them. [3458/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** It is unclear to what programme the Deputy refers. If the Deputy wishes to provide further information in relation to the cross border early childhood care and education consortia, this matter can be investigated further.