

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN ROGHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA AGUS TRÁDÁIL, AGUS COSAIN

SELECT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE, AND DEFENCE

Déardaoin, 8 Márta 2018

Thursday, 8 March 2018

Tháinig an Roghchoiste le chéile ag 2 p.m.

The Select Committee met at 2 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair/Members present:

Teachtaí Dála/Deputies	
Seán Barrett,	
Ciarán Cannon (<i>Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade</i>),	
Simon Coveney (<i>Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade</i>),	
Seán Crowe,	
Noel Grealish,	
Paul Kehoe (<i>Minister of State at the Department of Defence</i>),	
Tony McLoughlin,	
Darragh O'Brien,	
Maureen O'Sullivan.	

I láthair/In attendance: Deputies Lisa Chambers and Aengus Ó Snodaigh.

Teachta/Deputy Brendan Smith sa Chathaoir/in the Chair.

Estimates for Public Services 2018

Vote 35 - Army Pensions (Revised)

Vote 36 - Defence (Revised)

Chairman: On behalf of the select committee, I extend our sincere thanks to the members of the Defence Forces for their work throughout the State during the recent storms. With their colleagues in all of the emergency services, they did us proud in providing support for individuals, families and communities at a very difficult time.

On 14 September 2017 the Dáil ordered that the Revised Estimates for Public Services for the following Votes be referred to the committee for consideration - Vote 35 - Army Pensions; Vote 36 - Defence; Vote 28 - Foreign Affairs and Trade; and Vote 27 - International Co-operation. In the first part of the meeting we will consider the Revised Estimates for Votes 35 and 36 and report back to the Dáil on them. I welcome the Minister of State with special responsibility for defence, Deputy Paul Kehoe, and officials from the Department whom I thank for the briefing material provided. The proposed format is that at the outset of consideration of each programme we will hear a short overview from the Minister of State, including details of pressures likely to impact on his Department's performance or expenditure under the programme in 2018. We will then open the floor to members to ask questions. I ask that they ensure their questions are about the specific programme under consideration in order that we can get through our business in an orderly and efficient manner.

I remind members and those in the Visitors Gallery to ensure their mobile phones are switched off completely for the duration of the meeting as, even when left in silent mode, they cause interference with the recording and broadcasting equipment.

I remind members of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or body outside the Houses or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. They have been forwarded in advance briefing material on the programmes to be considered. We shall proceed sequentially. I call on the Minister of State to make brief opening remarks on programme A.

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I welcome the opportunity to engage with the Oireachtas Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence in considering the 2018 Revised Estimates for Vote 35 - Army Pensions and Vote 36 - Defence. I concur with the Chairman's remarks and acknowledge, on behalf of the Government, the efforts made by all public servants, communities and volunteers in responding to the severe weather emergency. In particular, I record my thanks to the civil servants, civilian employees, members of the Defence Forces and Civil Defence and all volunteer organisations for their particular contributions. Overall co-ordination was led by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government from the National Emergency Coordination Centre which is managed by my Department's office of emergency planning.

While I understand the select committee does not want an opening statement as such, it

would be useful to set out briefly the overall position on the Votes and update members on some of the main developments within the defence sector in recent times.

The defence sector is covered by two Votes, Vote 35 - Army Pensions and Vote 36 - Defence. The high level goal of both is to provide for the military defence of the State, contribute to national and international peace and security and fulfil all other roles assigned by the Government. Accordingly, defence sector outputs are delivered under a single programme in each Vote. The combined Estimates for defence and Army pensions in 2018 provide for gross expenditure of €946 million. The Army pensions Vote has a single programme for the provision of Defence Forces' pension benefits. It makes provision for retirement pay, pensions, allowances and gratuities payable to, or in respect of, former members of the Defence Forces and their dependants. It is primarily demand driven and non-discretionary, with superannuation benefits - retirement pensions and gratuities - and disability pensions accounting for 99% of all expenditure. The 2018 Estimate provides for a gross sum of more than €239 million for the Army pensions Vote. Some €229 million of this allocation covers expenditure on all superannuation benefits for former members of the Permanent Defence Force and their dependants. Pension benefits granted are, for the most part, statutory entitlements once certain criteria are met. There are currently 12,350 pensioners paid from the Army pensions Vote. This is a net increase of 1,350 since 2007. For the years 2018-20, inclusive, current projections are that some 1,050 military personnel will retire on pension. During 2017, almost 330 Defence Forces members retired on pension, with a similar number anticipated for 2018. As the committee will be aware, it has been my stated intention to seek extra funding for military pensions as part of the overall future budgetary negotiations, and solid progress has been made on that front. As announced in budget 2018, the gross allocation for Army pensions has been increased by €9.5 million to some €239 million for this year, which is very welcome. This builds on a funding increase of €6 million in the 2017 Estimates.

I now turn to Vote 36, which is delivered under a single programme entitled "Defence Policy and Support, Military Capabilities and Operational Outputs". The Vote of €707 million includes a pay and allowances allocation of some €509 million, while the remaining non-pay allocation of €198 million provides mainly for the renewal and maintenance of essential equipment, infrastructure and operational costs. The pay allocation of €509 million includes €12.3 million to provide for increases due under the Lansdowne Road public service stability agreement 2018-20 commitments. The public service stability agreement contains proposals for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the agreement. I welcome the fact that the Defence Forces representative associations have accepted this agreement.

The defence pay allocation provides for the pay and allowances of a Permanent Defence Force strength of up to 9,500, 550 civilian employees, 350 civil servants, 18 chaplains and 14 Army nurses. This level of funding provides the defence organisation with the resources necessary for it to deliver effectively across all its key domestic and international responsibilities. There has been an ongoing and increasing level of recruitment taking place within the Defence Forces over recent years at both enlisted and officer level. This includes general service recruits, apprentices, cadets and direct entry officers. Recruitment has increased from 405 in 2015, to 690 in 2016 and to 751 in 2017. It is anticipated that there will be over 800 personnel recruited in 2018. The budget allocation also provides over €2 million for Reserve Defence Force pay for 2018. This will allow for 26,000 training days for reservists this year.

The defence non-pay allocation comprises both current and capital elements. The current expenditure allocation of €121 million provides mainly for expenditure on ongoing Defence

Forces standing and operational costs such as utilities, fuel, catering, maintenance, information technology and training. The capital expenditure allocation of €77 million for 2018 will allow the defence organisation to undertake a programme of sustained equipment replacement and infrastructural development across the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, as identified and prioritised in the defence White Paper. Among the main equipment programme priorities planned for 2018 are the ongoing upgrade of the Army Mowag armoured personnel carriers, replacement of the Air Corps Cessna aircraft, continuation of the naval vessel replacement programme and the mid-life refit of naval vessels. The overall capital allocation of €541 million for defence for the period 2018 to 2022, as set out in the national development plan, emphasises the importance attached by this Government to ensuring that the Defence Forces have the capability necessary to deliver on all the roles assigned by the Government. This funding will play a vital role in ensuring that the priorities identified in the White Paper can be met and that the Defence Forces can deliver fully across all roles.

I will now briefly mention some of the key roles and outputs delivered under the defence programme. The Defence Forces continue to make a considerable contribution in their international peace and security role. As of February 2018, Ireland is contributing 586 Permanent Defence Force personnel to nine different missions throughout the world. In addition, personnel are deployed to a range of international organisations and national representations. The main overseas missions in which Defence Forces personnel are currently deployed are the United Nations interim force in Lebanon, UNIFIL, with 375 personnel, and the United Nations disengagement observer force, UNDOF, in Syria, with 136 personnel. Since October 2017, the Naval Service has been participating in the EU naval mission Operation Sophia which specifically seeks to counter human trafficking and smuggling in the southern central Mediterranean, and the Government recently approved the continuation of this deployment for 2018.

The Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána have primary responsibility for Ireland's domestic security, supported, as required, by the Defence Forces as part of its aid to the civil power function. This role is multi-faceted and in 2017 included a varied set of tasks such as Garda air support missions, Central Bank security guards, prisoner escorts, explosive ordnance disposal call-outs and Naval Service diving operations. The Defence Forces also provide assistance to the principal response agencies tasked with responding to major emergencies. The professional competence shown by the Defence Forces in undertaking these roles is greatly valued and appreciated by all stakeholders and was further illustrated by the extensive and wide-ranging assistance provided in response to last week's severe weather emergency.

Civil Defence is also funded from the defence Vote and remains a vital component in each local authority's emergency response arrangements. Volunteers from Civil Defence have responded very effectively when required, most recently during the flooding events that occurred in 2017, during Storm Ophelia and again in the most recent severe weather emergency last week. Committee members have been provided with briefing material on the individual sub-heads for both the defence and Army pensions Estimates and I look forward to positive engagement on any issues the members may wish to discuss.

Chairman: We will now take Vote 35, programme A, provisions for Defence Forces pensions benefits. Does the Minister of State wish to say something specific on that or just to take questions?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I will take questions, Chairman.

Chairman: Deputy Grealish, was your question on this Vote and the pensions issue? As I

said earlier, the time is constrained so the question must be on the particular programme under discussion.

Deputy Noel Grealish: I will be brief. The question is about pension payments and payments to the Defence Forces. At the end of last year we saw many protests about the pay and pensions of Defence Forces personnel. The Minister of State said in his opening statement that he is trying to get extra funding for that so I presume he is not satisfied that the pensions of retired Army personnel are adequate. Does he anticipate being successful in that? It appears to be a big issue among the retired Army personnel. How do the pensions compare with those in other areas of the public sector, for example, the Garda Síochána, local authorities and the hospitals? Are they way down the line in that regard or does the Minister of State have such a comparison?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: It is similar across the public service. It depends on the salary of each member, and that is reflected in the pension payment. Any retired member of the Defence Forces who is entitled to a pension will receive that pension. There is never any shortfall-----

Deputy Noel Grealish: However, how do they compare? I realise it is related to salary. It must mean that the lower grades in the Army are not well paid, which means they get a lower pension.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Absolutely. That would be-----

Deputy Noel Grealish: The Minister of State is trying to address that.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: No. It is the overall issue. The average pension of all ranks combined is €19,100; it is €30,600 for retired officers and €16,000 for retired non-commissioned officers, NCOs, and privates. The average retirement gratuity, the lump sum, for all ranks combined is €52,000; it is €81,000 for officers newly retired on pension and €44,000 for NCOs and privates newly retired on pension. What I am saying is that there is a shortfall in the overall package and we want to make up that shortfall. We got additional moneys last year in the 2018 budget, amounting to €9.5 million, and I will be in negotiations with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for the next budget to make up the shortfall.

There have been pay increases for all members of the Defence Forces and both the Permanent Defence Force Other Ranks Representative Association, PDFORRA, and the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers, RACO, signed up to the extended Lansdowne Road agreement in the last number of months. They will receive extra pay increases in the next short while.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: I thank the Minister of State for his presentation. I want to put on record the work done by the Defence Forces, including the Air Corps, and the Civil Defence in recent weeks. I am sure the committee would acknowledge the work that was done by the Defence Forces and others up until this weekend. It is important we acknowledge that wonderful work by the Defence Forces, the Air Corps, the Civil Defence and everybody else. The Civil Defence is a voluntary organisation. With regard to benefits, its members are there at the beck and call of all of us, and it is important these people are acknowledged.

The Minister of State referred to additional funding and it is good to see it is hoped over 800 personnel will be recruited for 2018. With regard to the starting salaries and the budget the Department has had in recent years, given the Minister of State is endeavouring to get additional funding for the recruits and everybody associated with the Defence Forces, he might

elaborate on that.

Chairman: The Deputy's query is more appropriate for the second programme so I will not let the Minister respond on that until then. I want to stick to the programme. Is that okay?

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: Yes.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I have a number questions. We have had the discussion in regard to the numbers within the Defence Forces and the numbers that have been leaving. Has that exodus increased pressure on the amount allocated for pensions each year? If that continues, will an additional amount be required? Obviously, when people leave they do not automatically get their pension but if they leave ahead of schedule and are not working elsewhere, and if they have the required time, do they still benefit from the pension?

Chairman: Does Deputy Barrett have a query on the pensions issue?

Deputy Seán Barrett: Yes. I fail to see why the cost of pensions is included in an Estimate, whether it is Army pensions or any other pensions. Surely, we should have an overall costing for pensions full stop. This has really nothing to do with the Department of Defence once the person has retired. It seems strange that we include it in an overall Estimate for the Department because, if there are reductions or cuts, the pensions cannot be cut. I question the whole concept of including an item called "Pensions" in an Estimate. There should be an overall figure for pensions in, for example, the Department of Finance, rather than the Minister of State having to come in here and talk about Army pensions. There is nothing he can do about it. The people are retired and they are entitled to their pension, so let us get on with it.

Chairman: I would say the Deputy would have the support of every Department except the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Deputy Seán Barrett: Seriously, though, it inflates the Estimate to a level that is just not true.

Chairman: True. Maybe the Minister of State will tell us that is the plan for next year.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I will not disagree with the Deputy as this affects every public service organisation, whether it involves nurses, teachers or otherwise. While I am not sure if Ministers such as Deputy Simon Harris or Deputy Richard Bruton have to come in here and argue for the pensions of retired nurses, doctors or teachers, I concur with the Deputy in this regard. We got an increase of €9.5 million in budget 2018 and we will be in negotiations with the Minister, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, in the coming months for budget 2019. However, it is too early to predict and, of course, year on year, we are not sure how many people are going to retire on pension.

On Deputy Ó Snodaigh's question, I will give the figures for the past three years. In 2015, some 567 people retired, of whom 318 were entitled to a pension; in 2016, some 649 retired, of whom 330 were entitled to a pension; and in 2017, some 700 retired, of whom 327 were entitled to a pension. In 2017, some 700 left and 751 came in; and in 2016, some 649 left and 690 came in, which indicates we are bringing in a few more than are leaving.

Chairman: Thank you. We move to programme B, appropriations-in-aid-----

Deputy Seán Barrett: Before we do, I suggest that we make a recommendation that the Department of Finance, or otherwise, would look into this whole question of including in the

Estimates for various Departments the cost of pensions, and that it should be centralised. It is giving an inflated impression of-----

Chairman: Of the availability of funds for Departments. It is true.

Deputy Seán Barrett: I suggest that at least it could be looked at.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: On subhead A4, concerning payments to spouses of deceased veterans of the War of Independence, I understand a once-off payment was made in 2016 as part of the commemorative programme. Obviously, it is a reducing number of people. Given that next January is the anniversary of the supposed start date of the War of Independence, I ask whether the Department is considering further one-off payments for the remaining 45, according to this Estimate, although it might be fewer at that stage. I believe it would be appropriate that this be looked at as some way to mark the date for the surviving spouses of deceased veterans of the War of Independence.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The widows received the special 50% boost in their monthly pensions from the Department of Defence on 1 January 2016. That would have given an average of €175 per month, increasing their average annual payments from €4,200 to €6,300 per head. At the moment there are 48 such persons receiving the payments to spouses of deceased veterans of the War of Independence.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The figure is 45 in this document. Have we found another three?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: That is an estimate.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Could consideration be given to marking this date? It does not necessarily have to be a monetary payment.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: That was a once-off payment. It was a gesture at the time and it has been maintained every year since.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Whether it is monetary or whether there is some other way of marking this, given these are surviving spouses of deceased veterans of the War of Independence, I ask that this consideration go into the Department. It is a reducing number. This time next year will be the anniversary of the Tan war or the War of Independence, whatever we call it, and something special should be done in acknowledgement of those who are surviving.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I will take the Deputy's views on board.

Chairman: Are there any questions on programme B, appropriations-in-aid? No. We will move on to Vote 36. Does the Minister of State wish to make some introductory remarks?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: No, we will get straight into it.

Deputy Noel Grealish: How many vacancies are there at present in the Army, the Naval Service and the Air Corps and how many positions are not filled? We have heard questions being asked in the Dáil, particularly about vacancies in the Air Corps, from which there has been an exodus of members.

I think my next question has been asked. We are all very proud of the members of the Defence Forces who serve abroad. I concur with what Deputy Tony McLoughlin said about the

work done by Army personnel during the storm. Any time there is a crisis, they are there to be called upon and we must acknowledge the tremendous work they do. What is the total cost of their service abroad? What moneys are recouped from the United Nations or various governments, including those in the Middle East or along the Mediterranean where Irish personnel worked in dealing with the refugee crisis? We are very proud of how Naval Service personnel served there. What were the costs in that regard and was any of the money recouped from the European Union or the United Nations? What is the cost arising from Army members serving abroad with the United Nations? How much do we get back? Will the Minister of State update me on the matter?

What will be the role of the Army in the context of Brexit and the talk of a hard or soft border? Are plans being drawn up and costings put in place to determine whether Army personnel need to be redeployed at the Border to stop smuggling that could happen in the event that there is a hard or soft border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland?

Chairman: Will the Minister of State also address Deputy Tony McLoughlin's earlier question?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The projected figure for UN overseas allowances in 2018 is €4,313,000.

Deputy Noel Grealish: Will we get back-----

Deputy Paul Kehoe: It takes time for the money to be reimbursed.

Deputy Noel Grealish: What will we spend?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I will come back to the Deputy on that matter. On whole-time equivalents, the Army establishment figure is 7,520. The current strength is 7,425. The establishment figure for the Air Corps is 886 and the current strength is 737. The establishment figure for the Naval Service is 1,094 and the current strength is 1,052.

Deputy Noel Grealish: What is the breakdown of vacancies in the Air Corps?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Pilots and air traffic controllers are the two-----

Deputy Noel Grealish: Why is there a difficulty in filling those positions?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I am not sure if the Deputy has followed Mr. Michael O'Leary and Ryanair in the past while-----

Deputy Noel Grealish: I have.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: That answers the question.

Deputy Noel Grealish: I know, but why do we not have adequate pay levels in order that they will stay because we need them?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The Department and the Defence Forces are making submissions to the Public Service Pay Commission on specialised pay. Pilots and air traffic controllers will come under that heading. We are working on the submission.

Deputy Noel Grealish: Is there a situation where Army personnel could be back on patrol on the Border to stop smuggling should there be a hard or a soft border between Northern Ireland and the Republic?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: As the Deputy understands, that would be a matter for An Garda Síochána. If required, Army personnel would act in aid of the civil power.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin is right about Civil Defence. It is an organisation in which staff are voluntary and unpaid. The Department looks after whatever investment is required to provide whatever equipment Civil Defence needs. The budget in 2018 is €4.2 million. The allocation covers the cost of recruitment and 70% of the local authorities' expenditure on Civil Defence. It also covers the cost of Civil Defence stores, equipment and exercises. Some €3 million is provided in grants for local training, administration and operational costs. Additional funds were provided for Civil Defence in 2016 and 2017 for the purchase of vehicles and other capital equipment. The 2018 allocation excludes these additional funds and is in line with usual expenditure in this area.

Chairman: Does Deputy Tony McLoughlin have an additional question?

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: I have a question about the figure of €4.2 million. As I said, those involved in Civil Defence are the unsung heroes for the work and activities they carry out each year. I have seen at first hand the work being done. Does the Minister of State think this is adequate funding to meet the requirements of Civil Defence in the current year?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Absolutely. It is an area in which I have a keen interest. The Civil Defence organisation and the equipment it needs are high priorities for the Department. We also work very closely with the local authorities. We are looking at a number of counties where additional buildings are needed in which the Department might incur rental costs and where they want to build their own buildings. We are working with a number of local authorities in that regard.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: My final question concerns Naval Service vessels. Is there a full complement of vessels in operation?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: We have a full complement of eight ships. We expect to take delivery of a new ship, the *LÉ George Bernard Shaw*, in mid-2018.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I thank all those involved in the Defence Forces and Civil Defence, in particular, for their tremendous work last week. Anything I say is not a slight on them or their work. It is more a question of how we can help them to provide even more assistance in the future.

The allocation for Civil Defence has been reduced from the figure of €5.1 million in 2016. I think it was down to €4.2 million in the budget for 2018. What is the reason for the reduction? Is it the drop in numbers? The numbers have been set out somewhere. If the numbers in Civil Defence are down, how do we attract more volunteers? Obviously, on the back of the Trojan work done last week, it might be an opportune time to remind people of the role played by Civil Defence and encourage them to join it. The allocation for Civil Defence in the 2017 Estimates was €5,240,000, not all of which was spent. A sum of €300,000 was not spent. The allocation in front of us is €4,240,000, which represents a reduction of €1 million, a substantial amount for such a small organisation. Will the Minister of State explain the reason for the reduction? The allocation for the Irish Red Cross is small. Obviously, its outrun was far higher because of the storms and the same could happen this year. We understand that in the event that there is storm damage, caused by floods in particular, the Irish Red Cross receives additional money, as it has during the years; therefore, I am not too worried in that regard. However, given the significant

role played by it, does Civil Defence have enough equipment or does it need new equipment? Obviously, it will review its activities last week and the week before which might indicate, or perhaps not, that it needs more modern equipment. It is about the Department having a sense at this stage because if Civil Defence needs additional equipment, rather than having to wait until later in the year, the allocation of funding should be fast-tracked for additional or new equipment, given that there are red alerts more frequently. I have other questions on other issues, which I hope to raise later.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I will answer the question on the Civil Defence. In 2016 and 2017, additional money was provided for vehicles. That was additional to the Civil Defence's budget in those years. There is no question of any shortfall or reduction in the yearly provision for the Civil Defence. In 2016 and 2017 the Government provided additional moneys.

There are approximately 350 Civil Defence personnel, with 70 members currently active in local authorities. Some 350 personnel were deployed on each of the days of last week. Some 138 vehicles, including ambulances and 4x4 vehicles, were deployed throughout the country in recent days to provide assistance to citizens throughout the country during the snow.

It was asked if there had been a drop in the number of volunteers for the Civil Defence. That is not the case. Most local authorities have a waiting list of people seeking to become members of the Civil Defence. In the White Paper on defence in 2015 there is a section concerning the Civil Defence and an inter-agency programme with all local authorities.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I thank the Minister of State for that clarification. When one reads the figures it looks as though there has been a drop. If there is a waiting list, I cannot figure out why we cannot take those people on, encourage them and train them so that they are available during the next weather event or whenever we need the Civil Defence again. I understand the local authorities' role but there must be some way to do this, because the goodwill is there. In regard to the Civil Defence, I note the praise throughout country for the role that it played, the number of vehicles it deployed and the people it rescued, including personnel of other emergency services. That shows the value of the Civil Defence. If we cannot get volunteers to join the Defence Forces we should get them to join the Civil Defence at the very least, so that they are available in a crisis such as that of last week.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: When a volunteer joins the Civil Defence, he or she is trained to a very high standard. The issue arises in providing this training. There is a waiting list throughout the country to join the Civil Defence, and there is a reason for that. While volunteers join, they are not simply given a jacket and made a member. They have to be trained and equipped. Some counties are quite happy with the numbers they have. I understand Deputy Ó Snodaigh's point, but the fact that people are willing to join the Civil Defence shows that it is a healthy organisation.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The estimate for litigation and compensation costs is set to rise. The overrun was €3.8 million and the estimate is €5 million. Does the Minister of State have reasons for that increase?

I also wish to raise EU issues. I refer to the signing of the permanent structured co-operation, PESCO, in December and the confirmation in recent weeks of the specific projects Ireland has signed up to out of the 17 that are available. Are additional costs expected this year or next year? Will the Minister of State elaborate on those costs?

I have raised the issue of the Air Corps several times. Others have referred to a shortage of numbers. Is the funding in the Estimate large enough to cover health and safety requirements and training that have been lacking in the past? Is the Minister of State satisfied that the health and safety regime that was promised is now fully up-to-date?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I presume the Deputy is referring to the health and welfare of personnel in the Air Corps?

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Yes.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I am content. I have visited the facilities recently. The Chief of Staff, the Secretary General and I got a full tour of the base, and I am content that every resource is provided for the health, safety and well-being of all members of the Air Corps.

On the issue of PESCO project engagement, I note that Ireland is participating in two projects. The European Union Training Mission Competence Centre project aims to improve the availability, interoperability, specific skills and professionalism of personnel trainers for EU missions across participating member states. Moreover, it will accelerate the provision of EU training missions due to a higher situational awareness regarding trained, educated and available personnel for current and future EU training missions. This is a capability that the Irish Defence Forces continually develop, and it is compatible with their efforts in this area.

The other project in which we are participating is the upgrade of maritime surveillance. This project aims to integrate land-based surveillance systems, maritime and air platforms to distribute real-time information to member states to provide a timely and effective response in international waters. The main objective of the programme is to enhance maritime surveillance, situational awareness and potential response effectiveness of the EU by using the existing infrastructure, deploying assets and developing related capabilities in the future. It aims to timely and effectively address new and old threats and challenges, such as energy security, environment challenges and security and defence aspects. It also aims to ensure accurate awareness and rapid response to contribute to the protection of the EU and its citizens. We will have a minimal participation, whether in European Defence Agency, EDA, or PESCO projects. Participating in the projects will not stretch our finances.

The total allocation for litigation during the past three years has been €5 million per annum. The estimate for 2018 is €5 million. Expenditure has been somewhat less, ranging from €2.4 million to €3.7 million per annum. The Department has no direct control over the quantum or timing of legal costs, claims or awards that fall for payment. Expenditure over 2017 amounted to €3.76 million.

Deputy Seán Barrett: Looking at the Estimate itself, I note some alarming figures, given that we are now facing into Brexit. This is going to impose greater obligations on our Defence Forces and our Naval Service. We should be hearing about this and talking about it before it happens. The Naval Service had 1,376 vessel patrol days in 2016. In 2017, that figure was 1,171. There were 200 fewer patrol days for the Naval Service. In 2016 the Air Corps had 4,287 operational flight hours. In 2017 it flew 3,271. There was a decrease of in excess of 1,000 flight hours between 2016 and 2017. Whether we like it or dislike it, Brexit is going to cause us major problems. We cannot allow a situation where Air Corps operational flights are reduced by more than 1,000 hours and the Naval Service's activity is reduced by about 260 patrol days. These are important issues at which we need to look and for which we need to be prepared because Brexit is only 12 months down the road. We need to examine how we can

bolster both the Naval Service and the Air Corps in patrolling and protecting our waters. It will be a new ball game. The figures have been presented factually but they are alarming. Not to take away from the great work being done by both the Naval Service and the Air Corps, but these figures are alarming when considering how they can protect our shores and assets locally.

While we may not have the time today to examine all these issues, I suggest that the Minister of State considers coming back to the committee to discuss the impact of Brexit on the Naval Service and the Air Corps. There is no point in waiting until D-Day to discover we have serious problems. I am not blaming the Minister of State but there is obviously a reason for this. Whether it is lack of personnel or the fact that we are engaging in other activities, we have to look after our assets and ensure that our fisheries are protected. I am just highlighting the fact that these figures are alarming.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The number of Naval Service vessel patrol days amounted to 1,204 in 2015, 1,376 in 2016 and 1,408 in 2017.

Deputy Seán Barrett: My figures show 1,171.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The figures I have are 1,204 in 2015, 1,376 in 2016 and 1,408 in 2017. We work closely with the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority and have never failed to meet any of its requests.

Deputy Seán Barrett: I am sorry but the figures with which we were presented show that the number of Naval Service vessel patrol days in 2017 amounted to 1,171.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I will get back to the Deputy on that. I am not disputing the figures he has in front of him but I will get back to him with the exact figures. The Naval Service has always fulfilled the requests made of it by the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority. The new modern ships have greater capability than the older vessels. I will come back to the Deputy on the Air Corps' flying hours. These amounted to 3,894 in 2015, 4,287 in 2016 and 3,572 in 2017.

Deputy Seán Barrett: This Estimate shows 3,271. These are large reductions of over 1,000 hours.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: There has been an increase year on year in Naval Service patrol days.

Deputy Seán Barrett: From the figures I have, there has been a reduction of over 200 days.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Within the Air Corps, it depends on the availability of the aircraft and pilots. We have a shortage of pilots.

As part of the whole-of-Government approach to Brexit, the Department of Defence is engaged in forward planning with all other Departments. We have a senior official at assistant secretary level working with the Government as part of the Brexit preparations. While no one knows the outcome of the final Brexit negotiations, I do not envisage we will have a hard border. Patrolling it will be a matter for the civil power, An Garda Síochána.

Deputy Seán Barrett: This is not a matter just for the Irish Government. When the British withdraw fully, they will protect their boundaries. That means there will be greater activity on the Irish Sea and in other areas. It also means that we have to be careful to make certain we are in a position to safeguard our fishing waters from a country that will be outside the EU. I am only highlighting this in the context of what we are facing in Brexit.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: It is a matter for the Government, as well as the Department of Defence. The line Department in this case will be the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The Naval Service has fulfilled all roles requested of it by the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority. We have increased Naval Service patrol days every year. The Deputy may have a different figure but I know we have increased them because I answered a similar question-----

Deputy Seán Barrett: This is the figure from the defence Estimate.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I will get back to the Deputy on the exact number of patrol days. I know we increased the patrol days because I answered a parliamentary question on it recently.

Chairman: For clarity, the figures I have in my briefing are the same as those of the Minister of State.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I apologise if there is a discrepancy.

Deputy Seán Barrett: My briefing refers to the amount required in the year ending 31 December 2018.

Chairman: There was a subsequent briefing.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: We would not have the full figures for 2018. That would be an estimated figure.

Deputy Seán Barrett: I am giving the figure for 2017. There has been a reduction from 4,287 to 3,231.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: My figures are up to date. I will clarify the figures the Deputy has.

Chairman: That may be what was in the Revised Estimate. The briefing the Minister of State provided is different from what was in the Revised Estimate.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: We would have given the figures for the full year with the up-to-date briefing.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: There are two costs associated with participation in two PESCO projects - the training mission competence centre and maritime surveillance. Are these projects part of the Estimates before us or will there be a future cost involved? Is it for one year? Does the Minister of State know the cost for the two projects in their entirety?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I am not able to give the exact figure now because those projects were only launched at a European Council meeting on Tuesday of this week.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: Are the projects included under these Estimates?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: No. They are being provided for - as is all training relating to European Defence Agency, EDA, projects - in the 2018 Estimate.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: Is it under subhead A23, costs arising directly from Ireland's participation in the EU's common security and defence policy? It looks as if we are estimating that we will spend less this year than we did last year, but we are participating in two additional projects. I am just trying to understand-----

Deputy Paul Kehoe: They will be provided for under subhead A23, which provides for

Ireland's contribution to European Union costs. Whatever expenditure is required for-----

Deputy Lisa Chambers: These projects come under this subhead.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: -----these projects will come from the normal budget within the Defence Forces.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: The reason I ask is that the Minister of State is estimating we will spend less this year, which just does not seem to work out. If we are participating in additional projects, one would imagine the Estimate for this year would be larger than last year.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I will come back to the Deputy with the-----

Deputy Lisa Chambers: I understand this is fairly new. We might come back to it. The second issue I wish to raise with the Minister of State I have raised with him in the Chamber. It concerns the state of barracks, specifically the accommodation and the bedding and equipment within barracks. I am looking under subhead A12. I see the 2018 Estimate provides for a slight increase in expenditure on this. I wish to raise with the Minister of State the matter of Cathal Brugha Barracks in particular. I was contacted very recently about this. A career course was held in the barracks for, I think, corporal rank, and complaints came through concerning the bedding and the mattresses not being fit to sleep on. When I addressed the Minister of State on this issue in the Chamber, I asked that a review of the accommodation across the board be considered. I had reports back from Cathal Brugha Barracks that there were ripped mattresses and stained bedding that were not fit to be slept on and that some of those participating in the career course did not sleep in the barracks because of the state of the accommodation and stayed outside the barracks instead. I doubt this is confined to Cathal Brugha Barracks, but there probably is a need to do an inventory check and a check of the accommodation to see what state the bedding and mattresses are in. These are basic enough things. They may seem minor in the overall context of the Defence Forces but these are the day-to-day things those serving must deal with. Some small changes would make a big difference in this regard. I therefore welcome the projected increase in spending on this area for this year but I ask the Minister of State to make a specific effort regarding the accommodation and bedding under subhead A12.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: There is a five-year plan for the built infrastructure programme. I am not sure whether the Deputy has raised this matter with me. Did she do so during Question Time or through a written parliamentary question? I am not sure.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: In the Chamber during our most recent questions session I raised the issue of the state of the accommodation in the barracks.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: What I do know is-----

Deputy Lisa Chambers: The Minister of State said there was a process-----

Deputy Paul Kehoe: There are projects and a process. Specifically, €5 million will be spent on different projects within Cathal Brugha Barracks. There is a combination of expenditure. Provision is made for an upgrade of accommodation facilities at Cathal Brugha Barracks, Rathmines, with €1.8 million to be spent as part of the built infrastructure programme. Investment in locker refurbishment at the barracks, at a cost of €3.7 million, is also provided for.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: Specifically regarding the bedding and mattresses, that stuff-----

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Okay. I will-----

Deputy Lisa Chambers: In this day and age it is not really acceptable. My next question concerns the recruitment campaign. This has been ongoing for the past number of years. We are still not at the establishment strength of 9,500 that we should be at. We are taking people in but losing them at an even greater rate. How much did the recruitment campaign cost in 2017, and what is the projected cost of the recruitment campaign for 2018?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I might not have those exact figures to hand for the Deputy. If I do not, I will get back to her on them. While I try to get them, I will say we have actually taken in more people in the past three years than have departed the organisation.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: That does not explain why we still only have a net increase of about 100.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I am working with the Chief of Staff and the general staff to try to get to the full establishment strength of 9,500. Campaigns will be launched by, I think, the end of this month or very early April for cadets and a general list of personnel.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: What is the cost of those campaigns?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The 2018 Estimate includes an increase of €150,000 in respect of advertisements to facilitate the costs arising from an increased recruitment drive for the Defence Forces. We are therefore increasing the budget for-----

Deputy Lisa Chambers: Sorry. Is that a €150,000 increase?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Yes.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: What is it on top of?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: A sum of €300,000.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: There was €300,000 spent in 2017 then. Is that correct?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Yes. We will clarify the exact figure, but we are providing for additional estimated expenditure of €150,000 for 2018.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: The next issue I wish to raise brings me to the Permanent Defence Force, PDF, allowances. In this context I wish to comment on the record on the outstanding work of the Defence Forces in respect of Storm Emma. So many of our soldiers went above and beyond the call of duty and worked day and night. I am sure they are still recovering and still quite tired after the work. I know some of them are still out on the ground assisting in various communities throughout the country. In times like these when we see a red alert warning and a potential national disaster, when there is a real threat of loss of life, we see the huge value and the importance of our Defence Forces, how much we really need them and that they are there at the drop of a hat in the worst of conditions. When everyone else is locked up in their homes staying safe, they are out helping people, bringing medical staff to hospitals and freeing people stuck at the sides of the roads.

This brings me back to the area of pay and conditions and members' allowances. The notion that a serving soldier who does a 24-hour duty would get in or around €20 has not been addressed yet and needs to be addressed. I understand the pay review that is ongoing - I know all that - but the Defence Forces are different from other public sector workers, and this has been recognised in other jurisdictions. Take, for example, our closest neighbours in the UK, where a

military covenant is in place and the state, the government and society as a whole recognise the defence forces' very special and unique work and role and the fact that they are limiting their own rights as employees because of the work of the defence forces. They do not have the right to strike and their work is extremely demanding and can often put their lives in danger. On that note, we must look at our Defence Forces as a separate and distinct entity within the Civil Service and the public service. The €20 they get paid for a 24-hour duty needs to change. I do not care how we go about doing so or what needs to be done to make it change, but that level of payment in itself is nothing short of a kick in the teeth for those who serve their country. It is one of the reasons we are finding it hard to hold on to personnel.

Regarding the allowances, and I refer specifically to subhead A4, PDF allowances, there is only an increase of roughly €100,000. The Defence Forces as an organisation have been trimmed and slimmed as much as possible in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008 and every year since then. They have pulled back and made savings and efficiencies to the point that they can go no further. They have probably gone too far, actually. While their salary is one aspect of their pay, their allowances are a very vital other aspect, and it is in the latter area that we can make huge changes and alleviate some of the pressures on Defence Forces personnel and their families. I see the Estimates for this year are pretty much the same as last year's. If we are talking about taking in additional personnel and saying we now have more personnel on the books, even to stay at the same strength we would need to see a greater increase in spending on allowances than what we are seeing for this year. Salaries are a difficult thing to move on and they are moving slowly in the right direction. However, allowances really formed part of personnel's overall pay. They became reliant on them, and I can understand why. It is these allowances that were cut to nothing.

Will the Minister to look at the Estimate for this year for the allowances and see what we can do for our Defence Forces personnel in this area? I appreciate the difficulties around public sector pay but I think a pay commission in the context of the Defence Forces would be worth exploring. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. We can look to our colleagues and neighbours in the UK. They have done this and they recognised that the defence forces, their armed forces, are a unique entity among public sector workers and that the sacrifice they make needs to be recognised separately. I will go on. I have other questions. Would the Minister of State prefer me to-----

Chairman: I will decide that. We will take all the questions together and then go back to the Minister of State because unfortunately we are starting to lose time. I prefer if we take all the questions now please.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: My next question is on the Air Corps. I know this question has been raised with the Minister of State but there are ongoing issues in respect of litigation. We cannot get into that. It is probably an explanation as to why litigation costs have gone up by €1.5 million for this year. I have my own views on that, which I have made known to the Minister of State within the Chamber. I do not think the approach is the right one. Granted, we cannot get into individual cases.

In respect of Air Corps equipment and support in subhead A9, there is only a slight increase of about €500,000. Considering the well documented and publicised issues in the Air Corps, including its inability to provide top cover 24-7 and the air ambulance service not being where it should be in respect of the level of cover, it strikes me as a very slim increase in that area of spending. We know the Air Corps needs serious investment and support financially.

My last question is on the area of military transport. Can the Minister of State advise me on the state of fleet within the transport corps? My understanding is that much of our fleet is old and needs replacing. The €500,000 allocated for this year is not going to get an awful lot of replacement transport vehicles. Will the Minister of State comment on where we are at with the transport corps? From the feedback I have been getting from those serving, €500,000 is not going to bring us to where we need to be with the age of our fleet.

Chairman: Is any of Deputy Ó Snodaigh's questions related to what Deputy Chambers has just raised?

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: No.

Chairman: I call on the Minister of State, Deputy Kehoe, then.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The Deputy spoke about allowances. Any Defence Forces member out during the last number of days, as in Storm Ophelia before, will receive the maintenance of essential services allowance. They will get that, as was the case with any storm where the Defence Forces have been called out in the last couple of years or where they have been called out under aid to the civil power, under which heading this comes. On the 24-hour duty allowance, I have been in negotiations with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe on that. That is completely separate to the Public Service Pay Commission. The representative organisation, PDFORRA, is aware of that. I understand it is back with it.

The Department of Defence, and the Defence Forces, is making a submission to the Public Service Pay Commission. That submission will be made, I understand, in the next couple of weeks. Last week's weather conditions delayed it. The review of the Defence Forces conciliation and arbitration scheme is happening. I appointed Mr. Gerald Barry as an independent chair. That began to sit the week before last. Both representative organisations, the Defence Forces, the Department of Defence and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are all part of that.

I mentioned specialist pay. On the allowances, the difference between 2016 and 2017 was a €4 million increase. The estimate for 2018 is €39,680,000. If more is required, then we will find it. There is no issue around that. If people are entitled to an allowance, then they will get their allowance. On transport, there has been a significant investment in the replacement programme. Within the Air Corps, the Cessna replacement programme is worth €40 million. The naval vessel replacement programme will see a new ship expected in mid-2018. The armour protective vehicle refit programme is under way at the moment. In 2017, there were 24 minibuses, ten Citroën Berlingo vans, four Mercedes coaches, three Fiat Ducato trucks, three Scania recovery trucks, two Citroën Relay vans, two Mercedes Sprinter vans. In 2018, over €2 million in spending is planned for 130 cars, 20 minibuses, 20 store vans, 17 off-road motor cycles and one electric van. The purchase of tools and equipment for 2018 will cost €2 million. I have not been told of complaints from anyone in the Defence Forces about equipment or vehicles. I have had no complaints from any member, the general staff or anyone. No one has approached me for further investment, unless the Deputy has been told differently.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: I have.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: There is also, between now and 2022, €540 million to be spent on infrastructure, whether that is equipment, vehicles or buildings, under the capital plan.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: I have one brief follow-up point. In respect of the allowances, I

appreciate that if they are entitled to the current allowances, as they are, they will be paid. The point I was making was that perhaps we could look to see how we could allow more flexibility and generosity in the whole area of allowances. It became so slimmed down that it took away a huge chunk of weekly take-home pay.

I welcome the Minister of State engaging with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on the 24-hour duty allowance. It has been a slow process and we still do not have a change. I urge that it be pressed even further to ensure those funds become available as soon as possible. I appreciate and welcome that those who were out during Storm Emma will be recognised for that. I do not think the pay will be sufficient to compensate them for what they have done but we are all very grateful for the work they have done. I thank the Minister of State.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: On the 24-hour duty allowance, I was with the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, with my senior officials. There has been back and forth communication on this. It is a priority for me.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: I thank the Minister of State.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I am not sure where it is at the moment. I cannot be directly involved in every part of negotiations but I have left it to my senior officials. However, I do know that PDFORRA is aware of my work. It has been in communication with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform as well.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I have a number of queries. One is in relation to the Reserve Defence Forces. The effective number of Army and Naval Service reserves is at 46%. That suggests there is a major crisis. How is that going to be reversed? How can we ensure the Army and Naval Reserve is at something akin to 90% to 95% of its effective strength? I do not know if the Reserve Defence Forces played a role during Storm Emma recently. Was there a role and if not, why not?

In respect of the other issues, I refer to recouping of funding and specifically appropriations-in-aid. We are not expecting to receive any moneys back from the EU for fishery protection costs in 2018. That seems odd, given that our fisheries and fishery stocks are still being plundered. On page 10, PDF allowances breakdown is expected to cost €8 million plus for allowances for security duties. Is any of that recouped from private banks and the likes? Is that what is in appropriation-in-aid as No. 3 “Receipts from banks and other organisations”, and is that the State recouping some of the costs? It is not equivalent; one is €1.3 million and the other is €8,212,000. In terms of military education and training, while the drop in the Estimate is not substantial, it is a drop nevertheless. I would have presumed that we would continue to enhance the education and training of members of our Defence Forces. I am wondering why, given that the budget had been increasing each year prior to this, there is a small drop in it now.

Deputy Barrett mentioned earlier the matter of Naval Service vessel patrol days. The figures indicate a slight increase but Irish naval vessels were on operational duty in the Mediterranean continuously in 2017. Are those days in the Mediterranean counted as patrol days? If so, that means that the number of patrol days in the Irish seas have reduced substantially in terms of fisheries protection and other duties.

I think we were all across the road for the annual remembrance ceremony for war veterans. The grant this year is €55,000. I know that those in receipt of the grant have asked that it be increased substantially. I am aware that €55,000 represents an increase on the previous year

but it still seems a minuscule amount considering what the veterans associations and the various representative associations want to do to assist past members of the Defence Forces, some of whom have fallen on hard times and others of whom have lost contact with friends and so forth. These organisations are doing tremendous work trying to liaise with former members, reunite them with colleagues and organise special events, particularly for more elderly and infirm former members.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: On the veteran associations, I meet them at least once, and sometimes twice, a year. I last met them in December of 2017. Their allowances were discussed and officials in my Department are in negotiations with them on that matter.

In 2016, the budget for military education and training was €1,983,000 while in 2017 it was €2,173,000. The Estimate for 2018 is €2,150,000 but if additional funding is required for 2018, it will be provided. It is most important that we continue to train and educate members of our Defence Forces. If members want to participate in any training or education programmes, they will be facilitated in doing so.

The Deputy also spoke about the Reserve Defence Forces, RDF. In 2017, there were 139 inductees. The most recent recruitment campaign for the Army's Reserves and the Naval Service began in July 2017 and attracted 121 applications. A total of 139 personnel were inducted into the RDF in 2017. It is planned to hold a further Reserve recruitment campaign in 2018. Having regard to training demands arising from the significant ongoing requirements of the PDF, it is proposed to hold the RDF general services recruitment campaign between 23 April and 4 June 2018. Applications for the Reserve are vetted by An Garda Síochána and standard vetting takes four weeks. However, additional vetting also takes place appropriate to the role of the Defence Forces as an element of national security. If at all possible, we try to facilitate members of the Reserve who are working by scheduling medical checks, fitness tests and so forth at weekends. One of my priorities is to increase the numbers in the RDF. However, it is also a priority to build up the numbers in the PDF. The fall-out rate for those who apply to join the RDF is very high as people go through the different stages of the recruitment process. I know that the process has been speeded up to try to get as many applicants through as quickly as possible.

Defence Forces allowances include a Border duty allowance, an overseas allowance, a miscellaneous allowance and a security duty allowance. The Deputy focused on the latter allowance which is payable to personnel to compensate them for the additional hours and responsibilities associated with security duties. These can include aid to civil power duties, barracks security duties or explosive ordnance disposal, EOD, duties. Personnel may also receive a patrol duty allowance, subsistence allowance and uniform allowance.

The Deputy also spoke about the number of patrol days carried out by the Naval Service. The figures provided are for actual patrol days in 2016 and 2017 and the projected number for 2018. However, I must stress that all of the requests made by the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority are met. We have never failed to meet all of the agency's requests for assistance. Indeed, the high number of arrests reflects the number of patrol days that the Defence Forces put in with-----

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Do the patrol days listed here include days spent on the Mediterranean?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Yes, they include absolutely everything, right across the board. They are the figures for all eight of our vessels.

There is no provision made for the receipt of EU funding for fisheries protection in 2018 but we are examining the potential for such funding in future years.

Chairman: I thank the Minister of State. Deputy Lisa Chambers raised an issue in respect of accommodation which also arose in the context of the University of Limerick's survey. That issue must be addressed. People are entitled to basic standards of accommodation and I sincerely hope that matter will be addressed without delay.

The RDF's representative association made a very good presentation to this committee 12 to 18 months ago. One of the issues raised was the fact that persons in receipt of a social welfare payment who must attend training for a few weeks must sign off with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection but there is a considerable time lag before they receive any payment from the Department of Defence. We ask that this unacceptable maladministration be addressed. I ask the Minister of State to write formally to this committee informing us of the time lag now for persons serving their number of weeks and getting their payment. It is not fair on people whose primary income is a social welfare payment that they are without any payment for a number of weeks. I sincerely hope that issue is addressed.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: There is no issue in terms of payment within my Department. The issue arises when people sign off and then sign back on again. There is a delay with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection rather than with the Department of Defence. I know that we pay them totally independently. Once they do their training days, they are paid and there is no issue with payment on our side. I will revert to the Chairman on this but as far as I recall, the issue was with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. When people signed off, there was a delay in getting their payment when they signed back on to the unemployment register. I think that was the problem but I stand to be corrected on that.

Chairman: What was presented to us was that while there may have been a delay on the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection side, there was also a definite delay with payments from the Department of Defence. There should be no delay in any Department, particularly for people on very basic incomes. If there is a delay on the part of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection the Minister of State might address it on behalf of people who are willing to serve in the Reserve Defence Force.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I will come back to the committee on the matter. On accommodation in each of the barracks, there is provision in the capital plan for €23 million in 2018 for investment in built infrastructure and for €855,000 for furniture, bedding, utensils and so on. I take the Deputy's point and I agree that throughout the years of the recession there was little investment in accommodation. I am now ensuring that there is investment in accommodation for members of the Defence Forces.

Chairman: With regard to the legislative output, three items of legislation are being prepared by the Department of Defence, including the Defence Forces (forensic evidence) Bill, the defence (amendment) Bill and the Red Cross Bill. The targets for this legislation were previously rolled over from 2016 to 2017 and they are now being rolled over again to 2018. I ask the Minister to provide the committee with a follow-up note on the status of this important legislation.

Before we conclude this session of the meeting I again emphasise the point made by Deputy Seán Barrett in regard to Brexit. With every passing day people are becoming more pessimistic about what is going to happen post Brexit. There has been much talk about soft borders and

hard borders. Unfortunately, it appears we are to have a border foisted on us again. I sincerely hope that I am wrong but I do not think so in light of the comments of Prime Minister May that a border similar to the Canadian-US border could work here. We have all seen the pictures of how that border works in terms of hardware and the huge queue of vehicles and so on. Members of all Governments should be very conscious of the remarks of former Prime Minister John Major and Senator George Mitchell on the need to avoid borders. Given the current status of the talks I am not optimistic that we can avoid a border in this country but, as a person who lives in a Border community, I sincerely hope I am wrong. I understand that the Minister is not in a position to brief the committee on the preparations being made in this regard by the Department and the military authorities but like Deputy Seán Barrett, I hope that good work is under way.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Brexit and ensuring there is no hard border is a priority for the Taoiseach and the Government. As I have previously stated, the internal security of the State is a matter for the Garda Síochána and the Department of Justice and Equality but if there is a call on the Defence Forces they are ready to assist. A senior official of my Department, at assistant secretary level, is working with the interdepartmental group on Brexit, such that Brexit is a priority issue within the Department of Defence as well.

Issues such as sea fisheries are matters for the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority but the Defence Forces have always been able to respond to the calls from that authority. Brexit gives rise to a range of different areas that will affect all of us. While Brexit is a priority for the Department of Defence, security is a matter for An Garda Síochána but the Defence Forces do assist under aid to the civil power.

Chairman: I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Kehoe, and members for their consideration of the Revised Estimates.

Message to Dáil

Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 90, the following message will be sent to the Dáil:

The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence has completed its consideration of the following Revised Estimates for public services for the year ending 31 December 2018: Vote 35 - Army Pensions, and Vote 36 - Defence.

No Main Heading

Chairman: In this session, members will consider a motion regarding the proposal that Dáil Éireann approves the report by the Minister for Defence regarding service by the Defence Forces with the United Nations in 2016, which was referred to the committee by Dáil Éireann on 20 February 2018.

I invite the Minister of State, Deputy Kehoe to make his opening statement.

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Before we begin consideration of this motion, I would like to deal with another matter. Earlier, a number of people spoke about health and safety in the Air Corps. Under my instructions, the General

Officer Commanding, GOC, Irish Air Corps, Brigadier General Seán Clancy, has invited the committee to visit the Air Corps base and I ask that the Chairman and the committee secretariat arrange that visit through my office. I would encourage committee members to visit the Air Corps to see the improvements that have been made in terms of health and safety.

Chairman: I thank the Minister of State. The committee proposes to make the visit on 27 March.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I am pleased to report to the committee on the Irish Defence Forces' participation in United Nations missions in 2016. The report for 2016 was laid before Dáil Éireann on 5 October 2017. The following motion has been placed on the Order Paper of Dáil Éireann and referred to this committee:

That Dáil Éireann approves the report by the Minister for Defence regarding service by the Defence Forces with the United Nations in 2016, copies of which were laid before Dáil Éireann on 5 October 2017, in accordance with section 13 of the Defence (Amendment) Act 2006.

In commending the motion, I will shortly outline some of the key aspects of Ireland's involvement with the UN in 2016. Ireland's commitment to supporting the UN on international peace and security issues has been demonstrated through continuous participation in UN peacekeeping missions since 1958. Participation in overseas peacekeeping missions is a key element of Ireland's foreign policy and has been an important dimension in meeting Ireland's international obligations as a member of the UN and the EU. At present, there are some 586 members of the Permanent Defence Force serving in missions overseas. Irish troops are deployed in UN-led and UN-mandated missions in Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

Ireland's main commitments during 2016 were to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, UNIFIL, and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, UNDOF, on the Golan Heights. The UNIFIL mission continues to represent Ireland's largest overseas deployment. At the request of the United Nations, a contingent of Defence Forces personnel deployed to UNIFIL in mid-2011. Ireland has served as part of a joint battalion comprising Irish and Finnish troops since June 2012. Since May 2015, the Finnish contingent has included an Estonian platoon of some 40 personnel. Command of the joint battalion has rotated between Ireland and Finland, by agreement. Ireland has been in command of the joint battalion since November 2016.

Partnership with like-minded states has become an increasing element of our overseas peacekeeping operations. Working with like-minded states is critical to overcoming the new and ever-emerging challenges we face. Together, we can provide support for fragile states and work to prevent conflict from escalating. Also, in the absence of partners, the range and nature of overseas operations which Ireland could undertake in support of international peace and security would be notably curtailed.

There were two rotations of Irish personnel during 2016 comprising the 53rd Infantry Group in May and the 109th Infantry Battalion in November. At 31 December 2016, there were 379 Irish personnel serving with the mission. An Irish officer, Major General Michael Beary, took up the post of head of mission and force commander with UNIFIL in July 2016. At the request of the UN, his appointment has been extended until July 2018. His appointment to this prestigious post is a tribute to the fine reputation of Irish peacekeepers over the years and to the skills and attributes that they bring to the job. It is also a tribute to the professional competence,

experience and integrity of Major General Beary himself.

The United Nations Security Council has extended the mandate of UNIFIL until 31 August 2018. Ireland's second largest overseas deployment in 2016 was to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, UNDOF, on the Golan Heights. The Defence Forces contribution to UNDOF in 2016 comprised the 52nd Infantry Group and the 54th Infantry Group, each with approximately 130 personnel. The infantry group operated in the role of a quick reaction force on stand-by to assist with ongoing operations within the UNDOF area of responsibility. At the request of the UN, Brigadier General Anthony Hanlon was extended in his appointment as deputy force commander, UNDOF, until 21 May 2016. The security situation in the UNDOF area of operation is continually reviewed by the UN and the Defence Forces. The continued presence of the UNDOF mission remains an important element in ensuring stability on the Golan Heights and in the Middle East generally despite the ongoing conflict in the region. It should be noted that the role of UNDOF is one of being an observer in regard to the separation agreement between Israel and Syria. It is not a peacekeeping or peace-enforcement mission. Its continued presence is supported and welcomed by both Syria and Israel.

Ireland continued to contribute military observers and staff to various UN missions throughout the year under review. The main mission in this regard is UNTSO. Twelve Irish personnel were deployed to this mission in 2016, including Colonel Eamon Caulfield as deputy chief of staff of UNTSO.

Ireland increased the contingent of personnel deployed to the EU training mission in Mali to 18 during 2016. The objective of this mission is to improve the capacity of the Malian armed forces to maintain security in Mali and restore the authority of the Malian Government. Ireland has participated in EUTM Mali since the mission was launched in 2013. Ireland's contribution to the mission has been further increased and currently 20 Irish Defence Forces personnel are deployed to EUTM Mali.

Other missions in which Defence Forces personnel were deployed in 2016 were the EU-led mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUFOR, with seven personnel; the NATO-led international security presence in Kosovo, KFOR, with 12 personnel; and the Resolute Support Mission, RSM, in Afghanistan, with seven personnel. Ireland withdrew from RSM in March 2016.

In addition, during 2016 a small number of Defence Forces officers continued to serve with MINURSO, the UN mission for the referendum in Western Sahara, MONUSCO, the UN stabilisation mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and UNOCI, the UN operation in Côte d'Ivoire.

I had the opportunity to travel to Mali in October 2016 to meet the Irish personnel serving with the EUTM Mali mission. The Taoiseach and I visited UNIFIL in December 2017, and next week I will be travelling to the UNIFIL, UNTSO and UNDOF missions. Such visits are a valuable opportunity to be briefed on the situation and the challenges facing the respective mission areas. It is also an opportunity to thank the members of the Defence Forces for the incredible work they are doing in overseas missions.

During 2016 and again in 2017, I met with fellow defence Ministers to discuss contributions to peace-support operations and UN commitments to progress peacekeeping reform. These summits provide an opportunity to consider the evolution of UN peacekeeping as we face new and more complex security and peacekeeping challenges across the globe.

A central tenet of Irish foreign policy is support for the multilateral system of collective security represented by the United Nations. In this regard, Ireland has taken seriously its obligation under the UN charter to make available to the Security Council armed forces, assistance and facilities in order to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. The current contribution, of some 586 personnel, to overseas missions is very significant in the context of the resources available for defence. This figure will increase further in 2018, with the planned consecutive deployments this year of two Naval Service ships as part of Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean. In 2018, in the region of 650 personnel will be deployed to overseas missions.

As a long-standing contributor to UN peacekeeping missions globally, we are very aware of the challenging nature of the missions we assign to our personnel. The UN is in the process of reforming its peacekeeping operations with a view to becoming more effective and cost-efficient and being more transparent and accountable in its decisions. In this connection, the promotion of a strong gender perspective is a key element in all our peacekeeping operations and an important part of improving the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations.

UN peacekeeping continues to be one of the most flexible and effective tools available to the international community in responding to crises around the world. Any reforms that create the conditions for successful peacekeeping operations and thereby produce tangible improvements in the lives of the people under protection in mission areas are to be welcomed.

Operational experience in peace-support operations is essential for the ongoing development of the Defence Forces. It is important to acknowledge, however, that participation in peace-support missions comes at a personal cost for individuals, who must be away from families and friends for extended periods of time in unfamiliar and difficult environments. Without their commitment and dedication Ireland's strong tradition of service overseas, under the auspices of the United Nations, would not be possible.

Since 1958, over 65,000 Defence Forces personnel have served on overseas missions. This year also marks significant anniversaries in relation to our UN peacekeeping role. It will be the 60th anniversary of Irish participation in UN peacekeeping missions and it will be the 40th anniversary of our first deployment to Lebanon as part of the UNIFIL mission. This is an opportune time for me to acknowledge the significant contribution that they have made to UN peacekeeping operations over many years.

I commend the motion to the committee.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I wish to raise a number of issues. I welcome the report in the main. I commend the work over 40 years. UNIFIL, in particular, has been a testament to the work of the soldiers in the Defence Forces. They have set a standard and have earned much praise for the country because of their actions. It is opportune that Major General Michael Beary is heading the mission in UNIFIL although he has come under quite vicious attack from both the Israeli representatives and the United States Ambassador to the United Nations in recent times. His credibility has been slighted by those representatives. In December, what was being said of him was reported. We should use the opportunity to stand fully behind him and the soldiers who have acted under him in recent times and also the previous detachments from the Irish Defence Forces who have served in Lebanon with distinction and who have been under physical attack from the forces they were trying to keep apart and that are represented at the United Nations. They are the very same ones who are attacking or questioning the major general's ability. The US ambassador to the United Nations, Ms Nikki Haley, said UNIFIL was

giving terrorism a pass in the area and that Major General Beary was blind to Hezbollah's actions. Furthermore, she said he had an embarrassing lack of understanding of what is going on and seemed to be the only person in southern Lebanon who was blind to what Hezbollah was doing.

The Minister of State said he is visiting the UNIFIL mission next week. I hope he will be able to inform Major General Beary and the soldiers serving under him of the support of this committee and that, despite the attacks at such a high level, we are fully behind the work in the area. The actions of Irish soldiers and others in the UNIFIL mission have resulted in relative peace in the area. As I stated, their work has stood up for us internationally.

I have had and still have doubts about the mission in Mali because of the activity of the Malian army in the past and its still-questionable activities.

With regard to the mission in Western Sahara, it is good that the Irish are participating. It is a pity it is not matched by the European Union's actions. We need to see the referendum on independence in Western Sahara. That is what the mission is meant to encourage but it has not happened to date.

The Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan is a NATO mission. I do not think Irish troops should have any role to play in a mission that has any connection with NATO. Irish soldiers should not be involved in such missions.

Deputy Seán Barrett: I would like to put on record once again how proud we are of the Irish forces who serve in various parts of the world on peacekeeping missions. I emphasise "peacekeeping". We are experts in it and have been doing it in Lebanon for about 40 years. I was there myself when I was Minister for Defence and I saw these people in operation. We should be very proud of them.

I reject any criticism that is levelled at us from anybody in respect of the work of our peacekeepers. We are not and should never become associated with one group or another. We are there for a given purpose, to keep peace. It is important that this committee lets its feelings be known. We are very proud of our peacekeepers and it behoves us to remind people that their location and the work they do is peacekeeping. We are not on one side or the other. It is a very difficult task but we are experts at it.

I ask the Minister of State to pass on our congratulations to all these peacekeeping missions, whether they involve 100 people or 30 people. I have seen it myself and the Minister of State has seen it as well. They are wonderful and are highly respected throughout the world. I reject any criticism that is levelled. People should be reminded that they are peacekeepers. They are not there to support one regime or another. Sometimes they have to make difficult choices but they do so according to the purpose for which they are in that particular location. I want to put on record my full support for the role and work of our peacekeepers abroad.

Deputy Lisa Chambers: Most things have been said. Overall, the report is very positive and very welcome. As Deputy Seán Barrett has said, we are extremely proud of our soldiers who serve on overseas missions. I have made the point several times that it is not a holiday they embark upon but very serious missions which pose a threat to life and safety and to their health and well-being. They undertake this in the service of their country, maintaining peace and sometimes enforcing peace. It is part of our international obligation to participate with other like-minded states in working towards global peace and ensuring security across the globe. We

have as important a role to play as any other country. Despite our small geographic size, we have quite a large stature on the international stage and we certainly display that, particularly with our Defence Forces and our work overseas. To see that we have sent some 65,000 members of the Defence Forces overseas since 1958 is quite remarkable and extremely impressive. As citizens, we should all be very proud of this.

We are celebrating our 60th anniversary with UN peacekeeping missions and our 40th anniversary in UNIFIL. These are milestones to be celebrated and to be proud of. Has the Minister of State or anyone in his Department thought about how we might mark the occasion? Might it be worth erecting some sort of statue or monument to recognise our UN veterans, in particular, and those who have served on UN missions overseas? They have represented our country and our Defence Forces with distinction. Given the year that is in it and the fact that we have reached these incredible milestones, it would be a really worthwhile project to consider some sort of monument, perhaps somewhere here in the capital. It could become a location for children in school, young people and citizens across the board who are very proud of their soldiers to come and learn about the history of Ireland's participation in UN projects. It could form part of a visitor attraction. We should think about doing this to try to acknowledge the work that has been done. Ours is a unique achievement in this regard. There are plenty of people who might come up with some design concepts. I have seen one that included the blue helmet as part of the design, which I thought looked very impressive. It would be instantly recognisable in what it represents. The Minister of State might discuss this with his officials to see if it is something that could be achieved this year.

I thank our Defence Forces members. There are nearly 600 members overseas at present. I thank them and their families, who are without their loved ones for the period of the mission. Let us not forget the partners and children who are themselves serving their country in their own way.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: The Minister of State will be heading away next week to meet with members of the Defence Forces. The committee conveys its thanks and appreciation for the work they are doing. They are doing wonderful work. They take great pride in their work everywhere they go. As peacekeepers, they have been protecting people all over the world for many years. When our peacekeepers are coming home, it is wonderful to see the excitement from the families. The families are suffering as well. Young children and wives, partners and everybody else associated with our peacekeepers have a difficult job while the soldiers are serving abroad. It is only right and proper that we acknowledge everybody - families, extended families and everybody associated with this. It is a great achievement for the country. We are certainly punching well above our weight, which has been acknowledged worldwide.

Chairman: In conclusion, I endorse the remarks of our colleagues. I hope the Minister of State will have the opportunity, when speaking with our peacekeepers during his St. Patrick's week visit, to convey to them the committee's unanimous appreciation of the work they do. That is the unanimous view of the Irish people as well. I know some families in which the third generation has now served on peacekeeping missions. That is a great tribute to those families. As Deputy Lisa Chambers said, it is not easy for the partners left at home. They are generally families in which there may be young children. It is not easy but they have given and continue to give great service to our State.

I saw some political commentary at the weekend suggesting that some Fine Gael MEPs will be bringing out a radical policy document on neutrality and our defence policies. I hope that before the end of week, we will hear the Minister of State staunchly defending the triple lock

system and our neutrality in order to be reflective of the views of this committee. We will leave it to the Minister of State's good self to do that.

Deputy Seán Barrett: I forgot to say one thing about our peacekeeping college. It is the greatest establishment and has been there for so many years, yet very few people actually know about it. I keep reminding people about the role of a peacekeeping college. When I was Minister for Defence, I got a visit from the US military attaché seeking to know whether it would be in order for him to recommend to his superiors that they send their key personnel to our peacekeeping college. He said to me: "You know, Minister, we know nothing about peacekeeping. All we know is that we train young soldiers to use the best equipment in the world and we give it to them when they are trained and send them off on peacekeeping missions." The role of that peacekeeping college is incredible. It should be given more publicity and greater awareness. The Minister of State might consider having some sort of ceremony at some stage to highlight the role of the peacekeeping college so that the public at large can know about it and the reputation it has far and wide.

Chairman: That is an important issue to raise and the Deputy is quite right to highlight it. I invite the Minister of State to respond to the members' comments. We are in injury time.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I am injury time as well as I have to head to Donegal. Deputy Ó Snodaigh raised the anniversaries of 40 years in UNIFIL and 60 years in the UN. He praised the standard we have set and the great ability of Major General Mick Beary. I will of course pass on his comments. UN Under-Secretary General Lacroix visited the UNIFIL mission only last week and fully praised the work of Major General Mick Beary and acknowledged the professional work he was carrying out. The Deputies mentioned a number of other missions and I will pass on their good comments. Deputies Lisa Chambers and Seán Barrett are experts.

The UN peacekeeping college will be very much part and parcel of the celebration of 60 years of peacekeeping, 40 with UNIFIL which we should celebrate. Deputy Lisa Chambers outlined a number of ideas in that regard. I have set up a civil military group comprising representatives of the Department and An Garda Síochána because Garda members also participated in peacekeeping missions during the years alongside members of the Defence Forces. There will be an appropriate ceremony which will involve as many people as possible. The Deputy could have stolen my march on events at schools. I have asked for reviews of peacekeeping missions to be carried out outside the walls of barracks in a public space, not inside them, to which we can then invite as many members of the public as possible. Since my appointment, I have insisted on bringing along as many primary and secondary school pupils as possible. I hope we can involve schools in some way in the anniversary celebrations. It is important to do so, as it would be an opportune time to promote the Defence Forces.

I will pass on the committee's good wishes, as requested by Deputy Tony McLoughlin. An invitation was issued to members to visit the UNIFIL mission.

Chairman: We are hoping to do so at the end of June. The Minister of State's officials have been in contact with the clerk to the committee.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I have nothing to do with the drafting of the document being produced by Fine Gael MEPs, but I read with interest a leaked version in last weekend's newspaper. I have not yet seen a full copy of the document, but I will read it with interest.

Chairman: I always thought Fine Gael was a disciplined party and that nothing happened

without senior people knowing about it.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the Minister of State and his officials for attending and dealing with all of the issues raised. He will correspond with us on a number of issues, particularly those related to the Estimates.

Message to Dáil

Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 90, the following message will be sent to the Dáil:

The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence has completed its consideration of the following motion:

That Dáil Éireann approve the report by the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence regarding service by the Defence Forces with the United Nations in 2016.

Sitting suspended at 4.05 p.m. and resumed at 4.10 p.m.

Estimates for Public Services 2018

Vote 27 - International Co-operation (Revised)

Vote 28 - Foreign Affairs and Trade (Revised)

Chairman: We will now resume in public session. In this part of today's meeting we will consider Vote 28 - Foreign Affairs and Trade and Vote 27 - International Co-operation, Revised Estimates for 2018, and report back to the Dáil. I welcome the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Simon Coveney, and also the Minister of State, Deputy Ciarán Cannon. I also welcome the officials from the Department and thank them for the briefing material forwarded in advance of today's meeting. The proposed format of today's meeting is to deal with Vote 28 on a programme by programme basis. At the outset of the consideration of each of the programmes, the Minister can give an overview of the programme. We will then open the issue to members for questions. On completion of Vote 28 we will proceed to Vote 27 and consider it in a similar manner. I ask members to ask their questions on the specific programme in order to progress in an orderly and efficient manner.

Before proceeding to the business of the meeting, I remind members and those in the Public Gallery that their mobile phones should be switched off completely for the duration of the meeting as they cause interference with the recording equipment in the committee room even if on silent mode.

I remind members of the longstanding parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or body outside of the Houses or any

official either by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

Members have been forwarded advance briefing on the various programmes. We will now proceed sequentially. Programme A is “to serve people at home and abroad and to promote reconciliation and co-operation”.

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I will give a general introduction first and then go through the different sectors - A, B, C, D and E - as the Chairman has asked. I will then ask the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon, to deal with Vote 27, which is concerned with the overseas aid development and diaspora budgets, which is the bigger spending area of our Department. I am very pleased to be here this afternoon to present to the select committee the Revised Estimates from my Department for 2018. I would also like to wish everybody a very happy International Women’s Day. I will focus on Vote 28, the Vote of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Ciarán Cannon, will address the committee afterwards on Vote 27 on international co-operation.

On Vote 27, the Government is strongly committed to Ireland’s overseas aid development co-operation programme and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. The current programme for Government sets out our ambition to chart a clear pathway towards the UN target of providing 0.7% of GNI in ODA. I will be bringing proposals in this respect to Government in the near future.

Chairman: Do any of the Tánaiste’s officials have a copy of his opening statement? We were not provided with it.

Deputy Simon Coveney: My apologies. Members will have seen the advance briefing notes provided by my Department on the two Votes, which summarise the main activities and priorities under each strategic programme. For 2018, the overall gross Estimate for the foreign affairs and trade group of Votes, which is Vote 27 and Vote 28, is €738 million compared with €715 million in 2017, which is an overall increase of €23 million or 3.2%.

The Vote 28 priorities for 2018 include the passport reform programme, Brexit, Northern Ireland, provision for urgent capital building and security works in our missions abroad, continuing investment in the Department’s global ICT network and addressing increased operating cost pressures abroad across the mission network, which is growing all the time. I announced last October the decision by Government to open six new missions as part of the doubling our global footprint by 2025 initiative. The Government’s overarching ambition under this initiative is to ensure that Ireland is well-positioned to secure our national interests, particularly our economic interests, globally. The Taoiseach’s intention is that a finalised plan will be ready for consideration by Government shortly. Our expanded network will enhance Ireland’s visibility globally, extend our influence and position us for trade and investment growth in new and existing markets. It will also benefit our citizens travelling overseas and will involve reaching out to our diaspora and exploring new platforms for engagement. It will also involve us in political debates and considerations in parts of the world, in particular the Middle East, which is the main reason we will be opening an embassy in Jordan.

The programme structure for Vote 28 corresponds with the Department’s strategy statement 2016-2019 and also mirrors the priorities set out in the foreign policy review document “The Global Island: Ireland’s Foreign Policy for a Changing World”. It sets out the Department’s work in five priority areas: supporting our people, engaging actively in the European Union, promoting our values, advancing our prosperity and strengthening our influence. These cor-

respond directly with expenditure programmes A to E in the 2018 Revised Estimates volume.

As has been proposed, I will now make some very short introductory comments on programme A to open the discussion. When we complete our discussion of the programme, I will then take each of the following programmes in sequence, as the Chairman has asked me to do.

Programme A is to serve our people at home and abroad and to promote reconciliation and co-operation. Work under this programme includes the effective delivery of passport and consular services for our citizens; supporting our emigrants and deepening engagement with our diaspora; sustaining peace and enhancing reconciliation and political progress in Northern Ireland; increasing North-South and British-Irish co-operation. The amount allocated for current expenditure under programme A in 2018 is €73.4 million compared with €69.7 million in 2017, which is an increase of 7.4%. The programme is about Irish citizens at home and abroad and covers a number of key priority areas for the Department. Given the breadth of issues covered by this programme, I can only briefly touch on some of them in my short introduction.

Our consular services and consular assistance include a group of people who many committee members are familiar with as a result of some of the cases they have raised. Providing high-quality consular assistance and other consular services to Irish citizens at home and abroad remains a key priority of the Department. The Department and our mission network responded to around 3,000 serious consular assistance cases in 2017, including 320 cases where Irish citizens died while overseas. The year also saw the Department responding to a series of terrorist incidents in which Irish citizens were caught up including in London, Barcelona and Melbourne and major adverse weather crises in the US and the Caribbean. A high priority for my Department is ensuring that the travelling Irish public is well-informed about risks and has access to accurate and relevant information and advice. My Department's TravelWise smartphone app is helping to keep Irish citizens informed and safe while abroad and gives us an additional means of contact with citizens in the event of an emergency. I encourage all members of the committee and indeed all public representatives to do everything possible to make the public aware of the TravelWise app. If one uses it, one will see it is very pragmatic and useful. Many people do not realise the extent to which our consular services are working every day or that we assisted in 3,000 cases last year. If one thinks of 3,000 cases, one will realise how many are being assisted and supported every day. The number is significant. If one thinks of the 320 cases in which Irish citizens died abroad, many in accidents and very tragic circumstances, one gets an understanding that our consular services are involved in very difficult cases virtually every day and are working with families and individuals.

The passport service issued 781,375 passports in 2017. This represented an increase of over 6% on the previous year. We expect the number of passport applications to continue to increase throughout 2018. Applications in recent weeks are already showing increases of over 10% on last year. Last year was the highest ever. We will probably be 10% up on that this year. They are dramatic numbers for our passport services to deal with. There have been tens of thousands more applications. The increase in demand is driven by a number of factors including a general increase in the number of Irish residents travelling abroad and a growing population. There are about 54,000 more people in Ireland now than 12 months ago. Our population is growing by at least 50,000 annually, which means over the next two decades there will be an extra million people, which is why we have a 2040 plan. It also why the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is gearing up capacity around passport delivery and also consular services. The increase in demand is driven by a number of factors. There is a growing population and a significant rise in applications from Northern Ireland and the UK, driven by concerns around Brexit. Last

week's snow has impacted on demand also and the passport service is making every effort to deal with urgent cases. The Passport Office had to close for a couple of days last week because people could not get to work. We have sanctioned overtime this week to try to make up for the loss of time, as it has put a lot of stress on the system. People have expectations of receiving their passports in a particular timeframe and we are trying to meet those expectations as best we can.

Our online passport application service was launched in March 2017 as part of the passport reform programme and offers the convenience of an online application system for adult applicants who wish to renew their passport, anywhere in the world. It is planned to extend the online application facility to further categories of applicants, including first-time applicants and children. The 2018 allocation includes a capital allocation of €5.5 million in respect of the passport reform programme, which is money well spent.

I will now turn to the emigrant support programme and diaspora issues, which Deputy Darragh O'Brien in particular has raised with me several times. Through the emigrant support programme budget of €11.595 million annually, the Government provides funding to non-profit organisations and projects to support our most vulnerable emigrants abroad, to strengthen global Irish communities, and to facilitate the development of closer and more strategic links between Ireland and the global Irish. This important budget supports the Government's vision of a vibrant, diverse global Irish community, connected to Ireland and to each other.

I commend the work of my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Ciarán Cannon, in this important area in his role with special responsibility for the diaspora, and he will take any questions that members have on these matters. He is doing a very good job in this area.

This programme deals with matters relating to Northern Ireland and delivers funding for projects to bolster peace and reconciliation on this island. In the context of the current political challenges within Northern Ireland and the potential impact of Brexit, it will be no surprise that this area of work is a particular focus of my Department and a particular priority for me personally.

The interests of the island as a whole and protecting the gains of the peace process remain a priority for the Government in the Brexit negotiations. The Government's priority is to ensure that the Good Friday Agreement and the overall balance of the settlement are not in any way disturbed by the UK's exit from the EU and to maintain the open and effectively invisible Border, which I think everyone, including those in Britain, wants. Finding a way to do it, apart from using the backstop which has been agreed, will be the big challenge to these negotiations. If that is not possible, the backstop is there and we will insist on using it, but our first priority is to work with the British Government to find an option A or options A and B that can deal with the Irish Border issues comprehensively as well as the east-west trade interest that Ireland has in the context of Brexit.

In 2017, the reconciliation fund made grants to more than 100 projects, supporting organisations across the community and voluntary sector, most based in Northern Ireland. These groups are building meaningful links across communities, addressing the issues that are impacting on their lives, including sectarianism, and are working to create better understanding between people and traditions on the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Britain. As we approach the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, it is clear that this work is as important as ever. In recognition of this, the Government has protected the reconciliation fund's budget in recent years and included a commitment in the Stormont House Agreement to maintain its an-

nual budget at €2.7 million.

I welcome any comments or questions from committee members on programme A.

Chairman: I thank the Minister. I first call on Deputy Darragh O'Brien and remind members that we must stick with questions and not statements.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: That is a pity.

Chairman: We are under some time pressure. It would be unusual that members would make statements, anyway.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I will be obedient.

Chairman: We will also stick to discussion of programme A.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Tuigim. The Minister is welcome. Following the Chairman's instructions, I will confine myself to questions. I know that it is the Minister's first time before the committee apart from legislation, there having been a Bill when he took over. It would be opportune for us to have a committee meeting around some of the areas which the Minister covered in order that we might cover them in more detail.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I would be very happy to do that. I am conscious that we have not had the time for a proper policy debate.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: We can do it when we are not under time pressure.

Chairman: We lost a meeting last week due to the inclement weather.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I understand that. That is fair enough. We can reschedule it. The Minister referred to the consular staff and the service in particular, and the work that is being done here in Dublin by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I want to record my appreciation of this. Unfortunately, we all have instances where tragedies happen to families that we represent. The professionalism, efficiency and compassion shown at very difficult times is exceptional. It makes me proud and I mentioned it to the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon, in the Dáil.

I have raised the issue of the emigrant support programme. I am disappointed that there is no increase there. I note there were 490 applications, which is an increase from 319 different groups last year. What is the approval rate? It is a really good programme and I have seen it work. I have seen it on visits to London, Chicago and other places. It is very valuable and a very good link. Will the Minister comment on why we have not increased the funding?

The passport service has had its funding increased 6% year on year up to the end of 2017. It is very pressurised and I understand that. Does the Minister feel he has the resources required to meet the increased demand which will continue to increase this year? Last year well in excess of 10% of the passports issued were issued to people in the North and Britain, and that will increase further.

Will there be an additional requirement for the public services card to be used when applying for a new passport, whether it is a first passport or a renewal? If there is a plan to do this, would it mean that there was a different requirement for those applying for passports outside the Republic of Ireland, in the North of Ireland or Britain?

Looking to the Brexit challenges, it is a shame that we cannot have a policy debate here now. I was in Brussels the week before last and have met some of the additional staff who have been employed to deal with the challenges of Brexit in our permanent representation there. They are doing a superb job. Over this year and up to March 2019, every priority must be given to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to ensure that it is staffed and resourced. When Fianna Fáil, the main Opposition party, has travelled abroad, it has given the Government approach on Brexit and Ireland's challenges with Europe and we are showing a united front. I want to make sure that the Minister's Department is happy that it has the resources needed.

The Minister referred to official development assistance, ODA, in his opening remarks and the commitment to reach 0.7% of gross national income, GNI. We have discussed this several times and all parties are in agreement. The Minister said that he would publish a roadmap on this, which is something that I have called for. When does he intend to do that? It might be a question for the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon.

The Minister referred to the additional six missions which he announced will open and the doubling of the global footprint by 2025. I was told that doubling does not necessarily mean the doubling of the number of embassies or consulates. I have tried to grapple with that answer. What does it mean and how many embassies or consulates will we reopen? I welcome that the Minister has stated that he will publish a plan in that regard, which I presume will go to Cabinet to be agreed. Will he publish that plan and the criteria on which the decisions are made? I wish to know how we decide where embassies are opened. I welcomed the opening of embassies in Bogota, Mumbai and elsewhere but it is important for us to know the rationale for opening embassies and what our priorities are in that regard. Will the Minister publish that plan and, if so, when?

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: The briefing notes with which members have been provided indicate an increased allocation of 17% for programme B and 7.4% for programme A. What are the criteria for deciding upon allocation for 2018? The allocation for some programmes has increased, while for others it has decreased. On the new missions, some will be full embassies and some will not. On what basis is that being decided?

On the civil society groups, we met several which are working in the North on peace and reconciliation and there is no doubt that they are carrying out very valuable work. However, some have been there for a very long time and there may be no space for new groups that might have a different idea or approach or, because they have been doing something differently, might like to present a new and innovative idea. Is there space for such groups in that regard?

Deputy Seán Crowe: I welcome the Minister and the Minister of State. I wish to start on a negative note, which will be of no surprise to the Minister. Members yesterday received a briefing note from the Department which outlined that the overall gross Estimate for Votes 27 and 28 is €738 million, as the Minister stated, but we have no independent analysis of how that money is being spent. I have raised this issue with previous Ministers. I am uncomfortable with the process in that regard. It is a huge amount of money and we have a responsibility in terms of governance and oversight but do not even have a copy of the Minister's speech. That is an appalling way to treat members of the committee. I do not believe that the briefing note on the spend which has been given to members was only available from yesterday. Members have been to other countries to discuss parliamentary oversight and so on and how that is carried out there. We would be uncomfortable if we observed another country dealing with such a large amount of money in this fashion. I have previously complained about the process in regard to the European defence fund and other breakdowns and that is similar to these huge sums we are

being asked to approve under general headings without knowing the detail of how the money is being spent. It is a fair point but I have laboured it long enough.

Like others, I thank the Minister's office, the Passport Office and the consular service for their efforts in regard to passport issues. The Minister mentioned problems caused by the recent snowfall. One person who could not get a passport because staff were unable to get into the office contacted me. He was unable to join his family on their planned trip to New Zealand because he could not get a passport. I do not know how one can legislate or provide for such situations. I am sure others were also affected and I welcome that the Minister is contemplating additional overtime for staff and so on to deal with the backlog. I welcome the €5 million increase for the passport reform programme and I understand that big reforms have been undertaken in recent years.

Recent figures indicate that 53,715 people in the North applied for Irish passports in 2015, 67,582 in 2016 and 80,964 in 2017. Staff in the Passport Office are doing a fantastic job under immense pressure as a result of Brexit but the Government must acknowledge that increased demand. Has money been set aside to establish a passport office in the North? That could take the form of a dedicated citizen hub providing a place for passport applications but also a valuable resource in terms of assisting Irish citizens with their legal rights and entitlements in regard to Brexit.

Deputy Noel Greally: I will be very brief. Like the previous speakers, I compliment and acknowledge the tremendous work of our offices and embassies abroad. Some 320 Irish people died abroad last year. When a Deputy gets a phone call informing him or her of such a death, he or she contacts the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, a representative of which contacts the family of the deceased within minutes. That phone call from the Department to an individual who might have lost somebody abroad means an awful lot to the family and I wish to acknowledge that, as well as the tremendous work done by departmental officials abroad in dealing with serious injuries or deaths. I recently dealt with a case where there were no Irish diplomatic, embassy or consular staff in a particular country but the embassy in a neighbouring country dealt with the incident very effectively and did tremendous work, which I wish to acknowledge. As mentioned by previous speakers, the Minister plans to open six new missions abroad. What are the criteria for choosing where to open those missions and what determines whether they will be full embassies or mission offices?

On passports, I compliment the staff of the Passport Office. I have had occasion to contact the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon, in a panic regarding passports. However, 780,000 is a huge number of passports to be processed and the staff in the office must be complimented. They have not seriously let anyone down in terms of providing a passport and I compliment them in that regard. I welcome the Minister's comments in regard to being able to apply for a passport online from anywhere in the world. That is a brilliant service as passports previously had to be sent to people's family homes.

One issue on which I hope the Chairman will give me latitude is the possibility of allowing online applications for driving licences. If one can apply for a passport online, why can one not do so for a driving licence? I was contacted this week by a young lady living in New York whose driving licence has expired. Unfortunately, she is there illegally and cannot do without a driving licence. It is the first thing for which one is asked when stopped by a police officer. There is to be a clampdown on people in the United States who do not have their driving licence with them when stopped by a police officer and such people are going to be pulled in. I appreciate this point does not directly relate to the issues under discussion but I ask that the Govern-

ment find a solution to that problem such that people abroad will be able to renew their driving licences online. I am not saying that one should be able to make a first-time application online but the Government should come up with a solution to give Irish people living abroad a chance to renew their licence. It is a huge issue which I am sure the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon, has encountered while dealing with the Irish abroad. I know of a case involving a young person who had to come home from Australia to renew his Irish driving licence and then fly back out again. Will the Government please give some consideration to that issue, in honour of God?

Deputy Simon Coveney: I am not sure God has much to do with it but-----

Deputy Noel Grealish: We are coming up to Easter and St. Patrick's Day. The Minister should have a bit of faith.

Deputy Simon Coveney: -----I will take that on board.

Chairman: Are any projections available within the Department which indicate that the growth in passport demand will continue? Members know some of the demand is as a result of Brexit. Is that spike expected to continue? The online service is very successful. Are there plans to roll out more online passport services? It would be very helpful if there were.

As regards North-South co-operation and the funding provided in that regard, the same funding is to be provided in 2018 as was allocated in 2017. As all members know, there are difficulties in communities in Northern Ireland. That programme has been very successful over the years in helping some of the most disadvantaged communities, and those of us who have regular interaction with both communities and traditions in Northern Ireland know that such funding can be critical in assisting a regeneration of communities and that it is an area that needs additional attention.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I will address the questions in reverse order. I am very aware of the Chair's interest in Northern Ireland and community relations there. One of the reasons we are not reducing funding which supports community engagement and reconciliation through a series of community and civic-led projects in Northern Ireland in spite of the fact that we are two decades after the Good Friday Agreement is that we recognise there is still much work to do in that regard. In the context of some of the negotiations and discussions in our attempts to try to re-establish an Executive in Northern Ireland, we considered increasing funding for some minority Border communities in particular. We wished to send out a very strong signal that both Governments are very anxious to recognise diversity and minority groups living on both sides of the Border. If anything, we might see slight increases in funding. I assure the committee that I do not envisage any reductions.

With regard to Deputy Grealish's point, the online passport service has been an extraordinary success. Approximately 40% of people applying to renew are doing so online and we think that we can get that number up much higher than 50%. We are solely confining the service to those over the age of 18 but, hopefully, in the future the service will be available for children. It makes sense that people should be able to apply for a driver's licence online. My understanding is that is likely to be the case after October. It would be a little more complicated to apply online from abroad for a licence. I am informed by the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon, that under EU law passports can only be sent to an address in the EU. If someone is in Sydney, it is hard to apply online and have an Irish passport sent to Australia but if he or she is returning home and applies for a passport, he or she should be able to update it online.

Members may have had an opportunity to debate the Indecon report and the diaspora generally in the Dáil earlier. Indecon has done good work on the barriers facing returning emigrants in a series of areas, some of which have been raised by members in the past, including driver's licence applications, opening of bank accounts, credit ratings, discrimination in respect of life and health insurance, accessing education and social housing lists and so on. The report is a good basis for Government consideration. The Minister of State will bring a set of recommendations to Government in a few months but significant cross-departmental co-ordination will be necessary to do that because different Departments will need to provide solutions. Hopefully, we will have something for Government by the end of May. If not, it will certainly happen before the summer recess. However, we have a set target of the end of May.

Deputy Crowe said he would have liked more information to have been provided before the meeting and that is a fair criticism. When I have gone through the Estimates process previously, more detail was available to the committee earlier. We will look at that and try to correct that for next year. If we are to have a proper Estimates process, members need time to digest the detail of where and how we are spending money. I will try to make sure that is improved for the next occasion.

With regard to whether a passport office is needed in Northern Ireland, even with the dramatic increase in online applications and the increase in applications from Northern Ireland, in particular, the system is working well and I am not sure that we need to open a physical office in the North to respond to, and deliver on, the expectations and the aspirations of those seeking Irish passports there. We will keep this under review. I do not want an unnecessary outlay of capital to open new offices when we provide a good service online.

Deputy O'Sullivan and a number of others asked about how we choose the cities and countries for new missions. One of the big priorities is new trade opportunities. That is partially a response to Brexit but even if that was not taking place, there are exciting markets that Irish companies are not part of to the extent that they should be. The obvious place to start is countries that have trade agreements with the EU. That is why we considered Latin America. There are currently trade agreements in place with both Chile and Colombia. We have a strong historical relationship with both countries, which few Irish people know much about. However, I suspect some members do. We have also had an active interest and involvement through some Irish personalities in the Colombian peace process, which is deeply appreciated in Colombia when I speak to politicians there. We looked on Bogota and Santiago as two cities with significant populations in reasonably stable countries. They have similar business traditions to Ireland, particularly in respect of agrifood and technology. Both economies are expanding and they are seeking EU partners for trade opportunities. There were many reasons for looking to both countries. Our diplomatic representation in South America generally is light but it is particularly light in Latin America. If we are serious about building engagement and trade opportunities with Colombia, it is not a runner to cover the country from Mexico. These are two exciting opportunities.

We probably should have opened an embassy in New Zealand a long time ago. There are large numbers of Irish people there and they are involved in the construction industry, in particular. There are many young Irish students there as well. We have a huge amount in common with the country. It has a significant agrifood and dairy industry. We compete with New Zealand in many markets but we also share a great deal of research and ambition. When one considers the size of our economies and how they are shaped, New Zealand and Ireland have a great deal in common and, therefore, we were anxious that opening an embassy there would be

an early decision.

With regard to Vancouver, CETA is the new trade agreement with Canada. We have an embassy in Toronto but Toronto is as close to Dublin as it is to Vancouver. Canada is a massive country and the Irish population there is significant, as it always has been. The Irish influence on Canada is enormous but a significant trading opportunity exists and we are starting to develop that. There have been 12 ministerial visits to the country in 13 months. The political engagement has been undertaken to support this expanding footprint. A consulate will open on the west coast because we have the embassy in Toronto but essentially that is similar to opening a second embassy. We do not need an embassy in Mumbai to exploit trading opportunities because we have one in India. However, Mumbai is a major commercial capital in which Ireland needs to have a presence and that is why we are opening a consulate in the city.

We have also decided to open an embassy in Amman, Jordan, for different reasons. Our global footprint is not all about economics and trade; it is also about ensuring Ireland plays a role and is relevant in political decision-making, human rights advocacy and overseas aid. We spend significant amounts supporting refugees and refugee camps in Jordan. Most of the refugees are Syrian but some are from Palestine. I welcome the Palestinian ambassador to the Gallery. He is always welcome. It is not a secret that the Government and I want to increase the priority of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship and Ireland's involvement in trying to advocate for progress in that area. One of the linked decisions to that increased priority is to open an embassy in Amman. There will be some limited trade opportunities as well. Jordan is a stable country and there will be opportunities in the agrifood sector, in particular.

There will be other announcements. When we bring a plan to Government, it will not involve naming every embassy and consulate we will open between now and 2025, but it certainly will specifically name embassies and consulates we would like to open in 2019, after the list the committee has heard for this year, and there will be reasons for this. There are parts of the world where Ireland has a very light diplomatic presence. North Africa is a good example, as is west Africa. There are also countries such as Ukraine and Serbia where the vast majority of EU member states have embassies and we do not. We need to understand the pressures and political considerations coming from the east as well as the concerns of western European countries.

I do not think there will be any huge surprises here. There are obvious gaps we are filling. The early decisions in terms of expanding our footprint are about the low hanging fruit and the obvious areas where Ireland, now that we can afford to, is looking to ensure we have a presence, never mind increasing a presence. Then, of course, we will build on an existing presence in countries that are strategically important for us. It will not be a surprise to people that we will be beefing up our teams in Paris and Berlin. Potentially in the future, we will also look at consulates in terms of having a secondary presence in markets such as France and Germany, and looking at places such as Munich and Lyon to see whether Ireland needs to increase its presence there. There is also Britain post-Brexit in terms of ensuring Ireland has the presence we need to maintain the closeness we have built up over the past 20 years. Over time, we will look at cities such as Cardiff and some English cities. I am not announcing that we are doing this now. I am just saying this is the type of thinking that guides the global footprint.

To answer Deputy Darragh O'Brien's question on whether doubling the global footprint means doubling the number of embassies we have globally, we have approximately 80 missions abroad at present, with 60 embassies and the rest are consulates. I do not think we will be announcing another 80 in the next seven years. When we speak about doubling our global footprint, we are speaking about doubling Ireland's reach and presence abroad, using all of the

tools we have available to do so. Some of this means embassies and consulates and some of it will be using arts and culture more proactively. Some of it will be more proactively reaching out to our diaspora. Some of it will be dramatically increasing, in my view, our overseas aid development budgets, and the increased reach that comes with this, in terms of the opportunities that come from it. Some of it will be using technology to reach out more successfully to ensure there is an Irish voice commenting on world affairs in parts of the world where there is little or no Irish intelligence or voice at present. There are many ways in which we can use the arms of the State and the talent that we have in Ireland in the public and private sectors, through our diaspora and through the infrastructure of the State, to be able to dramatically increase Ireland's reach globally. This is what the global footprint project is all about. I apologise for going on a bit about it, but it is important to give a detailed explanation about it.

Of course there is an opportunity for new groups in Northern Ireland with new thinking to get funding. There is an application process they can follow and we will put in place an assessment process that is impartial in terms of support. I will let my colleague answer the question on the emigrant support programme; I do not want to hog the whole thing.

With regard to the question on passports, I expect we will see an increase in passport numbers for some years to come. Ireland's population will continue to grow. If anything, the estimates in the 2040 plan are conservative. In the next two decades we could see closer to 1.5 million more people in Ireland rather than 1 million, but let us wait and see. The Irish proposition is very attractive, and at least half of the increased population will be people who will not have been born in Ireland, and this is a very good thing. This is not just a guesstimate by me randomly at the table. It is from the conversations we had when we put together the 2040 plan in terms of trying to understand what drives population growth and where it is likely to come from.

I will leave it to the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon, to deal with overseas development aid in more detail, but if there is one thing he and I want to do while we are in this Department it is to leave behind a total change in direction in terms of Ireland's contribution to overseas aid. Developed countries such as Ireland have an obligation not just to give what they can and decide on this year on year, where overseas development aid has to compete with health care, education and all of the other issues, but actually to make much more fundamental commitments that a certain percentage of wealth in a country would be assigned to help people with little or nothing in various parts of the world involved in conflict and desperately tragic and exposed circumstances. We would like to set Ireland on a course that is very clear. This requires a financial commitment from the Government over time to get to where we promised we would be, which is to reach 0.7% of gross national income in Ireland. This will take some time because we are a little above 0.3% at present. It is important to be realistic in terms of what is possible, but I would like us to have a very ambitious plan in this regard. We are working to get a plan together that I can bring to the Government soon. I will be very happy to come before the committee again to talk about this once it is done. The work of the committee on assessing our overseas aid programme and the report it published is very helpful in this regard. We will also launch a White Paper process on the overseas aid development programme, which I am sure the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon, will speak about. Obviously we want the continuing input from all political parties and the committee. I have spoken about many other areas, but the questions strayed outside programme A so I hope we will be a lot quicker on programmes B, C, D and E.

Chairman: I thank the Minister.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: There will be disappointment in some countries they will

not get an embassy or consulate. It is a few years since we made an official visit to Iran during the previous Dáil. We met the foreign Minister and various other officials there, and we know how keen they were to have an embassy. I also wonder about countries that have an embassy here but we do not have a presence in their countries, such as Cuba, for example, although I know we cannot be everywhere.

From our visits, we know other countries want to do business with us because they trust and respect us, but there is a huge challenge, particularly in two of the places the Minister mentioned, namely, Colombia and Mumbai. I am surprised he spoke about Colombia and stability. We meet quite a number of groups, formally and informally. We have met civil society groups from Colombia and some dreadful things are happening in their local communities with farmers. Multinational companies are coming in and there are land grabs. There is a lack of respect for indigenous peoples and their way of life. It will be challenging for Ireland. We do not want to lose the respect and high esteem in which we are held. The Department has produced a human rights and business plan. We speak about trade missions, and I hope we can be a leader when it comes to decent work and workers' rights. We know about the type of work that goes on in some of those countries, and it will be hugely challenging for us to maintain the good standing we have.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I have some very quick questions on the requirement for a public services card for a passport. I know we have thrown a lot at the Minister. I very much welcome the fact that the Minister will publish what he is going to do in 2019 with regard to the opening of new embassies and consulates. If the footprint also includes, which it does, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and the Ireland House type initiative, will this form part of it? Will what the Department will publish in 2019 have a business reach as well?

Deputy Simon Coveney: Yes.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: So the Department is looking at all of this. I will leave it at that.

Deputy Simon Coveney: On that question, the global footprint project very much involves the agencies, including Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia, Tourism Ireland, IDA Ireland and a number of the arts organisations. We are trying to use all of the tools Ireland has to reach out in a more effective and ambitious way in order to extend Irish influence and create opportunities. It is being led by the Taoiseach's Department, but it is supported by mine.

On the public services card, since 29 March 2016 the Passport Office has required all first-time applicants aged 18 years and over who are resident in Ireland to submit a copy of their public services card. It is not anything new and also applies to a small number of adult passport applicants whose passports were issued before 1 January 2006 and reported as lost, stolen or damaged. The measure has been an important step in providing protection against fraud and identity theft and upholding the integrity of the Irish passport. All passport applications from Irish citizens will continue to be subject to rigorous identification and entitlement checks. The introduction of the PSC requirement has allowed the Passport Office to dispense with the requirements to supply certain additional documentation and reduces the overall volume of documentation Irish citizens must submit when applying for a passport. The purpose of the public services card has been twisted in the political debate, but it tries to create a more efficient system to provide services for people quickly and with the minimum amount of bureaucracy.

On 17 July 2017 the Government agreed that, by the fourth quarter of this year, all adult ap-

plicants resident in the State who wished to renew their passport would require a public services card. We recognise that many changes are happening in passport delivery. We were asked to introduce the change at the start of this year, but I said that was not viable as too much was going on in the Passport Office in terms of efficiency improvements. By the end of the year, however, we will I hope be able to introduce the requirement which we think makes sense from the point of view of efficiency.

The Deputy also asked about passport applications from abroad. The public services card requirement does not and will not apply to Irish citizens who are normally resident outside the State. They include people living in Northern Ireland.

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan asked about choosing embassies and countries. One cannot choose countries solely on the basis of being comfortable with everything they do. There are question marks against Iran, for example, but many people would be able to make a coherent case for opening an embassy there at some stage in the future, as practically every European country has an embassy there. There are challenges in post-conflict Colombia, but it is trying to build a stable society and economy, in which task we want to be able to support it. Once one moves beyond comfortable territory such as with EU member states which all apply the same rules and into the Arab world, north Africa and Latin America one will have challenges, but having an embassy in a country gives us a say and an opportunity to have conversations we would otherwise not have. They may be on human rights issues or may help us to better understand the challenges certain countries face. Morocco has an embassy here. We will have to look at reciprocating in the future because we do not currently have any embassy in that part of Africa. It does not mean that we agree with Morocco on everything, but creating relationships through proper diplomatic channels allows us to extend our reach and become relevant in political debates in different parts of the world. It is easy to refer to problems in countries in other parts of the world which have a different history from ours, but the point in expanding our global footprint is to move out of our comfort zone and create new friendships and partnerships. On the back of this there will be trading opportunities for Irish businesses and businesses that wish to use Ireland as a gateway to the European Union.

Chairman: Deputy Darragh O’Brien asked the Minister of State a question about the emigrant support programme.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): As the Tánaiste said, the diaspora will play a critical role in expanding our global footprint. As there has been a significant increase in the number of applications from diaspora support groups across the world, we need to move beyond the figure of €11.59 million. There will be a significantly enhanced budget to double our global footprint as we need to build the sense of a global community among the diaspora.

Deputy Darragh O’Brien: There is an absolute necessity to increase the figure substantially. I also agree with the Minister that we should increase the level of official development assistance, but within the overall budget for foreign affairs we could do a lot more than provide €11.59 million and I believe there is the political will to do so. I asked how many of the 490 applicants had to be turned away because we did not have the funding sought. If we are reaching out to the diaspora and asking it to do more for us, it should be a two-way street. I have met many of the diaspora in Chicago, London, Manchester and Lisbon and they do a fantastic job. The programme is very valuable and we need to value it more. We need to utilise it better and put more into it.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: The traditional destinations of investment have been the United States and the United Kingdom, but very large diaspora communities are developing in the Middle East, South Africa and other locations and we need to be able to grow the budget to respond to their needs.

Deputy Seán Crowe: A 50% increase in the allocation for diaspora affairs is substantial, but we do not get a sense of where it is being spent. That is the difficulty.

Deputy Simon Coveney: There is a 50% increase in subhead A5, support for Irish emigrant services. On the question of accountability, we have an independent audit system that assesses how we spend money. The Secretary General has to submit audited accounts to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. There is a robust system for how Departments spend money. While this is a political discussion about how we prioritise spending which is a different issue, I would not like the suggestion the Department was spending money without an independent audit and assessment to go unchecked.

Deputy Seán Crowe: The Department is supposed to obtain the agreement of this committee, but if the committee does not have the necessary skills or the time to do so, it is a meaningless rubber-stamping job. In the years I have been a member of the committee we have simply rubber-stamped the spending of huge amounts, the expenditure of which was not really assessed by the committee. I am not saying it would have been any different if we had received the information a few days earlier, but a huge amount of money is involved.

Deputy Simon Coveney: The big spend is in the area of current expenditure. The programme can be broken into one thirds - salaries, programmes and other. Breaking it up item by item, there has not been significant change year on year, rather there has been a change of emphasis. There is nothing to stop the committee from looking in more detail at any one of these sections and asking me to come back to speak about why we are prioritising or spending money in each area. That is what we are giving a flavour of today. There are so many areas that we cover that we could spend a long time speaking about any one of them, from the diaspora to overseas development aid to passport services to consular services and so on. We have looked at the issue and do not see any area where we are not trying to provide value for money through reform, driving efficiencies and using technology. The passport services are a good example in that regard.

Chairman: The Committee of Public Accounts and the Comptroller and Auditor General have a very important role to play in the examination of expenditure and where public funding goes. On the documentation provided, the committee secretariat has contacted the Department, but the loss of a few days last week also caused delays. We all agree that we should receive documentation much earlier.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I accept that and we will ensure it will happen.

Chairman: The estimated time for completion of this meeting will be tomorrow if we keep going as we are. As we have spent over an hour on one programme, I ask the Minister, the Minister of State and my committee colleagues to, please, be mindful of the time. We will move to programme B.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I will ensure the committee will receive my full speaking note which I will try to summarise.

Programme B provides the framework for the Department's role in securing Ireland's influ-

ence in EU outcomes through maintaining and growing strong relationships with EU institutions and other member states. The focus of work under the programme in 2018 will be on safeguarding Ireland's interests in the broader context of the Brexit negotiations, both with regard to the final status of the United Kingdom outside the European Union and the future direction and policies of the Union. Equally, the programme supports Ireland's contribution to the European Union's global engagement on peace, security, trade and development, as well as security in the wider European region.

The allocation for the programme in 2018 is €27.3 million, compared with a figure of €22.3 million in 2017. It represents an increase of €5 million or 17.5%, reflecting the top priority attached to Brexit and our place in Europe. I can go through in some detail where the money will go. We have had to gear up significantly for the challenge of Brexit and I hope members are seeing the results in how Ireland is negotiating. It has meant more people, infrastructure, time and travel to Brussels. We are also gearing up to ensure Ireland will have its say in the debate on the future of Europe. All of these tasks require more resources and that, essentially, is what is happening.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: There is much in this programme which is crucial. The 17.5% increase is required and we fully understand the reason for it. We could have a full discussion on the programme and its priority. I know that the Tánaiste must report to other committees also, but at the appropriate time it would be useful for him to come back to speak about the programme, particularly the future of Europe element. I know that there is also a European affairs committee. It is important as the European Union and the Commission are moving forward very fast. I would like to see the European Union moving forward and it is, but it seems to be moving forward at great pace. The next few months are crucial with respect to the negotiations. It goes without saying that I wish the Tánaiste and our negotiating team all the best in what will be a critical phase. At the appropriate time I would like us to come back to the element of how we are approaching not just the negotiations but also the future of Europe piece. I am happy with the figures and do not have specific questions to ask, but I do not want people to think that in not commenting on it we do not afford it the absolute priority it should have.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I was going to ask about the increase in pay, but it has been indicated that this programme has to do with Brexit. As section B.3 relates to the treaty, does it cover the issue of Ireland's involvement in the Permanent Structured Co-operation, PESCO, arrangement? In section B.4 there is a 185% increase in spending compared with the figure for 2017. Supposedly, it is to inform and engage Irish citizens more with the European Union. Will the Tánaiste expand on that aspect? Is there a concern that people have become disenchanted with the European Union. Will the money be spent on glossy brochures about the Union and so on? On what will the money be spent?

Deputy Simon Coveney: With respect to section B.4 and EU engagement, much of it is linked with the debate on the future of Europe. As members know, the Minister of State, Deputy Helen McEntee, is organising public meetings throughout the country, of which she has had a series. I believe she is in Letterkenny today. One of the problems with debates such as that on the future of Europe is that they often take place in a bubble in which like-minded people speak to each other about Ireland's commitment to the European Union and its future. When decisions are made on the back of some of these debates, the public responds in a way that suggests they were never told that the European Union was moving in that direction. It is one of the reasons we sometimes see disenchantment with how decisions are taken at a European level within European institutions and so on.

We know exactly what is going on in the debate on the future of Europe and want to try to include as many people as we can to ensure all stakeholders will have an opportunity to have an impact on whether a non-governmental organisation wants to extend the European Union's levels of ambitions on the continent of Africa, in the Middle East, in the areas of common security and defence, terrorism and radicalisation or the internal market for banking and financial services. All of these issues are being debated in the context of where the European Union is going and what it will look like in five and ten years's time. If we do not put resources in place to ensure there is a proper conversation taking place nationally, it will not happen and we would then be accused, after decisions are made, of having the elites make decisions. People will say they were never consulted. As a result of the lessons learned in the past, we are trying to address that issue. The Minister of State, Deputy Helen McEntee, is doing a good job in that respect, although it is difficult to generate much interest in the debate on the future of Europe when much of the debate is dominated by Brexit because of the tensions or drama surrounding the negotiations. We have seen a significant increase in percentage terms in the section, but it is still a relatively modest amount, given the importance of the issue.

Chairman: Shall we proceed to programme C?

Deputy Simon Coveney: Programme C covers the Department's contribution to a more just world through the promotion and protection of human rights internationally and a more secure world based on a stable and secure rules-based international environment. Under the programme, 68% of current expenditure is made up of contributions to international organisations. My Department's commitment to promoting international peace, security and human rights is channelled through programme C, for which there is a total allocation of €51.6 million in 2018, compared with a figure of €55.8 million in 2017, representing a reduction of €4.8 million which is due to reduced projected contributions to international organisations. It should be noted, however, that the allocation for administration under the programme has increased by just over €500,000. Most of the expenditure under the programme relates to Ireland's mandatory contributions to international organisations of which we are a member, including the United Nations. The 2018 Estimate reflects the best estimate at this time of the size of mandatory contributions due this year. It should be noted, however, that the challenge in forecasting, in particular, the UN peacekeeping budget, which is the largest part of our payments to the UN, is not an easy one. It is difficult to estimate this in advance, as an existing peacekeeping operation might be expanded or reduced, depending on the circumstances, or a new one might be established. Also, UN contributions are invoiced in US dollars and, therefore, are subject to currency fluctuations.

Ireland is seeking election as a non-permanent members of the UN Security Council in June 2020 for the 2021-22 term. The campaign is well under way and we are basing our campaign on Ireland's foreign policy credentials and strong international standing at the UN.

We continue to engage closely with the UN and other multilateral partners, such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe. We are contributing to the work of our multilateral partners in targeted policy areas, such as peacekeeping, conflict resolution and conflict prevention, international development, disarmament and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

We will continue our efforts to make the UN and other multilateral institutions more effective in facing global regional and development challenges. Disarmament and non-proliferation issues will remain a priority in 2018, building on our active engagement and participation in international disarmament and non-proliferation in previous years.

We continue to advance human rights priorities and are making investments accordingly, particularly in terms of the solid record of achievements in the UN Human Rights Council in which Ireland is an active participant.

A key pillar of our international engagement under programme C is our input into the shaping and formulation of the European Union's common foreign and security policy, most notably at the monthly meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council in which I participate.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: One can look at these headings without really knowing what exactly is involved. The next time we might be given an example. For example, on women post conflict, perhaps the Minister could give us a concrete specific example of what is happening there.

I was not disagreeing with embassies being open in countries such as Colombia or cities such as Mumbai. My point was it was an opportunity for Ireland to continue its stand on human rights and that human rights are not only for the foreign affairs part of Deputy Coveney's Ministry but also for the trade part.

Has the Minister a budget to campaign for the seat on the UN Security Council? We have seen the Security Council at its worst lately over Ghouta. We saw how ineffective it was. It was being held to ransom by those with a veto. We in the committee heard a presentation when we were preparing for our own review and Mr. David Donoghue appeared before us. It was interesting talking about the Security Council and how there had been moves to try to get rid of that veto in order that it would not be allowed on occasions when a severe humanitarian crisis was being discussed.

Deputy Noel Grealish: Regarding the United Nations and our contribution, what has been the impact of the funding cut by the United States on overseas development aid? I am sure it has also cut funding to the United Nations. Is there pressure on other governments to try to make that up or has there been any contact from the United Nations? It is appalling the way President Trump is cutting overseas development aid. He should be increasing it, not cutting it.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I wish we had more information there. I am fine with it but I would like to know exactly where, by organisation, the money is going. One does not get a sense of that at all.

Chairman: With regard to funding of the United Nations, my understanding is that those are mandatory contributions.

Deputy Simon Coveney: Yes.

Chairman: With that *modus operandi*, is there a danger of that being badly wounded if President Trump carries out his proposal to reduce dramatically funding to the UN?

Deputy Simon Coveney: Yes. The contributions that we make to the UN each year are mandatory contributions and they fluctuate slightly. For example, a big part of UN expenditure is on peacekeeping operations. It is a multi-billion euro expenditure programme. Obviously, Ireland benefits from that in the context of our interest in UN peacekeeping operations, such as UNIFIL and UNDOF. Those operations are all funded through UN funds to which Ireland makes a contribution.

There is concern within the UN generally that were the US to reduce its funding to the UN

significantly in percentage terms, given the US provides nearly 40% of funding to the UN and it is a significant funder, it would have major consequences. There is a reform programme under way, that the US is buying into and supporting, in respect of value for money and ensuring there is no duplication to try to break down some of the silos in the UN that undoubtedly need to be challenged. We need to ensure, however, that the output in the form of the results the UN achieves in helping some of the most vulnerable people in the world is not reduced in the effort to ensure efficiency and value for money. Unfortunately, there are more conflicts and crises for the UN to deal with than we have seen for many years. For a start, there are multiple famines, which are inexcusable in this day and age, and for the most part are preventable if there is intervention at the right time.

Potential reductions by the US in contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA, are a major concern for Ireland and for many other countries. UNRWA is the UN organisation that essentially supports Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan and Lebanon. Historically, the US is a big funder of UNRWA. I have visited UNRWA schools within Palestinian territories, as I am sure have members of this committee. They are impressive and effective ways of educating young Palestinians, who, by the way, are really well educated generally, which is why it is such a tragedy that we cannot allow a state of Palestine to grow and build sustainably for itself. The immediate concern - I will stand corrected on this - is that between 70% and 80% of the population in Gaza are reliant in some way or other on UNRWA support through health care, education or food supports. Consequently, because the US is a very significant funder a significant reduction would have significant consequences. This is so much the case that Ireland will be participating, as will many other countries, in a funding conference for UNRWA, led by Sweden and Jordan, which will be held in Rome in a few weeks' time. I think I am right on that detail - I will happily stand corrected if I am not - but I think that is where it is happening.

Incidentally, this year we have committed €5 million to UNRWA. I signed off on that a few weeks ago. We would encourage other countries to do the same. Most important, we would encourage - I have directly asked - the US to reconsider its decision to reduce funding for UNRWA. Undoubtedly, in the medium term, there is reform required of the role that UNRWA plays because people should not be refugees forever. Many Palestinian refugees, unfortunately for them and their families, have been refugees for a lifetime. There is a need for a transition in time from a refugee organisation to a support organisation that can allow a Palestinian government to be able to provide for health care and education in its own territories for its own people. However, that is no consolation to a parent who has a child in a UNRWA school today or a woman who is relying on a UNRWA health care clinic, living in very difficult conditions in Gaza or in any of the other refugee camps today. I am sorry about the detail on the UNRWA, but I feel strongly about it.

Finally, I was asked a specific question on the UN Security Council campaign. Our UN Security Council campaign is currently being managed within existing resources but before the election in 2020 an extra spend undoubtedly will be required, which we will have to factor into our budget. With respect to our last UN Security Council campaign in 2000, additional staffing needs at that time were supplied by redeployment and the creation of temporary posts. Approximately €1.5 million was allocated to cover additional costs relating to that campaign. We will probably spend a little more than that this time. If Ireland wants to be at the table where major decisions are taken on global issues, which is the UN Security Council, it must win a very competitive campaign process. There are two places available and three countries are going for those places, namely, Ireland, Norway and Canada. We happen to be competing with two

very influential countries in the UN structure. It is not an easy task but we are well placed to be able to be in the top two if we focus on a well run campaign, which is what we are trying to do.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I have a question about the destruction of UNRWA-funded and Irish Aid-funded schools in the West Bank. The Minister has received correspondence on that and it was raised previously. Have we or UNRWA received any compensation from the Israelis for UNRWA-funded or Irish Aid-funded schools that were destroyed recently?

Deputy Simon Coveney: The direct answer is "No".

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I thought so.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I am not sure that it was UNRWA schools-----

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I believe it was an Irish Aid funded school the last time.

Deputy Simon Coveney: -----that were demolished. Belgium and the Netherlands have raised serious concerns with the Israelis about projects that have been destroyed. In the case of a solar panel project which the Netherlands funded in Gaza, where the panels were confiscated by the Israeli military, I understand that some of them have subsequently been returned.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Recently, and the officials will know about this and I received correspondence and pictures about it, a school that was co-funded by the Irish Government was demolished by the Israelis. The Minister is aware of that. I know the Minister raised it with the Israelis but has he received a response on any compensation?

Deputy Simon Coveney: We have not received any compensation. I have raised the general issue of demolitions in what is called Area C of the West Bank with the Israelis. We are very critical of that and in my view it should not be happening. However, Ireland is not the only country that has raised concerns on this issue.

Chairman: We will now move to programme D.

Deputy Simon Coveney: The Department's work under this programme will focus on leveraging our resources to drive job creation, exports, inward investment and the tourism and education market. There will be a particular focus in 2018 on assisting Irish business in the context of the UK's exit from the EU. My Department's commitment to advancing Ireland's trade and economic interests in Europe and internationally is set out in programme D. The amount allocated for the programme in 2018 is €34.1 million, representing an increase of €3 million on the 2017 allocation or an increase of 9.4%. The Department and our network missions play a pivotal role in enhancing our reputation and promoting Ireland's economic interests overseas. The economy is now in good shape and growing strongly, with forecast GDP growth of 3.5% in 2018.

If you wish, Chairman, I can refer to programme E as well and we can discuss both at the same time. Would that be helpful?

Chairman: Yes.

Deputy Simon Coveney: The allocation under programme E in 2018 is €41.2 million compared with €39.3 million in 2017, an increase of €1.9 million or 4.9%. This programme covers the Department's work in marshalling its human and capital resources at home and abroad to maximise Ireland's influence internationally. It includes the management and development of

staff, the management and mitigation of risk and compliance with statutory and legal obligations. The programme also covers communication by the Department of its policies, objectives and activities to citizens at home and abroad. On human resources, the Department is developing and delivering a new human resources strategy to build professional capacity and to support management in decision making, particularly on workforce planning and the effective deployment of staff at home and abroad. This is particularly important in responding to new challenges and opportunities afforded by an expanded global footprint.

There is a connection between programmes D and E so it might be helpful to take the two together. Neither has dramatic increases. They are modest percentage increases that reflect the increased pressures the Department is under.

Chairman: That is fine. We will move on to programme F, appropriations-in-aid.

Deputy Simon Coveney: The total income under appropriations-in-aid in 2018 is estimated at over €45.2 million. The primary source of income that accrues directly to the Exchequer from my Department comes from passport application fees, which account for over 90% of all the receipts. If current passport application trends continue, this level of income is likely to be exceeded. Passport, citizenship, visa and other consular fees are set by way of statutory instrument issued under section 3 of the Diplomatic and Consular Officers (Provision of Services) Act 1993.

Chairman: Earlier you said you would leave open the possibility of having a passport office in the province of Ulster. My constituency colleague, Senator Robbie Gallagher, put forward a proposal that a passport office should be opened in County Monaghan, which is centrally situated in the south of the province. I wholeheartedly agree with that. It had the endorsement of this committee as well. I would like if that could be considered.

Deputy Simon Coveney: Would you like to name a townland?

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: The office can be named after him.

Chairman: I am being very generous to my neighbouring county. I did not advocate for Cavan at all but for the other part of my constituency.

Deputy Simon Coveney: That is very big of you.

I will have to leave the meeting now. The Minister of State, Deputy Cannon, will deal with the aid budget. However, I would like to return to the committee to discuss some of the policy issues that have been raised, particularly the approach we are taking to Brexit and where we see it going, as well as the future of Europe. It would be good to bring the Minister of State, Deputy McEntee, with me to discuss some of the things we are advocating at present. I believe the committee would be very interested in that.

Chairman: That would likely be at the end of April or early in May.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I will be happy to do that.

Chairman: Thank you.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: I welcome this opportunity to present the 2018 Revised Estimates for Vote 27 for international co-operation. Vote 27 funds over 70% of Ireland's official development assistance, ODA, programme, better known to the public as Irish Aid. The Vote provides

the funding necessary to deliver on the Department's high level goal to work towards a fairer, more just, secure and sustainable world.

This year the Government has provided just over €707 million for ODA, an increase of €26 million on last year's allocation. This increased allocation builds on the momentum started in 2016 of increasing budget allocations to ODA in an incremental, measured and sustainable way. Some €500 million of the total will be managed through my Department while the remainder, an estimated €207 million, will be managed through other Departments and Ireland's share of the EU development co-operation budget. The sum of €707 million is a significant investment on behalf of the Irish taxpayer and represents a clear demonstration of the Government's firm commitment to the aid programme and to our stated position of increasing allocations as economic conditions permit. In line with aspirations that are shared with this committee we remain committed to making incremental, sustainable and manageable progress towards achieving the 0.7% UN target by 2030, over the period of the sustainable development goals. This progress will build on Ireland's recognised role as a reliable and effective partner in contributing to ending global poverty and hunger, and in providing flexible humanitarian assistance to those most in need.

The committee will appreciate that reaching the 0.7% target will involve significant increases to the official development assistance, ODA, budget. Currently Ireland spends roughly 0.3% of gross national income, GNI, on ODA. The projected growth in aid budgets to match this ambition will be substantial and will require careful planning and consultation with other Departments and stakeholders, including Irish citizens and civil society organisations and, importantly, this committee.

I acknowledge the recent review undertaken by the committee. I was delighted to attend the presentation of the review. I reiterate that the conclusions and recommendations of that report will form a key input to the development of a new White Paper on international development co-operation. One of my Department's key objectives this year is to produce a new White Paper on international development co-operation. This will inform an ambitious pathway towards making greater but sustainable progress on the UN target.

The international development context has evolved significantly over the past five years. The White Paper will build on our existing aid programme and will allow us to take stock of the implications of a fast-changing global environment and prioritise our role in fulfilling the ambitious international development policy agenda. Internal preparations and analysis are already under way for the White Paper. The process to develop the new policy will include a period of consultation from March to May across Government and with the public, following Department of Public Expenditure and Reform guidelines. It is intended that the new policy will be produced by the end of July 2018 at the earliest.

I am passionate about Ireland's development co-operation programme and in making sure that we excel in how we target and deliver our resources for maximum impact. Ireland and the Irish people can be very proud of our country's impact. Any member who has travelled abroad would certainly echo that sentiment. We are reducing inequality, poverty and hunger. We bring our authentic experience as a people to this work as we continue delivering a world class programme, aimed at some of the world's most vulnerable and marginalised people, helping to save lives, build livelihoods and bring lifesaving humanitarian assistance to those most in need and in times of crisis. I welcome comments and questions from committee members.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: We have discussed this before and I welcome the stated com-

mitment to get back on track to reach the 0.7% target. There is an opportunity now to seize the goodwill that is there and to seize the political consensus, certainly through this committee, which was evident at the report launch. It is a valuable report. When the Minister of State is working on the White Paper he could, while not rewriting it, use the committee's report as a basis. It is very important that we publish the roadmap, get political agreement on it, which I believe the Minister of State will get, and show it in euro and cents. We should not lose the opportunity right now to seize the goodwill to create that momentum. I understand that there were economic reasons the momentum slowed, but as we are moving forward, if we can start to show a leap forward, it will mean a significant increase in one year to the next if we are to catch up in real terms. This is not from a selfish perspective. The Tánaiste and the Minister of State have referred to the UN Security Council and the credibility that Ireland has abroad. I encourage the Minister of State to do this.

I reiterate my concerns around the third country arrangements and Ireland's funding of certain projects alongside the EU. I am uncomfortable with the EU-Turkey arrangement. There are 15 or 16 other arrangements that the EU have been working on also which, as a European Union member state, Ireland is also part of. There is one arrangement for resettling refugees back to Afghanistan. There seems to be a bit of a carrot and stick approach at an EU level, not from Ireland, that unless conditions are adhered to and figures for repatriation happen, there will be a question over the annual action programmes, AAPs. When addressing the White Paper, I encourage the Minister of State to look afresh at entering into these arrangements. Can Ireland dissent from them? I believe we can. I do not believe Ireland should be going down that route. Where it makes sense for member states to pool resources, third country arrangements can be done, but we must be ultra-careful when it applies to refugee resettlement especially. I could not get a full answer on an absolute assurance that none of the money Ireland puts into that programme has gone on security measures as opposed to welfare for the person who is the refugee. Ireland carefully guards its reputation. I am, however, concerned about those third country arrangements, and I wanted to flag it here.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I have a query about subhead A5. Are we taking that now?

Chairman: We are discussing it all under the one programme.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Subheads A1 and A2 are fine. With regard to A3 and the Africa section, I understand the focus is on the least developed countries, LDCs. Ireland met the UN target of spending at least 0.15% of its GNI on overseas development to LDCs in 2015. This does not seem to have happened in 2017. Will the Minister of State confirm that the target will be met in 2018?

Do the figures include any funding for new EU policies in Africa that are focused on migration or does it come under the European Development Fund, EDF? Again, this is deeply concerning and is an instrument of moving EU aid away from what I believe is genuine and sustainable development in favour of migration control, securitisation and the private sector in donor countries.

Section A4 is fine. I have a concern about the provision in subhead A5 of €5 million for the EU-Turkey deal. As other members have said, we have repeatedly stated our concern about and deep opposition to this deal. I believe it hampers the human rights of refugees and is effectively a bribe to Erdoğan's autocratic regime. I also wish to flag the €45.6 million due to be spent on the EDF. Many members have raised this issue and are concerned about accountability for multilateral spending. I am thankful that we have had some meetings on the issue, and some

of our concerns have been clarified. I am, however, concerned that the EDF is largely unaccountable and that Ireland does not have enough influence to ensure that its work is in line with Ireland's priorities. If, for example, we give money to the EDF, how can we say that 100% of Ireland's ODA is untied? The EDF has openly admitted that EU aid is partially tied. There is a contradiction there. It is probably a debate for another day but I have concerns about it.

Deputy Noel Grealish: The sum of €707 million is significant but I welcome the increase of €26 million, especially when one goes abroad, particularly on the most recent visit to Malawi and Mozambique, and one sees the programmes in place to help the most vulnerable people in the world. I compliment our staff out there. I would like to see a lot more co-operation between nations to get better value for the money. This was evident in the Mozambique education programme administered by the Irish office there. They have said that if they had more staff, they could do a lot more. They led the education programme in that country and I compliment the staff on that.

I have highlighted previously, and the Tánaiste has spoken about, the occupied Palestinian territories and the cut the United States of America has brought in. The Tánaiste has said an extra €5 million is allocated towards the occupied Palestinian territories. I welcome this. The world should come around to supporting the Palestinian people and putting extreme pressure on the United States of America to continue providing the aid towards that.

The briefing document on Irish Aid lists all the money allocated to various countries. In addition, €10 million has been allocated to the south-east Asia region programme, mainly in favour of Vietnam. Perhaps the Minister of State will outline why we are giving them €10 million and what programmes Ireland is promoting in Vietnam.

Chairman: This committee recently published a report on reaching the target of 0.7% of gross national income in overseas development aid, ODA, recommending that the Government put forward a multi-annual plan to be submitted to the committee and the Committee on Budgetary Oversight. What is the Government's thinking on how the 0.7% target would be reached?

Policy coherence across Government also needs to be addressed. What measures are being put in place to ensure that policy coherence can be achieved? We referred to it on the day of the launch.

Colleagues have mentioned concern over the balance between bilateral and multilateral programmes. We understand we need to be involved in some multilateral programmes, but there is a strong view on the value of our bilateral programmes.

The final matter is something we all need to address. On the day we launched the report, we referred to communicating the value of the good work done by Irish Aid to the citizens at large. We could all more in that respect. If the Minister of State, the Department or Irish Aid have new measures or programmes they hope to put in place, they need to communicate their effectiveness and value and highlight the necessity to increase the aid in coming years.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: All members referred to the target of 0.7% of GNI by 2030, which we are very ambitious to achieve. We need to be cognisant that it is an increase of approximately €100 million to €130 million per annum, moving from €707 million at the moment to about €2.5 billion by 2030. As Deputy Darragh O'Brien pointed out, the political support is already apparent from everyone in this room and from the political parties. I would argue

that the public is equally supportive. Much of that public support stems from our history as a people. Reflecting on our history, we feel the need to reach out to communities and countries across the world in a spirit of solidarity and to respect that many countries are embarking on a journey upon which we embarked more than 100 years ago.

We have garnered considerable experience from that, particularly in the area of education. We have travelled a considerable journey in the past 50 years following the landmark decision by Donogh O'Malley in 1966. When I attended a pledging conference for education in Africa held in Dakar recently, it was wonderful to be able to reflect upon that experience and to commit to €25 million, to double our commitment to the global partnership for education over the next three years to reflect our history of having an educational landscape that changed Irish society and the Irish economy forever. It is an opportune time.

I agree wholeheartedly with Deputy O'Brien that we will need to nail down that definitive, staged, incremental move. Ultimately, that will happen as part of the White Paper process and members of the committee will have a critical role to play in that. I agree with the Cathaoirleach that the committee's report is a fantastic starting point to develop the White Paper strategy in coming months and it will feature heavily in that.

I had expected many of the members to voice concerns over Turkey. The resources we are providing in Turkey are not being used in any context for either security measures or border control. I want to make that clear. Of the €3 billion committed to programming under the facility, €60 million or 2% has been committed to the Turkish Directorate General of Migration Management to support migrants upon their return to Turkey, covering food, health care, transport and accommodation expenses. Some €20 million or 0.67% has been committed to the International Organization for Migration for its work in enhancing the capacity of the Turkish coastguard to carry our search and rescue operations in an effective manner. I want to make clear that none of our resources are being used for any security or border control matters. In addition to our active participation in the steering committee, Ireland has placed an officer from the development co-operation division of the Department in our embassy in Ankara with the specific brief to cover the humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis, including that facility for refugees in Turkey.

Deputy Crowe spoke about oversight in general and in particular relating to the European Development Fund, EDF. EU development assistance, including the EDF, is subject to various forms of rigorous monitoring and evaluation by a number of separate bodies: the European Court of Auditors, the EU's results-oriented monitoring and external independent review system, the EU's own evaluation unit, ultimately the European Parliament, and member states, obviously including Ireland. There is a significant audit and oversight structure in place to ensure that every cent we contribute to that is spent wisely and effectively.

Deputy Crowe also asked about the untied aspect. I can confirm that all the funds we channel through the European Union are used solely and uniquely for untied aid. That is a stipulation we include in any commitment we make.

Deputy Seán Crowe: What about the least developed countries in Africa and meeting the target?

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: We were just below the target in 2017, but overall our *per capita* contribution compared with other EU member states means we are one of the top contributors on a *per capita* basis. As we move towards the 0.7% by 2030, we would be anxious to reach

that target consistently in the years to come.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Does the Minister of State believe we will achieve it in 2018?

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: Yes, we hope to. The Cathaoirleach asked about policy coherence. We need to achieve exactly that. If we use the collective experience and expertise across all Departments we can develop very strong policy coherence. That will form part of the White Paper process. If we look to an overarching structure to allow that to happen, the SDGs give us that excellent coherence. If we prepare our national implementation plan on the basis of complying with and supporting the achievement of the SDGs, I think it will give that coherence in the future.

Chairman: I thank the Tánaiste and the Minister of State, as well as the Secretary General and his colleagues for attending today.

Message to Dáil

Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 90, the following message will be sent to the Dáil:

The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence has completed its consideration of the following Estimates for public services for the year ending 31 December 2018: Vote 27 - International Co-operation (Revised), and Vote 28 - Foreign Affairs and Trade (Revised).

The select committee adjourned at 6 p.m. *sine die*.