

7 Transforming the passport service

- 7.1** The Passports Act 2008, as amended (the Act), sets out the legislative basis for issuing Irish passports.¹ The Department of Foreign Affairs (the Department), on behalf of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, is responsible for the provision of passports through the passport service. The passport service's primary responsibility is to process passport applications and issue passports to Irish citizens living in Ireland and abroad.²
- 7.2** In 2020 and 2021, the passport service was impacted by restrictions imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, until designated as an essential service on 29 April 2021. Routine passport operations were paused on a number of occasions throughout 2020 and 2021 — approximately eight months in total.³ In 2022, the passport service experienced an unprecedented demand for passports due to a pent-up demand for travel.
- 7.3** This examination was undertaken to assess the systems in place for the timely issuance of passports, with a particular focus on performance monitoring and reporting arrangements, including performance metrics for the issuance of passports.

Managing the delivery of passports

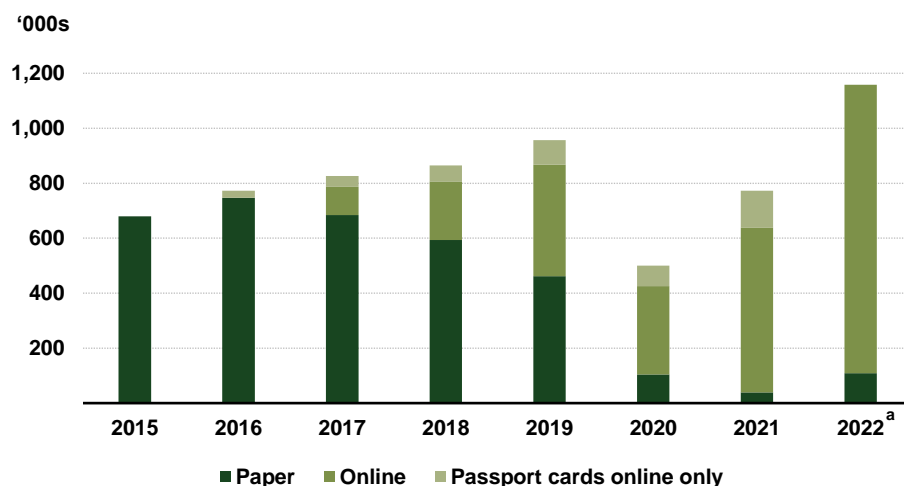
- 7.4** In 2022, the passport service received over one million passport applications. This represented a significant increase of around 21% when compared with 2019, the previous highest year for applications. However, in addition to increased numbers of applications, there was also a rapid and significant change in the method of application: online applications (including online passport cards) increased from 52% of the total in 2019 to 91% of all applications received in 2022 (see Figure 7.1).

¹ The Act sets out who may apply for passports; the types and validity of passports; identity and citizenship requirements; the requirements for issuing passports for children; the grounds on which a passport can be refused, revoked or cancelled, and a decision appealed; and various offences under the Act.

² Since 2019, the passport service is also responsible for granting Irish citizenship in respect of persons born outside of Ireland, as provided for in section 7(3) of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 (as amended).

³ Routine operations were paused between 27 March 2020 and 8 June 2020; 21 October 2020 and 1 December 2020; and 26 December 2020 and 4 May 2021.

Figure 7.1 Number of passport applications received, 2015 – 2022



Source: Department of Foreign Affairs. Analysis by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Note: ^a In March 2017, online application for adult renewals was launched and the option to apply for a passport book and card as a bundle was introduced. To end 2021, the bundle application was counted as two applications. In 2022, bundle applications are counted as one application.

7.5 The passport service is a demand-led service. A forecasting and planning system, introduced in 2021, is used to project the demand for passports. Prior to Covid-19, demand for passports was generally predictable, increasing by on average 9% a year between 2015 and 2019. Applications fell back significantly due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, but by 2022, were at about the long term trend level i.e. continued growth of 9% per year would have resulted in around 1.25 million applications in 2022, just marginally above the 1.2 million received.

Cancellation of passport applications

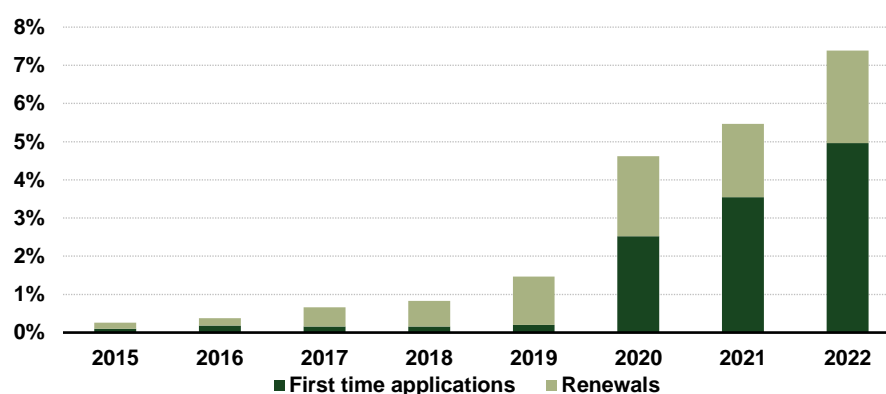
7.6 The passport service's internal procedures set out that a passport application can be cancelled for either of two reasons

- the applicant requests the cancellation of the application
- the application cannot be progressed after six months from receipt, primarily due to insufficient or no documentation submitted.

7.7 The cancellation of applications is not provided for in the Passports Act. However, section 12 of the Act sets out the circumstances whereby a passport may be refused. The Department stated that it does not monitor the number of refusals, and that applications refused are included in the numbers for cancelled applications.

7.8 Since 2015, the cancellation rate of passport applications has increased year on year. There was a significant increase in cancellations between 2019 and 2022 — from 1.5% of all applications received in 2019, to over 7% in 2022. Cancelled first time applications accounted for just over one-third of all cancellations in 2015; by 2022, this had increased to over two-thirds of all cancellations (see Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2 Applications (including passport cards) cancelled as a percentage of all applications received, 2015 – 2022



Source: Department of Foreign Affairs

- 7.9** The Department stated that throughout 2020 and 2021, applicants continued to apply online but more complex applications could not be processed because the passport service operated on a limited or emergency basis and staff could not attend the workplace.¹ Many of these applications were not processed within the six-month timeframe and had to be subsequently cancelled and refunds issued. In the first half of 2022, when turnaround times were longer than normal, some applicants applied for passports using multiple channels i.e. applicants submitted both online and paper applications. This resulted in duplicate applications being cancelled and refunds issued.²
- 7.10** The Department has stated that the pattern of applicants' behaviour has changed with the development of the online system. It appears that some applicants apply online but fail to submit the required documentation. Three email reminders are issued, but if no documentation is received in response to these emails, the applications are considered as abandoned, are cancelled and refunds are issued to the applicants.
- 7.11** However, because the Department does not record the reasons for cancelled applications, it could not provide a breakdown of the number of cancellations which were due to applicant abandonment.

Issuance of passports

- 7.12** In 2022, the passport service issued 16% more passports than in 2019, pre Covid-19. While just under 1.2 million applications were received in 2022, around 1.09 million passports were issued.
- 7.13** When cancelled applications are taken into account, the passport service has managed to dispose of all applications received and, apart from extended processing times at periods of high demand, it does not have an embedded backlog of applications.
- 7.14** The issuance of passports was significantly delayed throughout 2020 and 2021, caused by the intermittent pausing of the majority of passport services under Covid-19 public health restrictions. During these times, the passport service operated on a limited or emergency basis.
- 7.15** The Department stated that, in 2020 and 2021, also due to Covid-19, there were significant global supply chain issues for raw material and this was most acute in the supply of the chips used in passports.³ The Department put mitigating measures in place in 2022 to ensure the supply of passports up to the end of 2024. In July 2023, the Department decided to purchase additional chips to cover projected passport supply needs to June 2025.
- 7.16** When the service fully reopened in May 2021, there was a backlog of passport applications. The Department stated that citizens continued to apply for passports while services were disrupted. A significant proportion of the backlog applications were received during the first four months of 2021, when they could not be processed. By the end of July 2021, substantial progress had been made in clearing the backlog and all backlog applications which had been completed correctly had been processed and passports issued to applicants. As of April 2023, there was no backlog and all processing times for online applications were in line with normal pre Covid-19 processing times.

1 Complex applications include all first time applications and child renewal applications. They also include adult renewal applications where applicants are changing their family name.

2 In early 2023, the Department identified an issue whereby duplicate refunds were made due to a system error for paper applications. Most of these overpayments occurred in 2022-2023. A small number occurred in 2019. See Vote 28 Foreign Affairs Appropriation Account 2022 at www.audit.gov.ie

3 The lead period for delivery of supplies of chips increased from 12 weeks (prior to Covid-19) to 18 months.

Passport turnaround times

- 7.17** The passport service calculates the target turnaround time (measured in working days) for processing applications using a forecasting and planning system with integrated statistical modelling and scenario analysis capabilities. The Department stated that target turnaround times are service delivery targets based on average turnaround times, agreed at management board level and published on the Department's website.¹ It stated that target turnaround times are used as the basis for workforce and resource planning. It also stated that actual turnaround times reflect how long it takes to process the different types of applications in a given period.
- 7.18** The passport service commenced the calculation of average turnaround times for online applications for passport renewals in March 2017. This was extended to other types of online applications as the online service expanded to include, *inter alia*, child passport renewals and first time applications from other countries.
- 7.19** In 2021, the passport service recorded its longest ever average turnaround times: 40 working days for paper and online first-time applications. While the average turnaround time for first-time online applications reduced to 20 working days by September 2022, there was no change in the average turnaround time for paper applications. As the target turnaround times are based on actual average turnaround times, the Department consequently updated the respective target turnaround times to reflect what was being achieved.
- 7.20** The Department stated that the reasons for the delays in processing passport applications in 2022 included
- a surge in demand post the easing of Covid-19 related travel restrictions
 - increased demand from United Kingdom (UK) residents as a result of Brexit
 - insufficient resources in place at the time to deal with the increased demand.

Oireachtas phone line

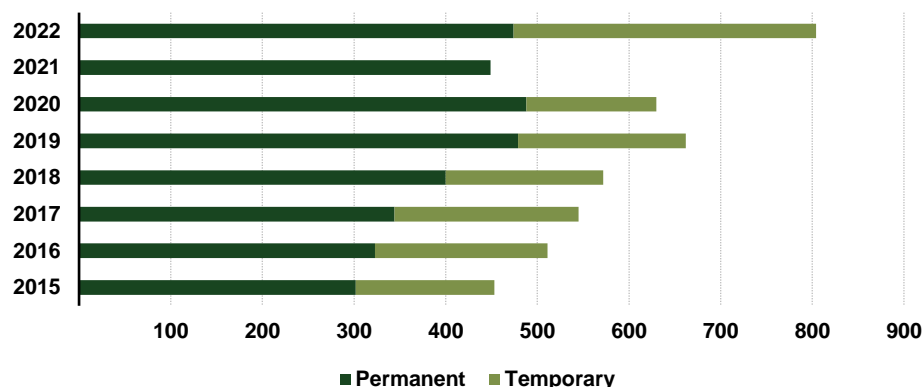
- 7.21** In October 2021, the Department introduced a dedicated phone line for members of the Oireachtas, whereby members can obtain a status update on constituents' passport applications.²
- 7.22** The Department stated that passports are not issued based on representations from politicians, and that the Oireachtas phone line is not a facility for expediting applications out of turn.

Staffing levels

- 7.23** The passport service experiences particular service delivery demands in the first half of the year, with the highest recent levels of demand experienced in February (2022), April (2018, 2019) and May (2016, 2017). The lowest demand for passports is usually experienced in December. To address the seasonality of the demand for passports, the Department employs additional temporary staff for the busier periods (see Figure 7.3).

¹ The target turnaround times differ according to type of application.

² The Department stated that members of the Oireachtas using the Oireachtas telephone line are limited to 20 enquiries per week.

Figure 7.3 Passport service staff numbers 2015 – 2022 as at 1 July annually

Source: Department of Foreign Affairs

7.24 At the end of June 2022, 41% of the passport service's staff were employed on a temporary basis compared with 33% in 2015 and 28% in 2019. The Department stated that in order to meet the projected continued high demand for 2023, it took the unprecedented step to retain all temporary staff through contract extensions to ensure expertise is retained and staffing levels maintained. It also expects the passport service's staff numbers to increase to 874 staff in 2023.

7.25 Since 2019, passport service staff are also involved in processing foreign birth registration (FBR) applications and the issuance of foreign birth certificates. While the overall number of applications received (for both passports and FBRs) between 2015 and 2022 increased by 74% — of which 70% related to passport applications — staff numbers increased by 77% over the same period.¹

7.26 The Department stated that staff employed by the passport service have increased in response to, *inter alia*, the increased level of passport applications received, the establishment of a team to support the transformation from a paper-based system to an online system, the provision of additional services including FBR, an enhanced customer service, data protection team, expansion of integrity team and establishment of an in-house HR and training unit.²

1 The increase in passport applications over the period to end 2021 includes passport cards as a separate application.

2 Major developments in the passport service over the period 2015 to 2022 are set out in Annex 7A.

3 The remaining income is generated from fees for foreign birth certificates issued.

4 Apart from this reduction, there have been no major changes to passport fees since 2013.

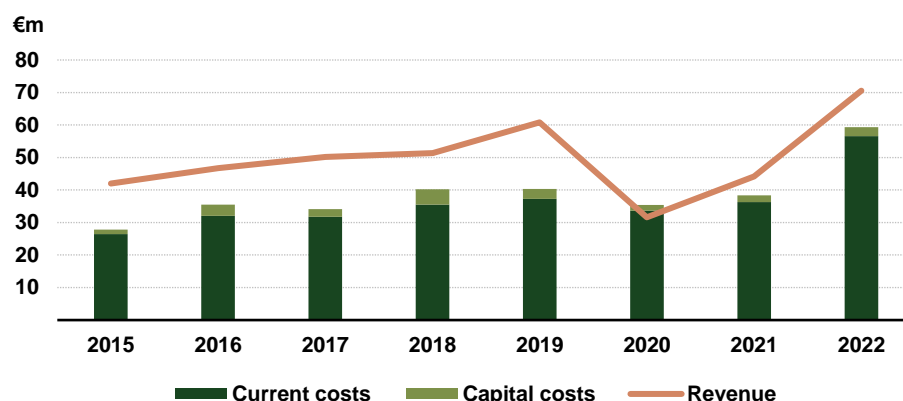
5 By comparison, the passport service in the UK is required to be self-financing.

Cost of passport service delivery

7.27 The passport service generates approximately 90% of its revenue from fees charged to citizens for passports issued — the fee charged depends on the application type.³ The current fees for passport paper applications are €80 for an adult and €30 for a child. The fees for online applications for adults and children were reduced by €5, to €75 and €25 respectively, in 2019.⁴

7.28 The Department does not have a formal self-financing policy i.e. whereby sufficient revenue is generated from passport fees to cover the costs of providing the service.⁵

7.29 While total revenue (for passports and FBRs) increased by 68% between 2015 and 2022, total direct costs increased by 113% over the same period (see Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4 Passport service revenue and direct costs, 2015 – 2022^a

Source: Department of Foreign Affairs

Note: a Direct costs include current and capital costs.

- 7.30** Around 160 passport service staff were temporarily redeployed to the Health Service Executive and the Department of Social Protection to assist with Covid-19 related response measures during 2020 and 2021. Routine operations of the passport office were intermittently paused for approximately eight months in total from March 2020 to May 2021. The staff costs for the redeployment periods were borne by the Department.
- 7.31** The Department stated that as it is not possible to provide the actual periods of redeployment it could not identify the related costs. The Department stated this was due to the fluidity of the situation, including the varying levels of Covid-19 related restrictions.
- 7.32** The Department also stated that additional, enhanced customer services have been introduced since 2015 which resulted in additional costs.

Overhead costs

- 7.33** Costs incurred by the Department in respect of certain central administration functions are not allocated to the passport service. These include the costs of units such as ICT, HR, finance and other corporate services. These are allocated between the Department's five expenditure programmes for accounting purposes, but the passport service is not a stand-alone programme. As a result, the total cost of the passport service cannot be readily established.

Unit cost of passports

- 7.34** The unit cost of processing a passport application and producing a passport is a potential measure of the level of efficiency achieved by the Department. However, the unit cost of producing a passport could not be estimated by the examination team because direct costs are not apportioned by the passport service to its outputs (i.e. costs relating to the processing of passport applications and FBR applications are not separately identifiable). Indirect costs are also not apportioned to the service.

- 7.35** The Department stated that it does not monitor the unit cost of passports, and considers that the unit cost is not an appropriate measure of efficiency because it is too narrow a metric for a complex and detailed passport service. It also pointed out that the inherent value of the Irish passport in terms of the esteem in which it is held internationally and the benefits and protections it offers to citizens is challenging to quantify in cost and outturn terms.

Reporting the performance of the passport service

- 7.36** The Department's strategic goal for the passport service, as set out in its Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023, is to provide modernised and accessible passport services to citizens with optimum use of digital platforms.^{1,2} The Department's key output objective for the passport service under this strategic goal is to '*effectively meet the high demand for passports, through continued reform and digitisation whilst ensuring high levels of security and data protection requirements.*'
- 7.37** The Department has developed measures to monitor the performance of the passport service in achieving its strategic objective. These measures, together with the related targets to be achieved are published annually in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services* (estimates) by the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform (DPENDPDR).
- 7.38** The 2023 estimates (published in December 2022) include three key high level performance metrics for the passport service (see Figure 7.5).

Figure 7.5 Passport service performance metrics 2023 estimates

Key output objective	Key high level metrics
Responsive and strengthened passport service for our citizens ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percentage of paper-based applications within published processing times ▪ Percentage of online applications processed within 20 working days ▪ Rate of complaints to number of passports issued

Source: *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2023*, Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform

Note: a Reflects the objective included in the Department's previous strategy 2017 – 2020.

¹ This is set out in the 2021 – 2023 strategy under the Department's high level Goal 1 – 'Our People: To serve our people at home and abroad and to promote reconciliation and cooperation'.

² The Department's new statement of strategy for the period 2023 – 2025 was launched in early June 2023.

- 7.39** The current performance metrics are mainly focused on timeliness, and partially align with the passport service's key output objective as set out in the Department's *Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023*. However, they do not address the security and data protection aspects of the stated objective.
- 7.40** The performance metrics included in the annual estimates have changed significantly over the period 2015 to 2023. The subsequent reporting on actual performance has been inconsistent and incomplete over the years (see Figure 7.6).

Figure 7.6 Development of metrics used in passport service performance framework 2015 – 2023^a

Key high level metrics	2015 ^b	2016 ^b	2017 ^b	2018	2019 ^d	2020	2021	2022	2023
Timeliness-focused									
% of passport express applications to have passports issued on or before 10 days	T: 83%								
	O: Note c								
% of domestic renewal applications processed within 15 working days			T: 90%	T: 90%	T: 90%				
			O: 95%	O: Note c	O: Note c				
% of domestic first time applications processed within 15 working days			T: 80%	T: 85%	T: 85%				
			O: 80%	O: Note c	O: Note c				
% of online passport applications processed within 10 working days					T: 95%				
					O: Note c				
% of online applications processed within 20 working days ^d					T: 95%	T: 95%	T: 95%	T: 95%	T: 95%
					O: 98%	O: 88%	O: 71%		
% of paper-based applications processed within 30 working days ^d					T: 95%	T: 95%	T: 95%	T: 95%	
					O: 88%	O: 87%	O: 33%		
% of paper-based applications within published processing times									T: 95%
Non-timeliness focused									
% of passport book applications rejected	T: 12%	T: 10%	T: 9%	T: 5%	T: 5%				
	O: 9.7%	O: 10.2%	O: 10%	O: Note c	O: Note c				
Rate of complaints to number of passports issued ^d					T: 0.5%	T: 0.3%	T: 0.3%	T: 0.15%	T: 0.15%
					O: 0.01%	O: 0.03%	O: 0.06%		
Overall customer satisfaction rate when using passport services				T: 85%	T: 90%	T: 90%			
				O: 84%	O: Note c	O: Note c			

Source: Revised Estimates for Public Services 2015 – 2023. Analysis by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Key: Green indicates that the actual outputs were reported against targets under the output metric in the relevant year.

Amber indicates that the actual outputs were not reported against targets as the metric had changed.

Notes: a T = target; O = Outturn.

b The estimates 2015, 2016 and 2017 also included qualitative indicators in relation to the passport service.

c The Department stated that the metric was updated and not repeated in the subsequent period. Therefore, the Department never publically reported the output outturn as this is not required by the estimates process.

d These metrics were not included in the 2019 revised estimates but were reported on in the 2020 (2019 output target) and 2021 (2019 output target and output outturn) revised estimates respectively.

- 7.41** For 2019, a new metric was introduced for the processing of online passport applications within ten working days with a target output of 95%. In 2020, this was revised to the processing of 95% of online applications within 20 working days. The Department stated that the main reason for revising the metric was the expansion of the online service to include child renewals in 2018 and first time applications from Ireland, the EU and EEA in 2019, which impacted the processing times for online applications.¹ The targets were not achieved in 2020 and 2021, mainly due to the impact of Covid-19.
- 7.42** In 2023, the performance metric for paper applications was further modified — whereby the processing time for 95% of applications was changed from ‘within 30 days’ to the more imprecise phrase ‘within published processing times’.² The Department had not achieved the target percentage within the time limit indicated in the previous three years.
- 7.43** The Department stated that the wording of the metric was changed because the published processing time for paper-based applications has been an average eight weeks since 2021.
- 7.44** The Department also stated that it holds historical data to support the calculation of the reported processing times for the purpose of the revised estimates, but that this data is difficult to extract from existing systems for verification purposes. The examination team was provided with the calculations for the outturns reported in the 2021 estimates.
- 7.45** The Department, since the commencement of this examination, ensures that supporting data on processing times is retained and readily accessible to facilitate the verification of the performance indicators and actual outturns.

Performance monitoring and reporting arrangements

- 7.46** The Department uses a real-time data visualisation application which is linked with the passport processing system to extract information for performance monitoring and reporting purposes.
- 7.47** The Department stated that the system satisfies the need for appropriate performance monitoring through various regular reporting and recurring meetings. Various performance reports are generated and circulated internally and externally (see Figure 7.7). The Department further stated that formal quarterly meetings are held to discuss demand, trends and lessons learned. However, minutes of these meetings are not kept.
- 7.48** The reports produced are mainly focused on the passport service’s activity statistics and trend analysis rather than desired passport service outcomes. However, since January 2023, the passport service compares target versus actual average turnaround times in its weekly passport operation reports. Scope exists to expand the range of information included in the performance reports by, for example, including detail together with relevant targets that seeks to monitor the
- cost of running the passport service
 - cost associated with processing passport applications
 - percentage reduction/increase in unit processing time
 - percentage of average unit cost recovered through fee income.

¹ The EEA is the European Economic Area.

² The processing times are based on the turnaround times and published on the Department’s website.

- 7.49** Also, since January 2023, there is a formal weekly meeting of the Department’s senior staff. However, the statistics analysed during the meetings are historic and not compared to targets.

Figure 7.7 Passport service's reporting arrangements^a

Type of report	Aim of the report	Focus of the report	Provided to
Daily statistics	Highlights immediately major increases and decreases	The number of applications received, applications on hand and the number of passports issued over the previous 24 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deputy Secretary General/Chief Operating Officer (DSG/COO) ▪ Director General, Citizen Services Division ▪ Passport service management
Weekly statistics	Indicates bottlenecks and trends	Weekly number of applications received, applications on hand and the weekly number of passports issued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DSG/COO ▪ Director General, Citizen Services Division ▪ Passport service management
Weekly work in progress	Indicates potential bottlenecks using operational knowledge of the various processing stages	Details current status of passport applications by processing stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Passport service management
Monthly statistics	Indicates trends Historic comparisons	Details monthly figures and trends Staffing levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Management Board ▪ Secretary General ▪ DSG/COO ▪ Passport service management ▪ Director General, Citizen Services Division
Annual statistics	Indicates trends	Details annual figures and trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Externally released in press release format ▪ To relevant members of the management board
Annual passport service operational plan	Includes current action plan, key updates and forecasting next year demand and workforce	Sets out current and forecasted demand, current and required workforce, key statistical update and planning for the year ahead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Management Board ▪ Secretary General ▪ DSG/COO

Source: Department of Foreign Affairs

Note a The Department noted that other operational level reports are also prepared. These are set out in Annex 7B.

Conclusions and recommendations

7.50 Covid-19 restrictions had a significant impact on the passport service. Until its designation as an essential service at the end of April 2021, passport production operations were paused for periods totalling approximately eight months overall. At the same time, the volume of passport applications fell significantly, because of reduced travel plans.

7.51 Following the removal of travel restrictions, the demand for passports peaked at almost 1.2 million in 2022, the highest ever number of passport applications received, representing an increase of 21% on 2019, the highest pre Covid-19 year for applications. This level of demand was in line with a continuation of the trend in the number of applications for passports over the period 2015 to 2019. However, there was also a strong shift in the way in which applications are received. Around 90% of all passport applications in 2022 were received online.

- 7.52** Prior to 2022, bundle applications — where applicants apply online for both a passport and a passport card — were counted by the Department as two applications. However, since 1 January 2022, to ensure more accurate reporting, a bundle application is now counted as one application.

Cancellation of passport applications

- 7.53** Over 7% of passport applications were cancelled in 2022. Two-thirds of the cancellations were first time applications.
- 7.54** The Department's procedures set out that a passport application can be cancelled by either the applicant requesting its cancellation or the non-progression of the application after six months from receipt, due mainly to non-submission of required documentation. The Department does not have a system in place to record reasons for cancellations. Similarly, the Department does not monitor instances where applications are refused in line with the provisions under the Passports Act 2008.

Recommendation 7.1

The Department of Foreign Affairs should introduce a process whereby the reasons for cancellation or refusal of passport applications are recorded and monitored to identify trends and to address possible shortcomings or difficulties in the application process.

Accounting Officer's response

Agreed

The passport service will introduce a process to track passport applications that are refused. A further breakdown of categories of passport applications that are cancelled is not possible with the current passport system. However, the introduction of the new passport operations system would facilitate this.

Timeline for implementation

Refusal tracker — end September 2023; cancellation tracker — end 2024.

Issuance of passports

- 7.55** The passport service issued almost 1.1 million passports in 2022. This was 16% more than in 2019 (pre Covid-19).
- 7.56** In 2021, the actual (and consequently target) average turnaround times increased, peaking at 40 days for paper applications and first time online applications. In September 2022, the average turnaround time for online first time applications reduced to 20 days. However, there was no change in the turnaround time for paper applications.
- 7.57** The turnaround times reported in the revised estimates relate to how long it takes to issue the majority of passports (e.g. 90% within 20 working days). While the Department stated that it holds historical data to support the calculation of the reported processing times included in the revised estimates, the data is not readily accessible prior to 2021.
- 7.58** Since the commencement of this examination, the Department ensures that supporting data on processing times is retained and readily accessible to facilitate the verification of the performance indicators and actual outcomes.

Staffing levels

- 7.59** The demand for passports tends to be higher in the first half of the year. Additional temporary staff are employed to address this demand. At the end of June 2022, the passport service employed 804 staff of which 41% were employed on a temporary basis. The Department expects to increase the passport service's staff to 874 in 2023.
- 7.60** The Department stated that staff numbers employed by the passport service have increased mainly due to the increased level of passport and foreign birth registration applications being received, transformation from a paper-based system to an online system, the provision of additional services and a significantly enhanced customer service.

Cost of passport delivery

- 7.61** In overall terms, the level of cost efficiency achieved by the Department in providing the passport service is not known. The Department does not monitor the level of cost efficiency achieved in providing the passport service.
- 7.62** The Department does not formally require the passport service to be self-financing. Passport application fees are revised from time to time, but are not determined by formal analyses of unit costs of production of passports.
- 7.63** Indirect costs associated with the provision of the passport service have not been quantified and therefore are not currently allocated to the service. Consequently, the total costs of providing the passport service is not known.
- 7.64** Between 2015 and 2022, the passport service's direct costs increased by 113%. The number of passports and FBRs applied for over the same period increased by 74%, and fee receipts increased by 68%. The passport service commenced involvement in the processing of FBRs in 2019.
- 7.65** The Department does not monitor the unit cost of passports. This limits the Department's ability to assess and analyse the levels of cost efficiencies achieved by the service.
- 7.66** Although the Department considers that the unit cost of a passport is too narrow a metric for a complex and detailed passport service, monitoring changes in the unit cost would also enable the Department to assess the impact of rising costs on the fees charged to citizens.

Recommendation 7.2

The Department of Foreign Affairs should introduce a written policy which sets out the extent to which fee income generated should cover the passport service's overall costs.

Accounting Officer's response

Agreed

The Department has a policy that the passport service covers the cost of providing the service and contributes to the indirect costs of the Department for services provided centrally to the passport service. The Department will put in place a written policy now.

Timeline for implementation

October 2023

Recommendation 7.3

The Department of Foreign Affairs should introduce a cost allocation model to allocate indirect costs/central administration costs appropriately to the passport service. This will enable the Department to calculate the full unit cost of producing a passport and to monitor and assess changes in the unit cost over time, including the impact of rising costs on fees charged to citizens.

Accounting Officer's response

Agreed

The Department will develop a cost allocation model to allocate central headquarters costs, such as ICT, HR, finance, corporate services to the passport service. The Department will consider the appropriate cost allocation and other metrics to reflect the complexity of the services and operations of the passport service.

Timeline for implementation

March 2024

Reporting the performance of the passport service

- 7.67** The Department's key output objectives for the passport service as included in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2023* reflects the objectives included in the Department's previous statement of strategy covering the period 2017 – 2020.
- 7.68** Also, while the current performance metrics, included in the 2023 revised estimates partially align with the Department's main objective for the passport service, they do not refer to the accessibility and security of the passport service. None of the key performance metrics for the passport service focus on costs or unit costs.

Recommendation 7.4

The Department of Foreign Affairs should ensure that relevant information is included in the published annual estimates and that the performance metrics align with the passport service's core objectives. This should include cost efficiency metrics and targets.

Accounting Officer's response

Agreed

The Department will consider how to appropriately capture and report passport service performance metrics, especially as most of the metrics that would reflect the broad and overarching service provided, are qualitative in nature.

Timeline for implementation

March 2024

- 7.69** The passport service's performance metrics and related targets as included in the annual revised estimates have changed over the period 2015 to 2023. Where new metrics are introduced, the revised estimates procedures do not require 'retired' metrics to be reported upon. Consequently, the Department did not report on the performance achieved for the previous metrics.
- 7.70** Changing metrics and incomplete reporting on output means that the performance of the passport service over the years cannot be easily or meaningfully compared. This in turn, limits the usefulness of the metrics for decision makers within the Department and for external stakeholders.

Recommendation 7.5

The Department of Foreign Affairs should ensure that the performance information reported annually in the revised estimates volume is consistent, complete and useful in facilitating an assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the passport service.

Accounting Officer's response

Agreed

Since 2015, the passport service has gone through a transformational shift from a fully paper process to a global online, citizen-focused service. Accordingly, metrics had to change year to year as the service transformed and also added additional services. The revised estimates volume is a reflection of a point of time and as the service changed, the metrics were updated to reflect this. In the future, where metrics are changed, we will report the outcome of the previous metric in the revised estimates volume as well as introducing the new metrics.

Timeline for implementation

December 2023

Annex 7A Passport service major developments, 2015 – 2022

Year	Main development
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passport card introduced
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facial recognition system launched
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online passport service launched for adult renewals (40% of applicants eligible for this service) Web Chat service launched
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online passport service extended to include child renewal and complex adult renewals applications (70% of applicants eligible for this service)
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online passport service for first time applicants in Ireland, the United Kingdom, the European Union and the European Economic Area launched (97% of applicants eligible for this service) Automated dispatch system for passports introduced The integration of Foreign Birth Registration into the passport service Customer Service Hub established
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Automated dispatch system for passport extended
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online passport service extended to first time applicants in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile Urgent appointment system launched Dedicated phone line for Oireachtas members introduced
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online passport service extended to first time applicants in Singapore, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Afghanistan

Source: Department of Foreign Affairs

Annex 7B Operational level reports

Type of report	Aim of the report	Focus of the report	Provided to
Daily report on phone operations	Shows operational statistics for call centre (by WhatsApp)	Daily analysis of total number of calls, calls answered, calls abandoned, percentage answered, number of staff in call centre.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Secretary General ▪ Deputy Secretary General/Chief Operating Officer (DSO/COO) ▪ Director General, Citizen Services Division ▪ Director of Passport Service ▪ Deputy Director Passport Service
Weekly passport staffing report	Highlights staffing figures and projections	Weekly review of permanent and temporary staff numbers, actual and projected staff numbers, new recruitments, vacancies and status of competitions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deputy Secretary General/Chief Operating Officer (DSG/COO) ▪ Director General, Citizen Services Division ▪ Director of Passport Service ▪ Director of HR ▪ Deputy Director Passport Service ▪ Deputy Director HR
Real-time call centre dashboard	Real-time status of call centre operations	Current information for the phone lines, number of staff logged in, number of staff handling a query, available staff, number of calls in the queue, calls abandoned, longest and current waiting time, total number of calls received	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DSG/COO ▪ Director General, Citizen Service Division ▪ Director of Passport Service ▪ Deputy Director Passport Service ▪ Passport service's management ▪ Others as required

Source: Department of Foreign Affairs