



**An Roinn Gnóthaí
Eachtracha agus Trádála**
Department of
Foreign Affairs and Trade

Our Ref: Fol/Req/2020/131

27 July 2020

Dear Mr Farrell,

I refer to the request of 29 June 2020 which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for access to records held by this Department, as follows:

The total amount of financial assistance given to Irish citizens to help them return home due to the Covid-19 pandemic; the number of loans given; the total cost of these loans combined; the number of loans repaid and their value, the number of loans outstanding and their value.

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 10 July 2020.

With unprecedented numbers of people stranded across the world as a result of COVID19, the Department of Foreign Affairs developed a comprehensive approach to repatriation of citizens who wished to return home, taking account of the best interests of our citizens, including from a public health perspective. To date, the Department has advised or assisted over 8,000 people to return safely to Ireland as part of this consular response. Priority has been given to helping citizens who are normally resident in Ireland to return home safely on commercial flights wherever possible and, where not possible, on flights chartered by EU and other partners. In exceptional cases, where these options were no longer available, the Department has chartered flights directly to bring citizens home, notably from Peru, India and Nigeria. These flights, which were arranged in close cooperation with EU partners and facilitated travel of citizens from other EU member states, were supported through the EU “Union Civil Protection Mechanism” - the first time Ireland has arranged flights using this method.

Of these citizens assisted, a very small proportion have also received emergency financial assistance to assist with repatriation in the context of COVID19. This assistance has been provided in exceptional circumstances and as a last resort, and has been in the form of a loan, repayable within six months. In such cases, the citizen would need to provide a copy of their passport, PPS details (where applicable) and permanent address in Ireland in advance of the flight booking, as well as evidence of why assistance is being requested.

An Emergency Relief Mechanism was also established as part of the Department's comprehensive approach to supporting citizens stranded overseas. The goal of this assistance has been to support citizens normally resident in Ireland, where they are stranded overseas due to COVID-19 and have no access to commercial or repatriation flights. It has involved short-term support, in the form of a loan, to cover basic needs of food and accommodation, and could only be accessed by citizens who are intending to travel home as soon as possible, and who can demonstrate that they have no recourse to funds from elsewhere. Any support provided must be repaid within six months. Each application would be considered on a case-by-case basis on its own merits, and taking local conditions and the broader context into account.

A breakdown of these costs is provided below:

<i>Location</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Number of people facilitated to return to Ireland</i>
<i>Peru; Lima</i>	<i>€361,958</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>India; Goa/New Delhi</i>	<i>€349,203</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Nigeria; Lagos</i>	<i>€210,300</i>	<i>95</i>

The above charter flights were arranged under the terms of the EU Union Civil Protection Mechanism which allows for partial co-financing of flights. In addition, all passengers on charter flights are required to pay a contribution towards the costs of the flights.

The Department agreed special arrangements with commercial airlines in relation to 2 flights. A breakdown of these costs is provided below:

<i>Location</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Number of people</i>
<i>Australia; Perth</i>	<i>€389,192</i>	<i>166</i>
<i>Venezuela (to Bogota)</i>	<i>€12,000</i>	<i>4</i>

The Department has also spent €141,688 on repatriation assistance and other supports for stranded Irish citizens abroad. This includes 89 emergency loans to assist 110 citizens return home. These loans total €134,608 to date and mainly cover the costs of repatriation on commercial flights and repatriation flights organised by other countries.

All citizens who receive an emergency repatriation and/or assistance loan must sign an agreement to repay that loan within six months. To date, a total of €15,217 has been repaid. This consists of 6 loans repaid in full and 3 partially paid loans.

Right of Appeal

Should you wish to appeal this decision, you may do so in writing to the Freedom of Information Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 76-78 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2 or by email to foi@dfa.ie. A fee applies for an appeal for access to non-personal information; the level of this fee has been set at €30. For methods of payment, please contact FOI Unit at foi@dfa.ie, or 01-4082857.

You should make your appeal within 4 weeks (20 working days) from the date of this notification. However, the making of a late appeal may be permitted in appropriate circumstances. The appeal will involve a complete reconsideration of the matter by a more senior member of the staff of this Department.

Yours sincerely

Joseph Keane
Finance Division