

Notice to Visa Offices regarding the ‘Minister of Religion’ and ‘Volunteering in Ireland’ schemes

On 31/12/2017 visa applications for ‘Minister of Religion’ and ‘Volunteering in Ireland’ were suspended until 31/03/2018. This suspension was later extended to 30/04/2018. As of 30/04/2018 updated versions of both these schemes will come into force. Both of these schemes now include a preclearance procedure to facilitate and streamline entry to the State. The preclearance scheme covers both non-visas required and visa required nationals. Before travelling to the State to undertake work as a Minister of Religion or as a volunteer, individuals will need to apply for, and be issued, an approval letter from the Preclearance Section in Visa Division

Under the new schemes, non-visa required nationals intending to work as a Minister of Religion or as a Volunteer must therefore be able to present a ‘Preclearance Letter of Approval’ to an Immigration Officer when they arrive at the port of entry, otherwise they will not be admitted entry to the state.

Persons, who are citizens of visa required countries, and who have been granted a ‘Preclearance Letter of Approval’, will also need to apply for and receive a Minister of Religion or Volunteering in Ireland visa before travelling to the State. In the majority of cases the visa application will only be made after the Preclearance application has already been approved. In the case of persons resident in countries where biometrics is recorded as part of the visa application process, the visa application will be made at the same time as the preclearance application. This covers residents of China, India, Pakistan and Nigeria.

Persons granted preclearance approval under the Minister of Religion scheme are entitled to be joined in the State by their spouse and their children under the age of 18 subject to normal visa requirements. The spouse and children, if they are visa required nationals, will need to apply for a Join Family visa, as per existing requirements, and to submit full supporting documentation.

Persons granted approval under the Volunteering in Ireland scheme are not entitled, on foot of that approval, to be joined in the State by any family members.

Ministers of Religion and Volunteers will be required to submit full substantial supporting documentation to the Preclearance Section in Dublin with their preclearance applications. Therefore the applicant will only be required to submit their visa application form, and their passport, as part of their actual visa application.

Missions must ensure that the applicant has been issued a Preclearance Letter of Approval before any visa application is granted in respect of that person. If preclearance has been granted to a person then the granting of the visa application in respect of that person should be expedited.

Further information on the operation of the new schemes can be found on the INIS website www.inis.gov.ie with effect from 30/04/2018.

For any queries, you may have in relation to the new schemes please email preclearance@justice.ie

