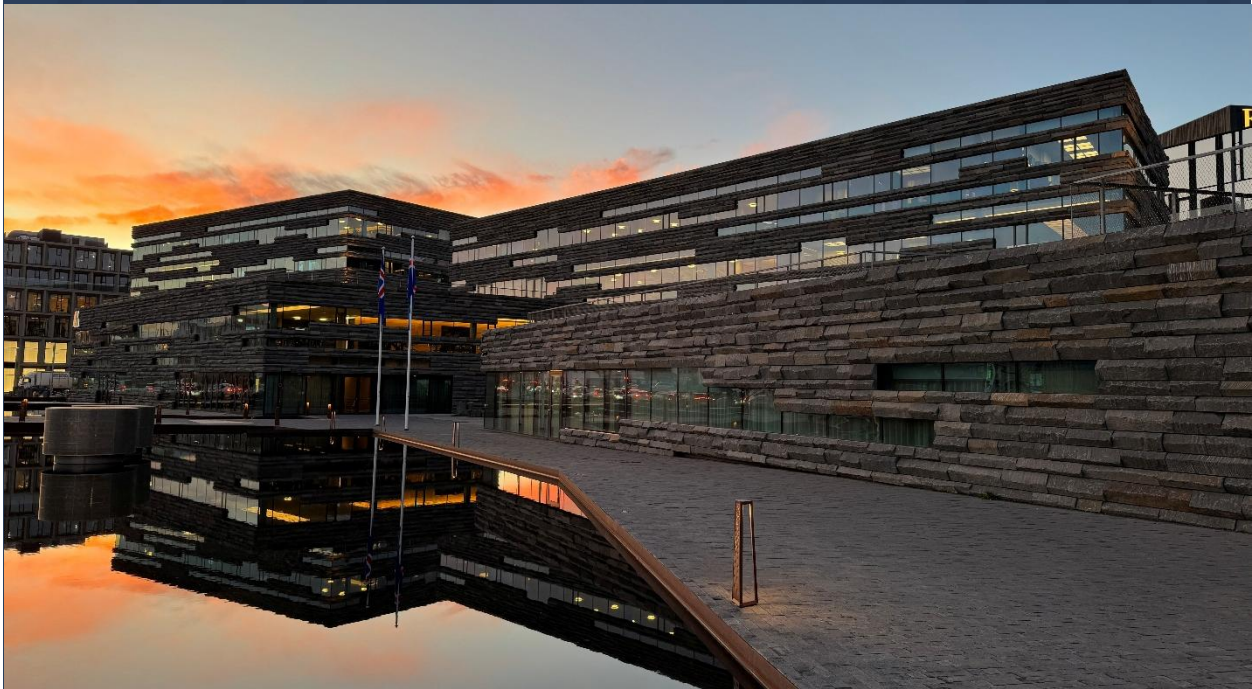


December 2025



Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Consular Services Policy 2026-2030



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Table of Contents

1. Preface	4
2. Policy Statement	5
3. Value Statement	5
4. Mission	6
5. Area and Assignments	7
6. Vision for the future	9
7. Analysis and Actions	9
7.1 Social Change and Technological Development	10
7.2 Digital Solutions	12
7.3 Passports	12
7.4 Residential Permit Holders, Refugees and Dual Citizens	13
8. Meginmarkmið borgarabjónustu	Err
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9. Monitoring, Evaluation and Revision	15

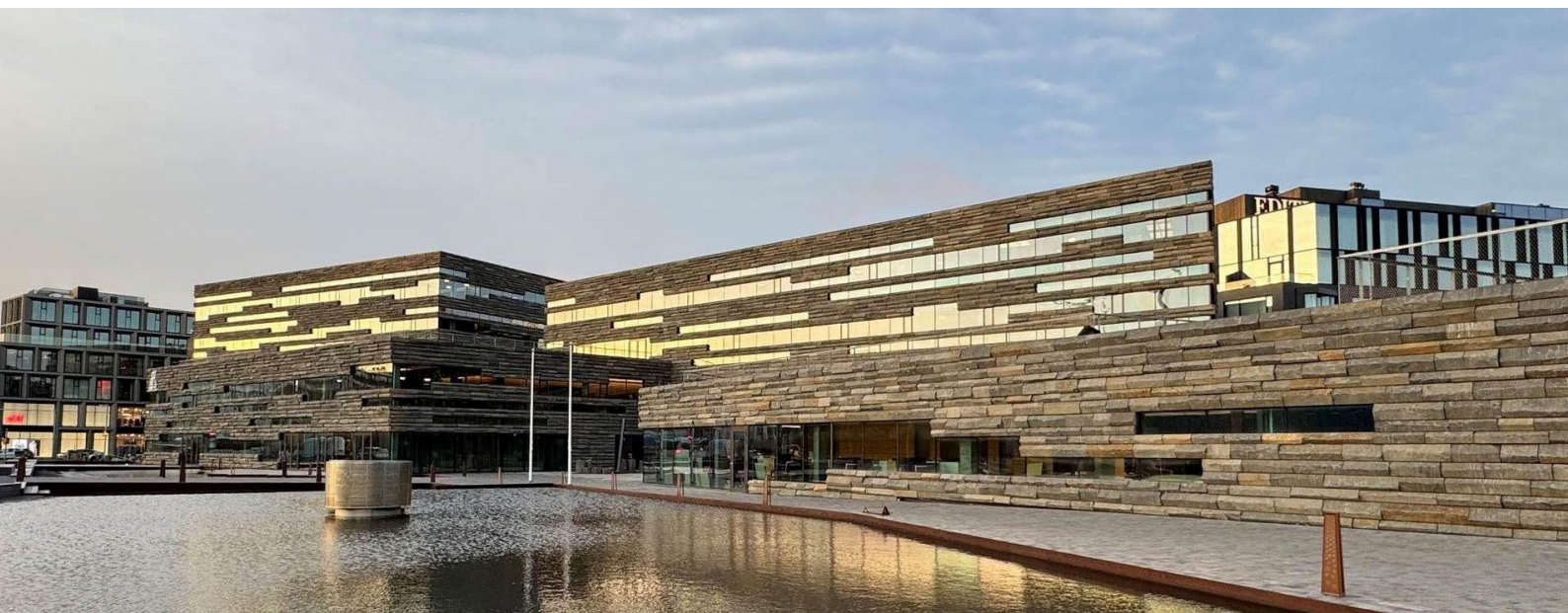
1. Preface

The Consular Service is one of the legal cornerstones of the Foreign Service. It provides protection and assistance to Icelandic citizens in emergencies and augments Icelandic citizens' access to the services of Icelandic government agencies overseas. The scale of the Consular Service's tasks has expanded considerably along with the evolution of Icelandic society and new global challenges, which is why a regularly reviewed Consular Service Strategy has been developed.

The Foreign Service as a workplace is characterized by wide-spread geographic operations, a multinational staff and frequent transfers of employees between countries and assignments. Because of this, there is an extensive need for written and standardized guidelines for the public and for service providers as regards delimitation of tasks, the attitude towards them and which instruments and authorizations are available at any given time. This ensure that citizens receive comparable services and advice wherever they turn to us.

The first Strategy on Consular Services was formulated in 2019, taking into consideration the challenges current at that time, forming its values and defining what stakeholders were connected to the Consular Service. That Strategy was intended to cover a five-year period. This updated Strategy paper takes into account the challenges faced by the Consular Service in recent years, not least the COVID-19 pandemic and the global increase of military conflicts. It also takes into account technical innovations that have emerged and the opportunities they offer for the strengthening of Consular Services, e.g. as regards artificial intelligence.

The Consular Service is a key component of Iceland's Foreign Service and has the role of providing Icelandic citizens with assistance and protection overseas, regardless of whether it concerns illness, accidents, death or criminal matters. The Consular Service also plays a very important role in providing services for Icelandic citizens overseas, such as receiving applications for identity papers, handling absentee voting and serving as a sort of extended branch for many Icelandic institutions. This updated Strategy is intended to create a common viewpoint and provide guidance for users of the Consular Services, ministry staff, diplomatic mission staff, as well as honorary consuls. Consular services can only be provided in tactful cooperation with key players, formal and informal, at home and abroad. Therefore, this strategy is expected to take note of the safety of our citizens and foster mutual understanding and clarify the roles of the numerous parties involved in resolving consular cases.



2. Policy Statement

The objective of the Consular Service is to guard the safety and interests of our citizens on foreign soil who need our assistance and to augment Icelandic citizens' overseas access to important services of Icelandic government agencies. In order to do this, digital services must be reinforced, along with the provision of information on the Internet and through social media, so as to enable an increasing number of people to resolve their own issues with the aid of artificial intelligence, as well as offering more traditional provision of information through the ministry's media accounts. Additionally, emphasis will continue to be placed on training staff to provide guidance in more complicated cases, following procedures and in smooth consultation with working partners. It should also be ensured that personal data are saved in centralised, secure databases.

The enhanced coordination and networking between the Consular Service and first responders in Iceland as well as abroad will continue, in order to enable rapid responses wherever Icelandic citizens may be in danger abroad.

3. Value Statement

Members of the Consular Services are **serving, flexible and resourceful** when they resolve the issues at hand. The core role of the Consular Service is to advise citizens on how they can effectively handle their issues on their own, but to also be able to render enhanced services in cases where more involvement and assistance is needed. These values are the guiding light in each task and in communications with partner institutions and citizens. They are intended to foster a positive culture and outlook within the Consular Service as well as towards it.



Solutions

When challenging issues arise, **we think in solutions.** We provide guidance to those who can solve their issues themselves, and we consult on how to solve other challenges.



Agility

We remain agile when cooperating with the public and other key-stakeholders so that the Consular Service continues to enjoy respect and support during challenging times.

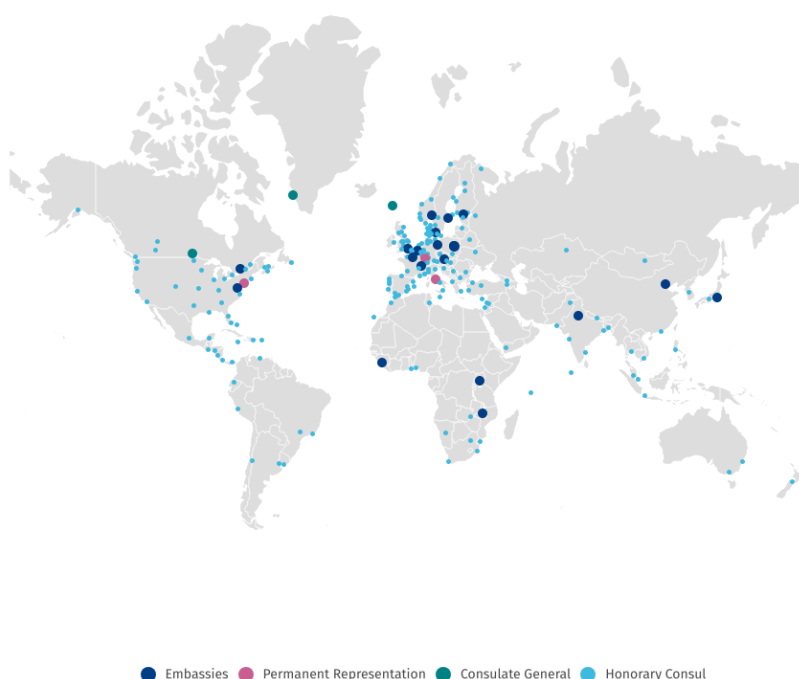


Service

We remain service-oriented and available to those who reach out to the Consular Service. By providing good, professional service we increase the positive public attitude towards the Ministry.

4. Mission

The legally mandated role of the Consular Service is to guard the safety of citizens abroad¹ and therefore it is the Foreign Service unit that has the most direct contact with the public.² Most requests for Consular Service assistance come as a result of a crisis or a task which within Iceland would fall under other administrative entities. When an emergency occurs in a foreign country, the problem can be compounded by language barriers, unfamiliarity with local customs and communication with institutions in an alien culture. This is where the Consular Services come in. We are available 24 hours a day, all year round, for emergencies involving Icelanders abroad. Assistance is provided through a telephone hotline, a network of 26 diplomatic missions in 22 states, and over 200 consuls.



The widespread and robust Consular Services cooperation between the Nordic countries is also an important factor in ensuring a high level of service. It is clear that a small Foreign Service with a small staff needs good friends. The Helsingfors Agreement on representation in Consular Services³ is the lynch pin of this cooperation. It provides that another Nordic country will provide emergency services to citizens in places where one or more of the Nordic countries do not have a diplomatic mission.

¹In the Foreign Service of Iceland Act this role is described as follows: "Furthermore, the Foreign Service shall protect and assist Icelandic nationals vis-à-vis foreign authorities, institutions and individuals."

² Icelandic citizens and others who have been granted protection in Iceland.

³The 1962 Cooperation Agreement between the Nordic Countries: <https://www.norden.org/is/publication/helsingforssamningurinn>

5. Area and Assignments

The cooperation between the ministry, diplomatic missions and honorary consuls across the world is the foundation for our service area, as vast as it is. In order to reach solutions, we need skilled staff with local knowledge and a strong social network, who can work expeditiously and professionally and have empathy for the people seeking service. Many Consular Service tasks at diplomatic missions are akin to those dealt with by District Commissioners and fall under the auspices of other ministries, for instance the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing, Registers Iceland and the police. The major body of work concerns handling general passport applications, applications for identification papers, document vouching, invigilation and providing guidance to the citizens, as well as overseeing absentee voting overseas.

Emergency cases include the issue of emergency passports, assistance due to sudden illness and hospitalisation, accidents, child protection cases, criminal cases, arrests and serving of sentences, and assistance to relatives related to deaths, illness and destitute citizens.

Increased security risks worldwide have increased the demand for rapid response from the Consular Service. The world's most popular travel destinations have been targeted by terrorists and been struck by natural catastrophes like flooding and hurricanes. The Consular Service's preparedness needs to take this into consideration and its contingency plans are made in consultation with the Civil Protection Unit of the Icelandic Police. Additionally, each diplomatic mission must have an updated contingency plan for its service area. There is also close cooperation with the Foreign Services of the Nordic countries to coordinate responses when Nordic citizens are at risk.

Strong networks facilitate solutions



Registers Iceland

All passports are manufactured at Registers Iceland. Twenty-one of our diplomatic missions are equipped to receive applications and transmit them digitally to Registers Iceland. The Registry also verifies custody of minors and authorizes Honorary Consulates to issue emergency passports.



Nordic Colleagues

Cooperate on a regular basis regarding consular services and crisis management. We refer to the Nordics' travel advice to evaluate high-risk areas where there are no Icelandic diplomatic missions.



Airlines and Airports

Can be key contacts when working on the safe return of citizens in difficult circumstances.



Police

Is our strategic partner for dealing with larger crisis abroad and when swift action is imperative. The police is a go-to partner for incidents related to death notices, crimes abroad and inquiries for missing persons overseas.



Municipalities and Child Protection units

Provide guidance and assistance. Close cooperation and consultations are key to safeguarding children's well-being.



Insurances and Hospitals

Provide invaluable support when resolving issues for sick Icelanders abroad or referrals between countries.



Media

Invaluable for reaching travellers to inform them about imminent danger or natural disasters.

The Consular Services' work in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic has been a special source of experience that must not go to waste. The scale of the Consular Service changed considerably when the pandemic hit and at the same time the volume of its tasks increased considerably. Voluntary registration was set up for Icelandic citizens abroad. Some 12 thousand people registered, giving a good overview of the number and location of Icelandic citizens abroad at that time.

The local staff were asked if they were able to assist the Consular Service and a call-centre was set up in the ministry's Communication and Public Diplomacy's offices. It was open for 16-hours a day. To supplement this service, two staff members worked from home to reply to enquiries by phone and email overnight, assisted by embassies in other time zones. Staff members from various departments assisted the Consular Service, as the operations of the Foreign Service were rendered irregular by COVID-19 and many traditional tasks were temporarily shelved.

A wide-ranging system of shifts was instituted in Iceland's diplomatic missions all over the world, in order to enable responses to written enquiries via email and through Facebook messages on a 24-hour basis. Thus, the diplomatic missions in North America took over when the day shift in Reykjavik ended, and then the embassies in Beijing, Tokyo and New-Delhi took over from them. Moscow was in full swing when Reykjavik came back to work, along with the diplomatic missions in Europe. For the first few days, there were even instances of former staff lending the ministry a hand, with support from Althingi, which loaned us a staff member for two weeks.

To respond to the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the first item on the agenda was to ensure the health and safety of Icelandic citizens abroad, through practical information and instructions through the Foreign Service's media accounts. The next step was an emphasis on assisting travellers who needed to be repatriated, through a coordinated effort of the ministry and diplomatic missions.

COVID-19 Pandemic - Consular Service from 14 March to 29 April 2020

3.214

General advice provided via phone and via



2.736

emails received by the Consular Service

74

Laissez-passer documents issued to travellers for international travel.



5.750

The Consular Service contacted nearly six thousand people. Around three thousand received phone calls while others received personalised emails or text messages.



211

211 people were stranded in 56 countries.



588

588 people received assistance via Facebook.



312

312 people were retrieved via chartered flights.



6. Vision for the future

The policy is for Icelandic citizens to know that they have solid backing from the Consular Service when they encounter difficulties abroad. Citizens should in most cases be able to solve their own issues via digital means by accessing the information they need via the Ministry for Foreign Affairs website. Many digital solutions are used by the Consular Service to ensure the security of data, enhance cooperation, reduce costs and increase efficiency.

We are constantly striving to find the most suitable solutions at any given time, including looking into using artificial intelligence. Consular Service staff are supported and trained; they approach people and issues with empathy and professionalism to satisfy customers' needs across the world.

When the safety of Icelanders abroad is at risk, the Consular Service responds swiftly, in coordination with powerful networks at home and on location.

7. Analysis and Actions

In a public survey made in 2024, 49% of the respondents replied that they had good or average knowledge about the Consular Service. Some 5.2% had sought assistance from the Consular Service, while just over 80% said they would probably seek assistance if they were to run into difficulties abroad. A similar number had directly approached embassies and consular offices, but far fewer had contacted the ministry directly.

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If I could choose my nationality, I would want to be Icelandic. You care so well for your people.

Doctor in Spain

The **strength** of the Consular Service lies first and foremost in the human resources of experienced professionals with local knowledge, the ability to open doors, short chains of command and extensive network of services. Among the **challenges** is a reduction of the number of staff posted to diplomatic missions, as well as frequent transfers between job positions. The knowledge of posted staff of the infrastructure in Iceland, as well as their connections to our working partners is an important factor of the Consular Service's work. There is also a lack of general overview in order to assess which areas are under-served, a lack of coordination of procedures and ensuring data security, especially in communications with consuls.

The scale of Consular Service tasks has increased in recent years, bringing with it a bigger burden on diplomatic missions and honorary consuls. There are gaps in our consular network, especially in popular tourist destinations and distant areas, e.g. Spain, South East Asia and the Middle East, e.g. since honorary consuls are not permitted to operate in most countries of the Middle East.

Additionally, nearly 40 out of the total of 210 Icelandic consuls are over 75 years old, which constitutes special challenges, for instance when it comes to the renewal of their posts close to their retirement.

Opportunities for more effective services lie in technological solutions, e.g. the use of artificial intelligence. They make it possible for us to solve many issues through remote working, increase data security and improve the provision of information to the public, to foreign Ministry for Foreign Affairs staff, and between units, including honorary consulates.

7.1 Social Change and Technological Development

Icelanders are frequent travellers and travel abroad has increased in line with more travel opportunities from Iceland⁴. Numbers from the Icelandic Tourist Board show that over 80% of Icelanders travelled abroad in 2023, which is a 6% increase from the previous year, with an average number of 2,7 trips. The most popular destination was Spain.⁵ Additionally, the average number of overnight stays abroad was the highest ever measured by the Icelandic Tourist Board.

In 2024 nearly 13.5% of the nation lived abroad, close to 50 thousand people⁶. Many of them are students and pensioners⁷ enjoying the right to settle in Europe that is inherent in the EEA-Agreement. Most Icelanders living abroad, or around 86%, reside in countries where there is an Icelandic diplomatic mission. One exception where many Icelanders reside, own real estate, spend long periods of time or take holidays, is Spain. The greatest number of requests for assistance submitted to the ministry originate in Spain. Some members of this group need extensive services due to health concerns, social and economic issues and language difficulties. There is a large number of cases and many of them tend to be of a demanding nature (deaths, arrests, child protection cases, illness etc.) that uncompensated Honorary Consuls can hardly be expected to handle.

Although only 952 Icelandic citizens are domiciled in Spain according to Registers Iceland, it is estimated that between 3,500 and 4,500 people annually are either permanent or temporary residents. This can, *inter alia*, be seen from the nature and volume of Consular Service cases that arise there, as well as the number of people who have participated in absentee voting there in recent years. The purchase of real estate by Icelandic citizens in Spain has increased considerably in recent years.

Honorary consuls are important working partners for the Consular Service, especially in Spain, where they are often under considerable strain due to the large number of Icelanders in the country. The Consular Service situation there is fragile; if one honorary consuls in a popular area retires, it can cause a serious lack of assistance to those in need. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs

4 ISAVIA Annual report 2018: In the summer of 2018, 30 airlines were flying from Keflavík to 101 destinations.

5 <https://www.ferdamalastofa.is/is/gogn/nyjustu-utgafur/ferdalag-islendinga-2022-og-ferdaaform-theirra-2023>

6 <https://www.skra.is/gogn/thjodskragattin/islenskir-rikisborgarar/>

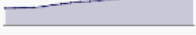
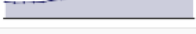
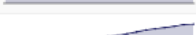
7 Mbl. 6.6.2019: Payments into foreign accounts of pensioners increased by 47%, according to Tryggingastofnun (The Social Insurance Administration).

has decided to establish an embassy in Spain in the latter half of 2025, *inter alia* to respond to these challenges.

During the 2024 presidential and general elections the ministry sent, for the first time, staff to handle absentee voting at those places in Spain with the largest population of expatriate Icelanders, and there proved to be a real need for this service. The latter election was also the first time that people could apply for passports and/or identification papers, and this was very well received. The expansion of such services to more locations should be considered. This would mainly include locations with considerable populations of Icelanders and no embassy close by.

The number of Icelandic citizens abroad, 1 December 2024⁸

Skipting eftir löndum

	Land	♂	♀	⚭	Samtals	Hlutfall	Þróun eftir árum
1.	 Danmörk	5.907	6.538	4	12.449	24,4%	
2.	 Noregur	4.681	4.675	1	9.357	18,3%	
3.	 Svíþjóð	4.541	4.567	3	9.111	17,9%	
4.	 Bandaríkin	2.958	3.682	0	6.640	13%	
5.	 Bretland	1.134	1.391	1	2.526	5%	
6.	 Þýskaland	962	915	1	1.878	3,7%	
7.	 Spánn	480	472	0	952	1,9%	
8.	 Kanada	464	473	0	937	1,8%	
9.	 Sviss	352	340	0	692	1,3%	
10.	 Holland	290	324	0	614	1,2%	
11.	 Ástralía	287	270	0	557	1,1%	
12.	 Frakkland	235	273	0	508	1%	
13.	 Lúxemborg	220	220	0	440	0,9%	
14.	 Pólland	179	226	0	405	0,8%	
15.	 Finnland	192	145	0	337	0,6%	
	 Önnur lönd	1.927	1.593	0	3.520	5,7%	
	Samtals íslenskir ríkisborgarar erlendis				50.923		

The arrangement for absentee voting would need to be discussed with the National Electoral Commission. The experience of the Foreign Service of the current system has been, with regard to legally mandated deadlines, the size of the Foreign Service and the work load, that it neither takes into consideration the number of Icelanders abroad nor how widely they are distributed globally. It should be considered whether it is really fair that voters in Honolulu should only be given the same amount of time to turn in their votes as those voting in Iceland.

⁸ <https://www.skra.is/um-okkur/frettir/frett/2025/02/25/Islandingar-busettir-erlendis-2024/>

7.2 Digital Solutions

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs has already made its mark as a powerful spreader of information on social media⁹, which has become an influential channel to spread information of impending danger to citizens abroad. Access to information for the public and honorary consuls in the ministry's digital domain could, however, be improved to ensure easier resolution of cases.



Digital signatures, document vouching (Apostille stamping) and self-service for passport applicants are tasks where better use of digital solutions should be considered. Further analysis must be made of the opportunities offered by digital solutions.

This could include streamlining through transfer of tasks, improving services by using digital payment gateways and increasing data security for the ministry as well as the honorary consuls. Additionally, special attention could be given, as previously mentioned, to using artificial intelligence in Consular Service tasks. Artificial intelligence offers various opportunities for Consular Service tasks, including improved services, increased efficiency and time saving. It would also be useful to look into using artificial intelligence to render written and real-time consultation services on a 24-hours basis, making it possible for the Consular Service to offer assistance through email, chat or phone calls.

7.3 Passports

Passports fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice and Registers Iceland; close to 6% of applications for passports are submitted to Registers Iceland via Iceland's embassies. Around 1% of the total number of Icelandic passports issued in 2024 were emergency passports issued by embassies and honorary consulates (437 in total). Emergency passports are hand-written and there is no system in place to securely control their circulation and issuing. The procedure is fragile and mistakes in the issuing of such passports can have serious consequences, since it is often difficult to ensure that correct procedures are followed in distant posts.

In the autumn of 2024, the Consular Service considerably stepped up its dissemination of information and tightened the procedure for issuing emergency passports. This has resulted in fewer such passports being issued, since they are solely intended to be used as travel documents to get back to Iceland or to the next location where an application can be made for a regular passport. They are not regular identity papers nor are they fully

In 2024



Around **50 thousand** Icelanders were registered abroad.



3,939 applications for passports and **234** ID cards were processed by Icelandic Embassies.



437 emergency passports were issued by Consulates and Embassies.

⁹ „The European External Action Service– EEAS is the world's best-connected diplomatic service, followed by the Icelandic MFA“, according to Matthias Lüfkens, founder of Twiplomacy and MD at BCW Global, 3. September 2019.

valid travel documents. Additionally, the number of states that do not accept handwritten identity documents is rising. It is therefore an important task to regularly remind passport holders to renew them in a timely manner and to check when they expire. Additionally, a growing number of states have started requiring at least 6 months validity beyond the duration of the visit and therefore it is not always enough to carry a valid passport.

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It can be defined as an emergency if a responder's inactivity has negative consequences or harms the person seeking assistance.

Guðbrandur Örn Arnarson, CEO SAReye ehf.

7.4 Residential Permit Holders, Refugees and Dual Citizens

Icelandic society today is considerably more diverse than it was when the Foreign Service of Iceland Act was adopted in 1971. This is reflected in the group of people who seek the assistance of the Consular Service. Among them are people with Icelandic residence permits, including individuals with refugee status, people with more than one citizenship and families where individual family members have different citizenships

These people often seek assistance concerning issues that are the responsibility of the Icelandic authorities, but which the Consular Service is not, strictly speaking, legally mandated to assist with. Providing service to dual citizens is growing in volume in the other Nordic countries, and refugee services are among the most complex issues handled by consular services. The obligations of the Consular Service vis-à-vis the growing number of individuals who have been granted Icelandic identity papers with long-term residence permits, and foreign spouses of Icelanders, need to be evaluated and aligned with practices in our neighbouring countries. Guidelines need to be set regarding solutions, in cooperation with the appropriate institutions and ministries, as well as checking whether there is reason to amend the applicable laws.



8. The Consular Service's Main Objectives

The following objectives guide the implementation of policies concerning the Consular Service. The objectives serve as a basis for the Consular Service's annual work agenda and its implementation.

1	Icelanders abroad have easy access to information, professional consular services and receive solutions for their issues.	The public can solve simpler Consular Service tasks on their own through improved web-based information and digital solutions.
		The Consular Service is visible to its users and reflects positively on the Foreign Service.
		Social Media bring important information to the public.
		Artificial intelligence will be used purposefully to provide the public with information. Examine whether bots can be used to provide information, such as the location and contact information of consuls, information about passports, emergency passports, identity cards, insurance matters, etc.
		Use a Sharepoint database to register Consular Service cases and produce statistics.
2	Consular Service staff perform their duties with empathy and professionalism, provide guidance and seek resolutions.	Training, education and information dissemination to staff increased and harmonised further.
		The number of staff in Consular Services is proportional to the tasks and more staffing is ensured in crisis situations.
		A positive attitude of Foreign Service staff towards Consular Services.
		Consuls are well informed and have good relations to their diplomatic missions or the ministry. Continuing cooperation with the Directorate for Protocol, Culture and Overseas Business Services on oversight, controls and communication of information to this important group.
3	Responsibilities are delimited, procedures are clear and the handling of personal data is secure.	Consular Service responsibilities are clearly delimited and cases are filed in a single, secure central database both from the ministry and embassies.
		Response to phone calls and case resolution are effective and harmonised between diplomatic missions via updating of the handbook and a special procedure document.
		Hotspot areas are defined and solutions sought for service areas with poor coverage (e.g. the appointment of honorary consuls and increased cooperation with the Nordic police forces).
4	Swift and secure crisis response to major emergencies abroad.	All staff are familiar with their respective contingency plans and the role of each responding party.
		Regular emergency response training and coordination is provided for all first responders.

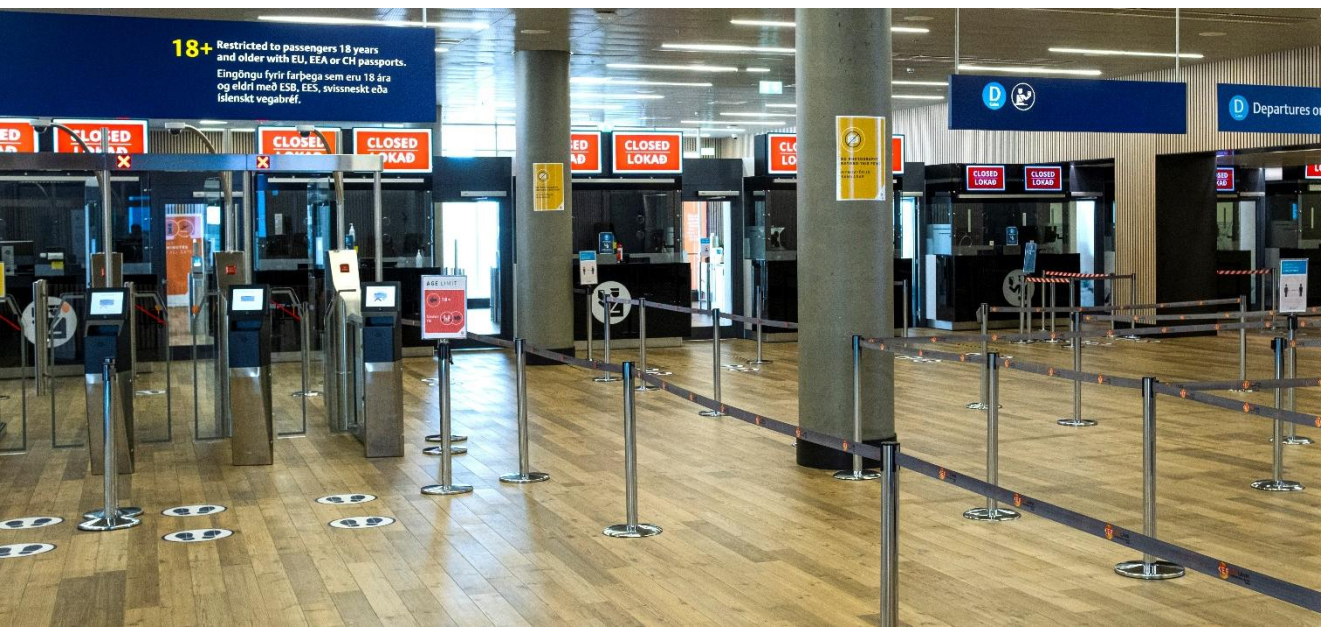
		Áreiðanlegar upplýsingar berist hratt til Íslendinga á hættusvæðum erlendis. Secure information is conveyed expeditiously to Icelanders in danger areas abroad. Continue to strengthen the cooperation with the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management. Ensure the correct registration there and in the 112 database. Look into the possibility of sending text messages to all phones with Icelandic numbers in danger zones abroad. Prepare a timeline for the review of diplomatic missions' contingency plans.
5	Active and smooth cooperation, domestically and abroad, with partner institutions and key actors.	Continued active participation in Nordic cooperation regarding consular work and crisis response. Ministry and embassies develop their Consular Service network with active consultation, meetings and agreements. Formalised cooperation with institutions on cooperation and procedures. Look into ways to further tighten the service network through international cooperation (e.g. the European External Action Service (EEAS)).

9. Monitoring, Evaluation and Revision

This policy is a five-year plan and its implementation is the responsibility of the Consular Service unit.

The Consular Service unit will regularly collect statistical data from the Consular Service database and share it with the administration and diplomatic missions. Information shall also be summarised at the end of each year.

The plan is for this strategy to be further worked out in the Consular Service's annual operational plan.



Citizens
Ríkisborgarar



