

Minister of Religion Preclearance Scheme

- 1.** From 29 November 2022, the Minister of Religion Preclearance scheme applies to both visa and non-visa required non-European Economic Area (EEA)/ non-United Kingdom (UK)/ non-Swiss nationals.
- 2.** Under the Minister of Religion Preclearance Scheme, qualifying religious personnel will be permitted to enter and remain in the State for up to three years, renewable for further periods as outlined in this document, where there is a demonstrated need for their services and subject to compliance with all other immigration requirements that apply in individual cases.
- 3.** All non-EEA/ non-UK/ non-Swiss nationals who have been offered a job with a religious body or faith community as a Minister of Religion in Ireland must seek prior approval to work in that capacity from the Department of Justice, before travelling to the State.

Minister of Religion

- 4.** For the purposes of this scheme “Minister of Religion” means a person who is a qualified or ordained member of a religious or faith community already established in the State, who has at least one verifiable year’s previous service as a Minister of Religion post-qualification/ordination. A qualified member is a person that has at least two years of relevant structured training evidenced by relevant documentation.

Conditions for permission under this Scheme

- 5.** A Minister of Religion may be granted permission under this Scheme where their purpose for entering and residing in the State is one or more of the following:
 - 5.1.** conducting religious ceremonies, providing pastoral care or spiritual leadership, or conducting classes based on a religious ethos to an established congregation in Ireland.
 - 5.2.** providing senior administration support of a substantially full-time nature to a religious institution, order, church, or congregation established in Ireland where the work would not qualify for an employment permit issued by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.
 - 5.3.** being a member of a religious community established in Ireland that takes public vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

- 5.4.** Engaging in an established course of religious studies of one years' duration administered by an established religious institution in Ireland. This permission may, at the discretion of the Minister for Justice, be extended for the purposes of taking up a role as a Minister of Religion on the basis of paragraphs 5.1.1 – 5.1.3 above where the same sponsor applies.

Sponsorship and nationality

- 6.** A Minister of Religion can apply under this scheme to travel to the State if:
- 6.1.** He/she has been sponsored for the position by a religious body or faith community already established in Ireland and having an active membership and congregation in the State, including serving full-time Ministers of Religion, and
- 6.2.** He/she is a national of a country that is not part of the EEA, United Kingdom (UK) and Switzerland.
- 7.** The religious organisation must also have a dedicated premises serving that religious body or faith community. Dedicated Premises means a premises that is set aside for the purpose of religious observation.
- 8.** The annual audited accounts or, in the case of religious organisations that have an annual gross income or expenditure of less than €100,000, the most recent six months bank statements, must also be available as required by the immigration authorities. A sponsor must be a body, it cannot be an individual.
- 9.** Any false, misleading or omitted documentation in the application will be taken into consideration and may adversely affect future applications for sponsorships where immigration authorities are not satisfied that such deficiencies have been adequately addressed

Obligations of sponsor

- 10.** The sponsor must confirm in writing that:
- 10.1.** there is a verifiable need for the Minister of Religion applying under this Scheme, and the nature of the proposed work they will be undertaking must be set out in correspondence This need must be demonstrated by, for example, reference to the size of the congregation in the State, the existing cohort of Ministers in the State as well as any other facts that would be relevant to demonstrating such a need;

- 10.2.** the applicant is suitably qualified to discharge the duties and responsibilities of the position;
- 10.3.** the applicant has a clean police record. Documentary evidence, including a current (not more than 6 months old) criminal records check and police clearance certificate from any country the applicant has resided in the last 5 years - or certified Irish or English language translation of a criminal records check and police clearance certificate, will be required of the applicant;
- 10.4.** child protection policies and procedures in line with the Children First Guidance are in place in the religious body or faith community (supporting documentation should be provided);
- 10.5.** the applicant is cleared to work with children and vulnerable adults. This must be obtained from An Garda Síochána by the sponsor; the preclearance will not be granted until a Garda vetting certificate is received;
- 10.6.** The applicant (and his or her immediate family) will be supported through the provision from the sponsor of funds or subsistence and accommodation that are sufficient to maintain the applicant throughout the period of his or her permission to remain in the State, under the Scheme. (Evidence of finance/accommodation, for example, the address where the applicant will reside, bank statements of both parties i.e., the sponsor and applicant or, at a minimum, those of the sponsor, must be provided with the application.) This can be achieved through the provision of a traditional salary, a stipend combined with board and lodgings or a combination of these means. Self-funding for Minister of Religion preclearance applications is not permitted. Financial support from outside the State will not be accepted as part of this Scheme.

Permission as Minister of Religion in the State

11. A Minister of Religion admitted under this scheme may:

- 11.1.** Work for their sponsor in the job described in their application;
- 11.2.** do additional voluntary work, as long as it does not interfere with the primary purpose for being in the State;
- 11.3.** Study as long as it does not interfere with the primary purpose for being in the State;

- 11.4.** Travel abroad for short periods of up to 90 days (e.g. holidays and attending conferences) and return to Ireland, subject to any re-entry visa requirements;
- 11.5.** Bring immediate family members (dependants) with them, meaning in this case spouse and minor children up to the age of 18. This can be extended to a maximum age of 23 where the child is in full time education and remains dependent on the parent. The permission granted to the spouse/partner under this Scheme will be dependent on the continued residence status of the Minister of Religion. In cases where the Minister of Religion permanently leaves the State, the accompanying spouse/partner and dependants, if applicable, must also depart.

Restrictions

12. A Minister of Religion admitted under this scheme may not:

- 12.1.** change sponsors while in the State under this Scheme – they must be outside the State to apply to change sponsor;
- 12.2.** engage in any paid work in any capacity (including remotely) while in the State other than in the capacity for which they were originally allowed entry, that is, to exercise their functions as a Minister of Religion;
- 12.3.** claim any State benefits, or rely on public funds for services, including health, or other state supports, for themselves or their dependants;
- 12.4.** bring any other family members, apart from those referred to above, with them;
- 12.5.** apply to change their immigration status while in the State.

Other important conditions

13. The following conditions must also be observed:

- 13.1.** The Minister of Religion and any permitted family member(s) must be covered by private medical insurance, from a company authorised by the Health Insurance Authority for the duration of their time in the State. This could be as part of the group medical scheme of your sponsor. In addition, it is advisable that applicants have insurance to cover repatriation in the event of serious illness or unforeseen events.

- 13.2.** Travel insurance may suffice but only during the first year of the applicant's stay, provided that the insurance provides coverage:
- (a) for the full period before you arrange medical insurance,
 - (b) at a minimum of €25,000 for accident and €25,000 for illness or disease, and
 - (c) for any period of hospitalisation.
- 13.3.** The minimum permitted period of residence under this Scheme is one (1) year and the maximum is three (3) years. This means that any period up to one year will reckon as a full year for the purposes of the Scheme. You may spend three full **consecutive** years in Ireland (renewable annually) or break the period into separate lots of one or two years, provided the overall period does not exceed three years.
- 13.4.** In the normal course, as a Minister of Religion you may be eligible for one extension of this three-year period of a further **three consecutive** years. This application for an extension must be made before the current permission expires. It can only be for service with the then current sponsor and will be considered only if the sponsor can demonstrate a genuine need for the continued service of the Minister of Religion. A non-refundable fee of €50 applies to an application for an extension.
- 13.5.** In exceptional circumstances only, a Minister of Religion may be eligible for an additional extension of three further consecutive years, subject to continuing to meet all the necessary qualifying criteria under this Scheme. This application for an extension must be made before the current permission expires. It can only be for service with the then current sponsor and will be considered only if the sponsor can demonstrate a genuine and exceptional need for the continued service of the Minister of Religion. Exceptional need includes continuing significant duties that are crucial to the ongoing functioning of the religious organisation in the State and evidence of same must be provided. This may include, but is not limited to, positions such as dean, archdeacon, vicar or equivalent positions within the religious organisation.
- 13.6.** Further information is available on the Irish Immigration Service website on access to other routes to long-term residency in the State.
- 13.7.** A Minister of Religion may not, having spent a period in the State as a Minister of Religion under this scheme, subsequently avail of the Volunteering in Ireland Programme.
- 13.8.** A letter of approval/visa under this Scheme will remain valid for six months after the date of issue. If not used within that time a fresh application will be required. A person can only apply for this Scheme if not currently in Ireland as a Minister of Religion.

Revocation of Permission

- 14.** Permission under this scheme may be revoked on the basis of national security, public order or public policy considerations. Permission may also be revoked where false or misleading documentation is provided as part of the application or renewal process.

Change of Sponsor application

- 15.** If an applicant wishes to make a permitted change of sponsor, please note:
- a) A change of sponsor (in respect of the initial three years only), is permitted, but only if a separate application is made under the Scheme from outside the State.
 - b) A change of sponsor, if accepted, does not alter the overall maximum period of time for which permission under the Scheme is given.
 - c) A non-refundable fee of €50 applies to an application for change of sponsor.

The Application Process

- 16.** An application under this Scheme must be made from outside the State. Further information on the application process can be found [here](#).
- 17.** Applicants must provide a valid email address with their application as all communications with regard to the application will be by email. Applicants should monitor their email account, as this is the email address to which all updates are sent. Applicants will receive a decision on their application via this email account.

Non-EEA nationals who require a Visa

- 18.** If an application is successful, a visa will issue. Applicants will not be permitted entry to the State for the purpose of working as a Minister of Religion /will not be registered by Immigration Service Delivery/GNIB as a Minister of Religion, without a visa obtained under this Scheme before travel to the State.
- 19.**

Non-EEA nationals not requiring a Visa

- 20.** If an application is successful, a letter of approval will issue. This letter of approval must be presented to the Immigration Officer at the port of entry on arrival in the State, who will verify its contents by reference to the applications system. Applicants will not be permitted entry to the State for the purpose of working as a Minister of Religion and or

will not be registered by Immigration Service Delivery/GNIB as a Minister of Religion, without a preclearance approval letter obtained under this Scheme before travel to the State.

Registration in Ireland

- 21.** Registration with the Immigration Service Registration Office /Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) applies to both visa required and non-visa required nationals.
- 22.** All non EEA /non- UK/ non- Swiss nationals remaining in the State for more than 90 consecutive days must register with the Immigration Service Delivery/GNIB and be issued with a Certificate of Registration (Irish Residence Permit (IRP) card). Please note an annual registration fee applies.
- 23.** A Certificate of Registration (Irish Residence Permit (IRP) card) will be granted for an initial 12-month period. A Minister of Religion may seek further yearly permission(s) without further reference to this office, by applying for further permission from the Registration authorities (GNIB/Immigration Service as applicable) up to a maximum of three (3) years in total, subject to the person meeting all the necessary qualifying criteria under this procedure.

The Unsuccessful Applicant

- 24.** an applicant is unhappy with the outcome of his or her application, an appeal may be submitted at no additional cost within 8 weeks from the date of refusal letter, addressing the specific grounds on which the initial application was refused. No further correspondence will be entered into in respect of an application after a decision on the appeal has issued.

Data Protection

- 25.** How we use information and the Legal Basis
 - 25.1.** The Department of Justice, Immigration Service Delivery treats personal information provided by applicants carefully and will not disclose personal data to third parties except in accordance with the law;
 - 25.2.** Therefore, the processing of personal information provided by an applicant in this application will be carried out in compliance with the law on data protection and under the executive power of the Government.
- 26.** In furtherance of an application under this immigration procedure we will take into account all known information and relevant factors including an applicant's previous immigration history, and may;
 - 26.1.** request further information or documentation, from an applicant or from

third parties as evidence of the bona fides of the applicant's particular case;

26.2. disclose personal information provided by the applicant in an application to third parties for the purpose of establishing the applicant's bona fides in connection with an application; and

26.3. use information provided by third parties in arriving at a decision on an application.

27. Further information on the Department of Justice data protection policy is available [here](#):