



1 October 2021

45 Pipitea Street, Wellington 6011

Phone +64 4 495 7200

Bharatbhai Patel
fyi-request-16342-
7ad3cf8d@requests.fyi.org.nz

dia.govt.nz

Dear Bharatbhai

OIA request 21/22 0120 Request for information relating to citizenship processing timeframes

Thank you for your Official Information Act (Act) request received by the Department of Internal Affairs (Department) on 8 August 2021.

You requested –

As we know before the COVID-19 situation the timeframe for the citizenship was 3 to 5 months. As i understand during COVID-19 you make the time frame to 12 months little longer which is acceptable due to lockdown situation.

Now the COVID-19 situation is properly handled by the government and the businesses are going back to normal but your time frame is still the same.

Can you please tell us when the Citizenship department will go back to normal timeframes and also can you please explain the breakdown of 5-10 months timeframe you need for so everyone have the clear picture regarding the timeframe.

As advised in our response of 6 September 2021, pursuant to section 15(1)(b) of the Act, we gave notice of the Department's decision to provide you with the information you sought.

I can now provide you with the following information in response to your request.

I can confirm that there are several factors that have contributed to the current processing timeframes for citizenship applications.

The Department is currently in the process of transitioning citizenship processing from a paper-based application system supported by aging technology, to a modern customer-centred case management system which supports a fully online application process.

I note that with the introduction of this new system, there has been a reduction of output in the period of the new system being introduced and the old one phased out. Productivity has been further impacted by the training requirements of staff on the new system, staff becoming proficient in the new system and the need for staff to work across both the online and offline systems. I also note that the inability for all staff to work at full productivity during COVID-19 also contributed.

It is important to explain that the new system is being designed iteratively, with new features and functionality being developed progressively. New features that have been and will be released will automate more aspects of the process and subsequently provide faster processing times.

It is also important to explain that limited citizenship processing occurred during lockdowns, as unlike birth or death registrations, it was not deemed an essential service. It was therefore not possible for full productivity to be maintained. This is because some key systems are not able to be accessed offsite due to privacy and security reasons, which meant working from home was not a feasible option for many of our staff. In addition, the Department followed Ministry of Health COVID-19 guidelines including physical distancing in the office, which limited the number of staff who could physically be present in our workplace to undertake their work.

I can assure you that the Department has been endeavouring to reduce these timeframes as a top priority, working hard behind the scenes to create and implement strategies to decrease the long wait times currently affecting citizenship applicants. As a result, the Department has created a specific programme of work to improve it. This includes more training, investing in technology changes to speed things up, and establishing a temporary workforce dedicated to working through these applications.

It may be of interest to you to know that a team of temporary staff has been brought on to process the approximately 9,000 cases that remain in the old system, freeing up existing staff to increase proficiency and speed in using the new system. Although we are unable to predict a specific date citizenship by grant processing timeframes will reach the standard two to five months again, the Department is confident that the above steps taken mean we will have the skills and processes in place early next year, to ensure we can slow the backlog and begin to reduce it by mid-2022.

I can also advise that the processing timeframe covers the entire application process, which starts when an applicant submits their application. When an application is received it then waits to be allocated to a staff member, these 'waiting to be allocated' applications are processed in order of when the payment was received.

Once the application is allocated to a staff member, it then undergoes an assessment, validation and a decision on the outcome is made. Most applicants will be advised of the outcome from their application within 11 to 13 months of submitting a correct and complete application.

If an application is not approved, the timeframe stops at that time as the process is complete. However, if an application has been approved, it normally takes between two to three months for an applicant to be allocated to attend a ceremony in their area of residence. This is because the waiting time to be allocated to a ceremony is dependent on where the applicant lives and the schedule of the local council.

For these approved applications, only once an applicant receives their Citizenship certificate is the process complete. This additional waiting time can bring the entire timeframe for the process up to 16 months.

As this information may be of interest to other members of the public, the Department has decided to proactively release a copy of this response on the DIA website. All requestor data, including your name and contact details, will be removed prior to release. The released response will be made available here: <https://www.dia.govt.nz/Official-Information-Act-Requests-2>.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Julia Taylor
Manager Operational Policy and Official Correspondence
Service Delivery and Operations