

I (T) A S

Irish Tourist
Assistance Service

helping tourist victims of crime

Annual Report 2020



Contents:	Page
Message from Kevin McPartlan, ITAS Chairman	3
2020 Overview	5
Funding and Other Support	7
Governance	8
2020 Client Contact and Support Statistics	9
Statistics	10

Message from Kevin McPartlan, Chairman, Irish Tourist Assistance Service

If ever the events of a year could prove that to live in interesting times can be a curse, it was those of 2020. The greatest pain has obviously been borne by the bereaved, those who experienced or are still enduring illness, and those who care for them; but on a business level, no sectors have been as greatly impacted as tourism and hospitality.

The stream of visitors eager to experience a few of our “céad míle fáiltes” stopped abruptly and almost totally. Aircraft seats were empty, cruises cancelled, hotels closed their doors, restaurants pulled down their shutters and hundreds of thousands of workers were laid off. The total cost in economic and human terms cannot yet be accurately calculated but would be hard to overstate.

Like every business and organization associated with tourism, ITAS’ normal operations ceased. Public health advice and government guidelines meant the temporary closure of all but essential services for much of the year and ITAS adapted its business model to operate remotely during this time. The Service re-opened in early August under strict safety measures, however with little or no international travel, support activity was limited. This allowed time to be devoted to other activities including training, planning, and updating policies to ensure compliance with the Charity Regulatory Authority Governance Code, along with other administrative tasks.

I think it is a measure of the esteem in which ITAS is held, that despite all the challenges which the tourism industry experienced in 2020 (and continues to experience) our funders and sponsors have continued to support our work. Our partners know, as do we, that for tourism and hospitality to swiftly recover when the public health situation allows, the full gamut of supports and enablers must be in place. The work which they allowed us to undertake during the pandemic will make us stronger and more responsive to our clients - and the national hospitality offering. We are grateful to them all.

My fellow Directors and I would also like to thank An Garda Síochána - particularly Superintendent Joe Gannon and the members of Pearse Street Garda Station, for continuing to accommodate ITAS. This ensures a swift response for tourists throughout the city. We look forward to the relocation of the remainder of ITAS personnel to Pearse Street Garda Station in 2021.

ITAS is the only service of its kind in Europe. It is vital that we retain the skills and expertise within the Service to ensure it can continue to offer its valuable services to those who experience crime or other traumatic events while visiting our fabulous country, to the hospitality and tourism sector, and to Ireland Inc. We have an exceptional team who consistently exceed expectations, and the Board of Directors remain grateful and proud to be associated with their work.

After nine years as a Director, this strange year brings to an end my time as a Director of ITAS. During handover conversations with the new (and greatly superior) Chair, Gina Murphy, I was able to tell her with absolute honesty that the Service is led and staffed by remarkably talented, committed, and decent people. The Board are capable, committed and engaged, but most importantly the CEO and staff are exceptional. Despite all the challenges they faced in 2020, Lisa Kennedy and her team have striven to assist clients wherever possible and to use the spare capacity to improve the Service so that it can be even better as visitors return to our shores.

The best is yet to come.

Kevin McPartlan
Chair

2020 Overview

What started out as a very promising year for the Service, turned out quite differently to our plans and aspirations. After marking our 25year anniversary in 2019, we had looked forward to capitalising on the positive awareness and sentiment towards the Service, however no one could have foreseen a global pandemic and the fundamental difference it would make to our lives.

The pandemic naturally had an impact on the activities of the Service, however prior to the initial lockdown, ITAS had a promising start to the year.

Supporting Gardaí and other front-line staff dealing with tourist crime victims

An important objective for ITAS each year is to raise the profile of the service. Our promotional efforts are focused on organisations that interact with visitors to Ireland. Our efforts, although naturally hampered, got off to a positive start.

In January, ITAS produced and printed new promotional material, posters and postcards for distribution throughout the country. The initial area of focus was on Garda Stations, embassies and tourism facilities. This was expanded to language schools and universities in early summer in the event that any of their international students staying in Ireland required support.

The poster is directed at tourists and primarily for display in public areas in Garda stations, embassies and language schools to ensure those requiring support have immediate access to ITAS details. The aim of the postcard is to act as a reminder of ITAS services to front line personnel interacting with tourists. The expectation is that these will be displayed where they will be easily accessible to those that come across a tourist in need of ITAS support.

Face to face presentations to garda probationers in the DMR North and South-Central Divisions continued in the early part of 2020 and later were delivered by Garda trainers on behalf of ITAS. These are critical in informing Gardaí of the particular difficulties associated with tourist victims and to ensure they are sensitive to their needs. Prior to the initial lockdown, a briefing to senior Gardaí in the Wicklow Division was also undertaken. ITAS will continue to deliver briefings to Gardaí when it is safe to do so to improve information provided to tourist victims and promote referral to ITAS.

The Service commenced its programme of presentations to the tourism industry with Dublin City BID Ambassadors receiving a briefing in early March. Further briefings scheduled to be given to front line tourism personnel had to be cancelled but again we hope to resume these at a time when it is safe to do so.

ITAS work in close cooperation with embassies and this continued in 2020. While there were fewer visitors in the country, ITAS continued to communicate with embassies and informed them of our services during lockdown and the assistance available during this time. We also helped a number of embassies with queries in relation to their citizens, some of whom could not return home during the initial lockdown period.

Broadening our Partnerships to improve the experience for tourist crime victims throughout Ireland

We are conscious that only a small percentage of tourist victims are referred to us for support, particularly from outside of Dublin. It is important that those who need vital assistance are able to easily access support. In an effort to advance the situation, ITAS were exploring with Fáilte Ireland the possibility of working with tourist information centre personnel to enhance and improve the experience for tourists requiring assistance. We hope to progress this with the return of international visitors.

Working for Greater Impact

What we learn from tourists about their experience, we aim to inform the agencies and organisations that can have a greater impact in ensuring better outcomes for victims of crime who are visitors to our country. To this end ITAS made a submission to the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB) for inclusion in their training programme for Gardaí. We were delighted to be included in this training programme to ensure improved victim engagement and look forward to its implementation in 2021.

Funding

In 2020 ITAS funding came from 3 main sources, the Department of Justice, Fáilte Ireland and Dublin City Council. We also availed of the benefit of a government scheme and received smaller donations from a number of different organisations. We are very grateful to all organisations who supported us.

We continued to engage with our tourism sponsors but with much of the industry closed for a considerable part of the year and with the lack of international visitors, we naturally did not look to them for support in 2020. We are fortunate that our sponsors recognise the importance of the work we do and value the contribution we make to the industry. We are confident that they will continue to support us with the return of international visitors and recovery of the industry.

Complimentary Supports

ITAS works with many organisations to ensure tourists receive care and support in the aftermath of crime or trauma, which can include complimentary accommodation, meals, transport and rescheduling of travel plans to name a few. Our thanks to all those organisations who supported the Service in 2020. We depend on these supports to offer a comprehensive service to tourists.

Other Support

Our sincere thanks to South Dublin Voluntary Groups, the Ballyfermot Chapelizod Partnership and the Department of Social Protection for providing Community Employment (CE) staff to the Service. Without this support we could not offer a seven-day service throughout the year.

Governance Obligations

Governance is an extremely important aspect in the operation of a non-profit and much time is devoted to it. This was particularly true for ITAS in 2020 when we had the time to ensure all aspects of governance were being adhered to and included in organisational policies.

This allowed us to comply with the Charities Governance Code published by the Charities Regulatory Authority. The Code outlines the minimum standards needed to effectively manage and control a charity through six principles with key standards that must be met. ITAS identified the main actions taken to meet each standard and the evidence required to show that standard was being met.

ITAS continued to comply with its legal obligations, including company and employment legislation and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). We also adhered to our annual reporting obligation to the Charity Regulatory Authority.

Looking Forward

The last year has been extraordinarily difficult and the outlook for 2021 is for another difficult and uncertain year with international travel now not expected until at least the third quarter of 2021. A number of factors will determine this, not least the effective rollout of the vaccine not only in Ireland but globally.

With the return of international visitors, ITAS will prioritise communication to its stakeholders, outlining the supports available to visitors experiencing crime and other traumatic incidents. We expect that it will take a number of years to return to pre pandemic levels of referrals, however, we will be available to support tourists as they begin to return to holidaying and doing business in Ireland.

We are very aware of the challenges ahead, however, remain optimistic and look forward to the return of international visitors and to continuing our comprehensive and essential support, which has been available to visitors since 1994.

2020 Client Contacts and Support Statistics

Due to the pandemic and the restrictions on international travel, there was a reduction of 73% in referrals to ITAS during 2020. ITAS assisted just 261 tourists of which 52% were face to face interactions. The Gardai referred the majority of cases to the service, however we saw an increase in tourists contacting the service directly for assistance.

44% of tourists availing of support from the Service were victims of theft related incidents, which included 'Theft from Person', 'Theft from Car', 'Fraud' and Burglary'. There were 10 incidents of violent crime referred to ITAS. These incidents included assaults, sexual assaults and robberies.

On the 20th March ITAS temporarily closed its doors as a result of government guidelines to contain the virus. The team remained available on the phone and by email to offer advice and assistance to tourists whose flights were cancelled and, in many instances, we were able to organise alternative routes and flights home. We also put tourists in touch with their embassy for further support, where necessary.

Others however were not so lucky as many countries closed their borders to incoming travel, meaning their citizens were stranded in Ireland. ITAS provided much needed reassurance and information to these people and in limited circumstances, due to the closure of accommodation, staff were able to source both short- and long-term accommodation options for visitors requiring this support.

We also received a myriad of enquiries from anxious visitors about overstaying their visa period. As ITAS has a good working relationship with INIS (Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service) we were able to get clarification or to put visitors in contact with INIS personnel in relation to their particular predicament.

There were many other requests from visitors for information on travel restrictions and quarantine rules particularly during the summer months when restrictions relaxed slightly.

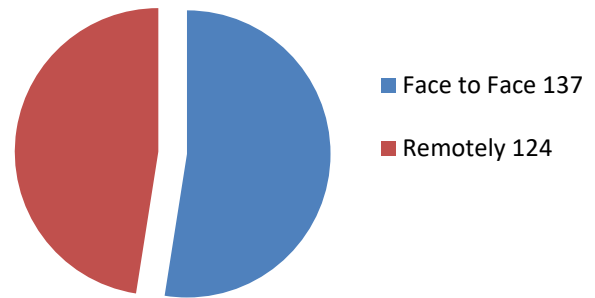
Prior to reopening the office in August, an extensive risk assessment was undertaken and strict guidelines, in line with the government's Return to Work Safely Protocols were implemented, with staff receiving training in all aspects of the new protocols.

2020 Statistics

Number of cases assisted	156
Cases assisted in the office	80
Cases assisted remotely	76
Number of casework days*	219
Number of people involved	261
Face to face assistance	137
Remote assistance	124

*many cases take several days to resolve

Tourists Assisted



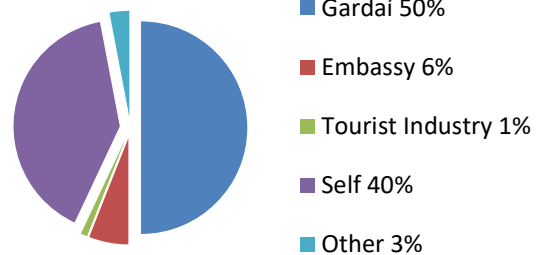
Cases Referrals

156

Contacts to ITAS via:

Gardaí	78
Embassy	10
Tourism Industry	2
Self	62
Other	4

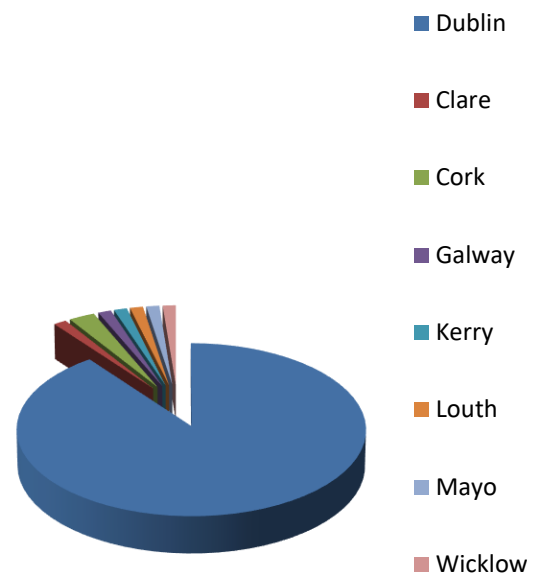
Total Sources of Contacts



Garda Contacts by County

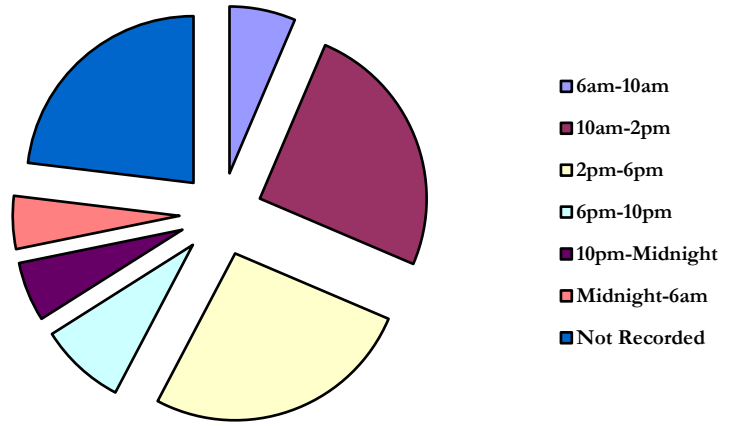
Dublin	70
Clare	1
Cork	2
Galway	1
Kerry	1
Louth	1
Mayo	1
Wicklow	1
Total	78

Garda Contacts by County



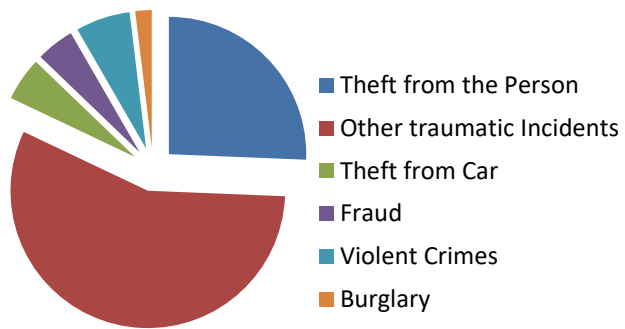
Time of Occurrence

6am-10am	10
10am-2pm	39
2pm-6pm	41
6pm-10pm	13
10pm-midnight	9
Midnight-6am	8
Not Recorded	36



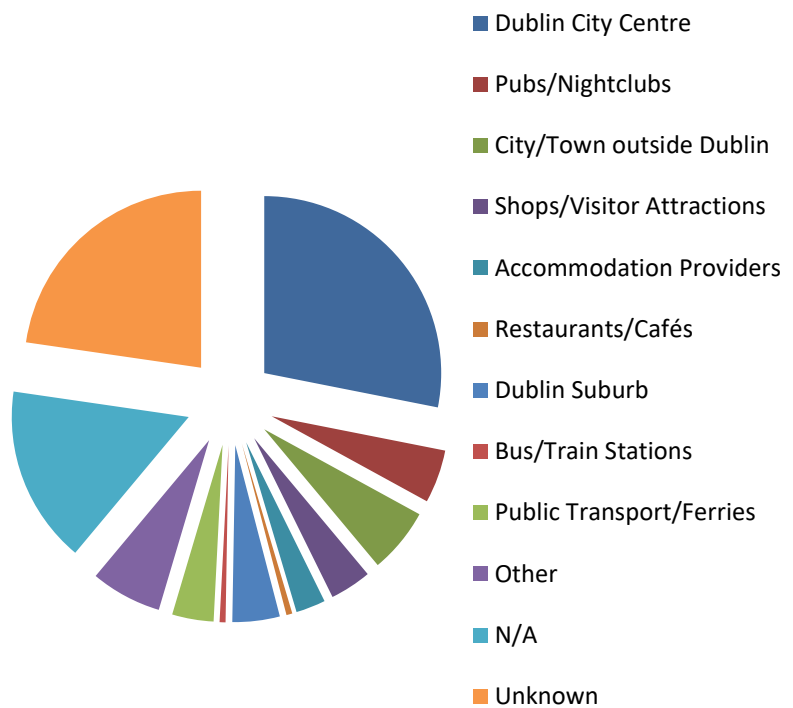
Main Incident Types

Theft from the person	40
Other Traumatic Incidents	88
Theft from Car	8
Fraud	7
Violent Crimes	10
Burglary	3



Location of Incidents

Dublin City Centre	52
Pubs/Nightclubs	9
City/Town outside Dublin	11
Shops/Visitor Attractions	7
Accommodation Providers	5
Restaurants & Cafés	1
Dublin Suburb	8
Bus/Train Stations	1
Public Transport/Ferries	7
Other	12
N/A	30
Unknown	13



Age Groups 2020	Total	Female	Male
Under 10yrs	2	0	2
10-16years	6	1	5
17-25yrs	57	34	23
26-35yrs	75	51	24
36-45yrs	21	10	11
46-55yrs	5	2	3
56-65yrs	13	9	4
over 66yrs	12	7	5
Unknown	70	32	38
Total	261	146	115

Items Stolen	2020
Cash (approximate stolen €17,389)	49
Passports	37
National Identity Cards	34
Credit Cards/Bank Cards	69
Driving Licences	26
Mobile Phones	11
Laptops	4
Cameras/Camcorders	1
Luggage	3
Medication	0
Jewellery	1

Complimentary Assistance	2020
Telephone Calls	103
Referrals to Embassies	38
Complimentary Re-schedule of Flights	3
Airline Travel with ITAS1 Form + other form of ID	23
Garda Liaison	29
Accommodation	0
Money Transfers	4
Interpreting	12
Meal Vouchers	4
Complimentary Transport	7
Sightseeing Vouchers	1
Retail Vouchers	3

Client Nationalities

American	22
Argentinian	1
Australian	8
Belgian	6
Bolivian	4
Brazilian	24
British	27
Bulgarian	1
Canadian	3
Chilean	2
Chinese	4
Colombian	1
Croatian	3
Czech	2
Danish	1
Dutch	3
Filipino	3
French	25
German	21
Hungarian	2
Indian	6
Irish	11
Italian	31
Lithuanian	1
Mexican	5
Moldovan	1
New Zealander	1
Polish	8
Portuguese	9
Romanian	1
Russian	4
South African	4
Spanish	12
Taiwanese	2
Turkish	1
Venezuelan	1
Total	261

Nationalities Referred to their Embassies

American	1
Argentinean	1
Australian	2
Belgian	1
Bolivian	1
Brazilian	4
Canadian	1
Chinese	1
Croatian	2
Filipino	1
French	3
German	3
Hungarian	1
Indian	1
Italian	5
Mexican	1
Polish	4
South African	1
Spanish	3
Total	38

ITAS Board Members

The Board of Directors of the Irish Tourist Assistance Service are voluntary and are not remunerated for the work that they do. They do not receive expenses for attending board meetings.

Board Members in 2020

Kevin McPartlan – Chairman

Harry Carberry – Company Secretary

Dr. Muireann Cullen

Neil Cullen

Kasia Debska

John Gilligan

Alan Moody (resigned from the board in July 2020)

Garrett Power

The Irish Tourist Assistance Service is a Company Limited by Guarantee and not having a Share Capital, registered number 406419. ITAS holds charitable tax exemption from the Revenue Commissioners CHY No. 16729 and is also registered with the Charities Regulatory Authority RCN 20060961

Irish Tourist Assistance Service (ITAS)

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Monday – Friday

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Opening Hours

Monday – Saturday 10:00 to 18:00
Sundays and Public Holidays 12:00 to 18:00

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