

Keeping People Safe



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2022-00898

Keyword: Crime

Subject: Child Sexual Offences in The Gambia

Request and Answer:

Your request for information below has now been considered. In respect of Section 1(1) (a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) we can confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland does hold the information you have requested however it is estimated that the cost of complying with your request for information would exceed the “appropriate costs limit” under Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. We have explained to you below that when PSNI estimates whether the appropriate limit is likely to be exceeded, it can include the costs of complying with two or more requests if certain conditions are met. In this case those conditions are met and complying with all of your requests would in our estimation exceed that appropriate limit set out in Regulation. We have explained this further below but also we followed the Information Commissioner’s Office guidance ‘*Requests where the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit*’ in relation to this request, which also provides further detail on the application of Section 12 (1) of the FOIA. This guidance is available on the ICO website at the following link:

https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1199/costs_of_compliance_exceeds_appropriate_limit.pdf

You requested the following information from PSNI:

Request 1

How many investigations has your force carried out into offences committed abroad under Section 72 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 in each of the calendar years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 to date

Request 2

How many of these investigations involved offences allegedly taking place in The Gambia?

Request 3

How many of these investigations involving offences allegedly taking place in The Gambia resulted in:

- a.) A referral to the Crown Prosecution Service
- b.) A charge
- c.) A conviction

Answer

Section 17(5) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit) to provide you the applicant with a notice which states that fact.

It is estimated that the cost of complying with your request for information would exceed the "appropriate costs limit" under Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Section 12 of FOIA allows a public authority to refuse to deal with a request where it estimates that it would exceed the appropriate limit to either comply with the request in its entirety or confirm or deny whether the requested information is held. The estimate must be reasonable in the circumstances of the case. The 'appropriate limit' is currently £600 for central government and £450 for all other public authorities including PSNI. The relevant Regulations which define the appropriate limit for section 12 purposes are The Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulation 2004 SI 2004 No 3244. These are known as the 'Fees Regulations' for brevity.

Regulation 4(3) of the Fees Regulations states that a public authority can take into account the costs it reasonably expects to incur in carrying out the following permitted activities in complying with the request:

- (i) determining whether the information is held;
- (ii) locating the information, or a document containing it;
- (iii) retrieving the information, or a document containing it; and
- (iv) extracting the information from a document containing it.

Under those regulations PSNI can calculate the time spent on each of these permitted activities at £25 per hour (thus if the activity(s) takes more than 18 hours PSNI will be in excess of the 'appropriate limit').

PSNI can advise that enquiries made in relation to your request have identified that retrieval of this information would exceed the 18 hour cost limit set under the FOI Act by the Secretary of State. In response to Request 1; the PSNI hold the number of recorded sexual offences in accordance with the home office counting rules. Please note that in Northern Ireland, the equivalent legislation is section 76 Sexual Offences Order (NI) 2008. However, we do not hold specific offences under this section of legislation in the recorded crime database. Therefore to retrieve the requested information, every recorded sexual offence would have to be manually assessed to establish if the offence was committed abroad. To demonstrate the vastness of this request, there were more than 3,000 sexual offences recorded in each of the last three years. The relevant business area has estimated that it would take 10 minutes to manually review each individual record, equating to 500 hours, this would be further increased for the remainder of the time period requested. Therefore to complete this task for all relevant records would grossly exceed the legislative timescale of 18 hours. To retrieve information in relation to Requests 2 and 3 will further increase the estimated timescale; as they are reliant on the data obtained from Request 1.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this letter should be considered as a Refusal Notice, and the request has therefore been closed.

Advice and Assistance

In compliance with Section 16 of the Act, we have considered how your request may be refined to bring it under the appropriate limit. Unfortunately, as a manual trawl of records would be required for retrieval of any relevant information, it is not possible to offer any refinement to assist your request.

Submission of a refined request would be treated as a new request, and considered in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, including consideration of relevant Part II exemptions.

If you have any queries regarding your request or this decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Corporate Information Branch, please quote the reference number listed at the beginning of this letter.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Corporate Information Branch, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing foi@psni.pnn.police.uk.

If, following an Internal Review carried out by an independent decision maker, you remain dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you may make a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at 'Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF', or use the ICO self-service portal available at www.ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/officialinformation-concerns-report/official-information-concern/

In most circumstances, the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out however, the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at their discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ www.psnipolice.uk

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.