

How could Emigrant Advice have helped these people?

Emigrant Advice's information and advocacy service operates on 3 basic levels:

- Informing the person what it going to be like in the country of destination regarding benefits and entitlements, housing situation, access to social services etc.
- Informing the person of what they should bring with them, e.g. photo identification, birth certificate, return ticket etc.
- Linking the person up with a contact organisation (where possible) in their country of destination.

If Michael and Marianne had been prepared in the above manner their respective moves to the UK would have been more secure and supported and they would have been much less likely to fall in to situations of homelessness

Emigrant Advice needs the co-operation of a wide variety of organisations across Ireland in order to prepare and support vulnerable intending emigrants.

Emigrant Advice provides an information and advocacy service to vulnerable intending emigrants and returning Irish emigrants. We can provide presentations on our service and the importance of prepared and supported emigration to interested organisations.

The full text of the research is available at www.emigrantadvice.ie or from Emigrant Advice, 1a Cathedral St., Dublin 1.

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Still Leaving – a summary

Recent, vulnerable Irish emigrants to the UK: profile, experiences & pre-departure solutions.



EmigrantAdvice



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Emigration is still an aspect of life in Ireland. While most who emigrate are economically and socially secure, many vulnerable and socially excluded Irish people still emigrate to find something new or to escape from difficult situations. However, many such people emigrate without adequate preparation or support. This research profiles these people so that, in co-operation with other organisations, Emigrant Advice can facilitate prepared emigration and reach vulnerable potential emigrants in Ireland.

Summary findings of research

Quantitative findings: Between April 2004 and April 2005 it is estimated that 4,100 persons emigrated from the Republic of Ireland to the UK. While it is difficult to get accurate figures, it is estimated that 400 newly arrived Irish emigrants presented to a variety of Irish housing and welfare services in the UK.

Qualitative findings: It can be assumed that the majority of the estimated 4,100 people who emigrated to the UK between April 2004 and April 2005 were in a reasonably secure economic and socially stable situation. However, the research clearly shows that issues of social exclusion continue to be motivating factors for Irish people emigrating to the UK. Such factors often mean that many vulnerable Irish people are emigrating to the UK in unsupported and unprepared situations. An effect of being ill prepared for emigration is that vulnerable emigrants quickly face new circumstances which enhance their vulnerability, including homelessness, prostitution and access to drugs on the street.

The following were given as motivating factors for people who recently emigrated to the UK from Ireland:

- Family breakdown
- Violence and threats of violence
- Escaping homophobia
- Making a fresh start after leaving prison
- The belief that there are better drug treatment services in the UK

The following two case studies are examples of young people in vulnerable situations who recently decided to move to the UK. Unfortunately, these people were poorly prepared for the change.

Case Study 1

Marianne is a 19-year-old female from Tipperary who left Ireland with her best female friend to come to the UK. She got the ferry and then a train to London. She felt that she wasn't doing anything in Ireland and wanted a change and to see if she 'could do something'. She hadn't prepared much for leaving, she had a hundred pounds when she left, and on arrival in London they met up with a stranger who put them up for a couple of weeks, and then she got a job with her friend working in a bar. This did not work out and she ended up sleeping on the streets for three months and had no money as she had only had a temporary national insurance number at the time.

She suffered being hungry and penniless and occasionally finding people who helped her. Eventually in a pub a man told her to go the Irish Centre and that someone might help. She felt that they really did help her. She was housed by Causeway and now she is hoping to go to college.

There were problems in her family when she was growing up and at one stage she was expelled from school and was sent to a home for a year. During her teenage years she experimented with drugs. Her experiences initially in London were distressing. She did not tell her family about the circumstances she faced initially in London. As other young migrants noted, drugs are very prevalent on London streets and pressures to become involved in that scene. Marianne felt that this was similar to where she grew up, except it is on a much larger scale.

Marianne is now happy about how things have turned out, even if it did take quite a number of months of hardship to find out about the help available within the Irish sector. She said 'things are a little better now, I don't have to worry about the next shower, about where to sleep'. Marianne had never received any advice on how to manage in London prior to leaving Ireland. She only found out about Causeway through a chance encounter in a pub and any knowledge she had of London was through her friend's family. However, this did not help her to avoid serious difficulties following her arrival in London.

Case Study 2

Michael is a 25 year old who moved from Cork to London in February 2004. His reasons for leaving were that he had been involved in some trouble locally, in a small community and had to move on. He left in the context of the recent death of his father and an addiction problem. Michael headed for London where he had a week's wages in his pocket and no contacts. He stayed in a backpackers' hostel for a week and then, having run out of money, he became homeless as he was unable to access benefits without a national insurance number. He waited four months for a national insurance number. During this time he slept rough in central London, used day centres and met other rough sleepers. Finally, after 4 months he got a national insurance number and was therefore eligible for hostel accommodation. He stayed in a few central London hostels which cater for single homeless people.

Finally Michael got a hostel directory himself and rang an Irish housing association who asked him to come for an interview and within a couple of weeks he got a place in a shared house with other young Irish people. He achieved this after about a year of upheaval on coming to the UK.

He commented that it was very difficult not to develop drug problems while homeless in London and that he had met others who soon developed drug and mental health problems as a result of being in hostels: 'It only takes a month or two for people to fall into the wrong crowd – you don't want to be isolated.'

Michael seems quite resilient and is happier now being in a situation where he has benefits, secure housing and access to training and possible employment. He has encountered problems getting a bank account due to a lack of adequate documentation. Not having a bank account can be a huge obstacle to finding employment.

He left school in Ireland at sixteen and had done labouring work and had lived on an estate with drug problems. He feels now that he is in a better position to improve his life: to work and to learn to drive. Although his family miss him, he still felt that there was nothing for him in Ireland and possibilities available in the UK.