

Home for Good?

A report on the experiences of recently
returned Irish emigrants



CONTENTS

FOREWORD	2
INTRODUCTION	3
METHODOLOGY	4
FINDINGS	5
Demographics of respondents	
Thematic issues	
Main challenges	
• Insurance and administrative issues	
• Employment	
• Accommodation	
• Reintegration, social support and emotional wellbeing	
• Other challenges	
Benefits	
Advice for emigrants considering a return	
TOP COUNTRIES OF RETURN	16
ANALYSIS	22
Challenges	
Benefits	
Advice	
CONCLUSION	24
RESOURCES	25
APPENDIX	26

FOREWORD

A Chara,

As Minister of State for the Diaspora and International Development I would like to thank everyone in Crosscare Migrant Project for their work and the useful insight they have developed from this report.

It is evident to me that despite ever more diverse emigrant locations and emigrant demographics, connections to home, and particularly family, continue to be a very strong factor in the decision making process for our diaspora. These feelings are testament to the character of Irish people and also to the tireless work of emigrant support organisations, like Crosscare Migrant Project, who support our diaspora wherever they are in the world.

The Government's response to this has also been developed over recent years and in 2015 we launched 'Global Irish: Ireland's Diaspora Policy.' This policy sets out the Government's commitment to support our diaspora whether that be in their lives abroad or in returning to Ireland. The policy also provides a broader framework for the Irish Government Emigrant Support Programme which is particularly focused towards funding organisations engaged in providing frontline welfare support to Irish communities worldwide. Provision of support to citizens choosing to return to Ireland is an important part of the Government's ongoing commitment. The Emigrant Support Programme has

provided over €4 million of funding over the last decade to Irish based organisations working with returning emigrants.

In my role as Minister of State for the Diaspora I have also sought to continue to facilitate actions and analysis across Government to reduce any disproportion—ate burdens that Irish citizens abroad may face when seeking to return to Ireland. Our work has also identified many of the issues highlighted in this report, and while some of these are complex and are not limited to the returning Irish, it is clear that we must continue to work to address issues which can have disproportionate effects on returning emigrants. I therefore welcome the very constructive and insightful input of reports such as this which will inform the Government's efforts to resolve such difficulties.

I have no doubt that over the coming years the strong connections that our diaspora feels towards Ireland will continue to be maintained, and many citizens will choose to once again make Ireland their home. In this endeavour I know Crosscare Migrant Project will have an important role to play and I, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, look forward to continuing to work with them.

Yours sincerely,

Joe McHugh T.D.

Minister of State for the Diaspora and International Development

INTRODUCTION

Crosscare Migrant Project provides information and advocacy services to Irish emigrants both before leaving the country and on their return to Ireland. It is an Irish based non-government organisation that is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Emigrant Support Programme. It is a project of Crosscare, the social support agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin. Crosscare has supported Irish emigrants since the 1940s.

The primary aim of this report is to update and develop the understanding and knowledge base of the situation of Irish emigrants moving back to Ireland from abroad. It was undertaken in response to increased national interest in the experiences of returning Irish emigrants arising from Central Statistics Office figures¹ released in August 2016 which revealed a dramatic 74% increase in net inward migration to Ireland by Irish citizens. It also follows Crosscare Migrant Project's 2016 report entitled 'Irish emigrants' perspectives of the emigration experience' which, in association with GAA clubs around the world, examined Irish emigrant views on emigration and return migration. Subsequent to these findings and the CSO statistics, certain questions were being asked by the media, politicians and general public about the profile of recent returnees – why were they returning and how were they adjusting to life back in Ireland?

With little more than anecdotal evidence available about the circumstances of recent returnees, Crosscare Migrant Project developed an online survey, targeting Irish emigrants in an attempt to capture their experiences of returning home. The responses to the survey inform this report and help to identify a gap in knowledge around the experiences of returning emigrants and their resettlement in Ireland in the past two years in a post-recession environment. Furthermore, this report provides the opportunity for recent emigrants to share their experiences and advice with others who may be considering move back to Ireland. Finally, it is hoped that the content of this report will help to inform Government policy and emigrant support organisations to be more responsive to the evolving needs of Ireland's diaspora.



Benefits

"I've watched my nephew take his first step, my sister getting married"



¹ <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimate-sapril2016/>

METHODOLOGY

The survey consisted of 23 questions devised for online participation from Irish emigrants who returned from abroad in the last two years. It was completed anonymously with the option to provide contact details for further research purposes. Survey questions were mixed choice-based, open-ended and closed responses.

The survey was accessible at www.surveymonkey.com/r/returnedirish from 11th November 2016 to 27th January 2017 (full survey in appendix 1). It was made available through the following mediums:

- Launch of survey at open event with first screening of new Irish documentary film 'Coming Home' with press release and promotion of the event on social media
- Returned Irish emigrants and interested parties invited to the event and encouraged to promote the survey
- Promotion on www.migrantproject.ie
- Social media posts on Crosscare Migrant Project's Facebook pages (@CrosscareMigrantProject and @LivingInIreland) and Twitter profile (@Irishmigrants)
- Posts on Irish emigrant-focused Facebook groups
- Emails with survey link forwarded to Irish emigrant support organisations in Ireland and abroad seeking shared posting online, on social media and with service users
- Published article in the Irish Times on the survey launch event in Wood Quay Venue, Dublin 14th November 2016 (<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/returned-irish-emigrants-asked-to-share-experience-of-coming-home-1.2867165>)
- Survey participation was also made available to clients of Crosscare Migrant Project and associated organisations, including Safe Home Ireland.

The report documents the findings based on the 400 qualified responses. The three most significant questions are open-ended and concern three key matters of interest:

1. **The challenges faced on return** (Questions 20)
2. **The positive aspects on return** (Question 21)
3. **Advice for intending returning emigrants** (Question 22).

Open-ended questions allowed respondents the opportunity to express their experiences in their own words and raise broader areas of interest that may not have been identified prescriptively with a choice-based set of answers. Interpretation of open-ended answers are analysed by grouping responses by commonalities and themes, and is discussed further under the 'Findings' section.

Details in relation to age, gender, country of return, time spent abroad, and accompanying family members were requested to allow demographic analysis of findings and to identify any patterns of response or experience among particular groups or variables. The promotion of the survey was predominantly online as this was expected to have the broadest reach. Respondents were required to have returned to Ireland within the last two years, and demographic groups such as age, gender or income were not specifically targeted.

FINDINGS

This section examines the findings from the survey sample of 400 respondents, using the statistics generated by SurveyMonkey.com. It outlines similarities, differences, and patterns noting any areas of significance to the overall purpose of the survey. It is divided into the following areas:

1. Demographics of respondents
2. Thematic issues: Challenges, Benefits, and Advice for returning emigrants

Demographics of respondents

The demographics of the 400 respondents were broken down based on age, gender, country of return, length of time abroad, family status and employment status. Statistics for each category are presented and discussed in relation to the context of the survey and areas of economic, political or relevant significance.

Age Groups

AGE	PERCENTAGE	RESPONSES
18 – 25	4.5%	18
26 – 30	32.3%	129
31 – 35	28.4%	114
36 – 45	24.3%	97
46 – 60	7.4%	30
61 – 66	2.3%	9
66+	0.5%	2
Unanswered	0.3%	1

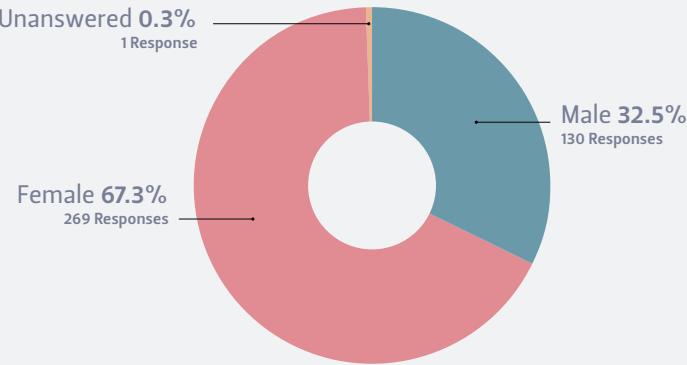
The largest age group of respondents was 26–30, followed by the 31–35 age-group. These cohorts could be said to be the generation most affected by the impact of the recession and a flagging labour market from 2008 to 2016, resulting in emigration in that period. It can also be argued that, along with a 24% rate of respondents in the 36–45 age-group, these cohorts are more likely to be engaged on social media and more exposed to the promotion of the survey via social networking links.



Challenges

“Mentally it was tough, at times it felt like the country I was born in was making it as difficult as possible for me to move back”

Gender



Country/Region of return

COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE	RESPONSES
Australia	41%	163
UK	23%	91
USA	9%	37
Canada	7%	29
Europe	5%	21
Middle East	4%	17
New Zealand	4%	17
Asia	3%	13
South America	1%	3
Central America	1%	3
Africa	1%	3
Unanswered	1%	3

Whilst the survey targeted any Irish emigrants who had returned in the two years prior, response rates showed that over two-thirds of respondents were women.

Overwhelmingly, respondents had returned mainly from Australia (41%). Australia has been the second most popular destination country for Irish emigrants in the past 8 years² with higher employment opportunities during that period. It was largely not affected by recession up until a recent downturn in the economy³.

At 23%, the UK ranks as the second highest country of return for the survey respondents. Its proximity to Ireland makes it an attractive destination for Irish emigrants and it has been the main destination for Irish emigrants in the last 8 years⁴. Statistically, other English speaking countries such as Canada and New Zealand have lower numbers of Irish emigrants therefore a lower representation of respondents returning from these countries was unsurprising.

Respondents who returned from countries in Europe and the Middle East are similarly represented at 4–5% which could be indicative of the economic opportunities in these countries in recent years, particularly in the Middle East which offers tax-free incentives.

Number of years abroad

NO. YEARS LIVING ABROAD	PERCENTAGE	RESPONSES
0–1 year	1.5%	6
1–2 years	12.6%	50
3–5 years	40.5%	161
6–10 years	28.4%	113
over 10 years	17.1%	68
Unanswered		2

The majority of respondents (41%) returned after 3–5 years of living abroad. Those who returned after 6–10 years were the second highest group followed by those away for over 10 years. This is significant in relation to the level of impact this may have on those returning from long periods of settled lives abroad. These emigrants are now separated from all the ties, networks and standard of living that they had established in their adopted countries. The level of re-adjustment and reintegration can be significant among these groups and may be evident more in their responses on the challenges faced on their return to Ireland.



Advice

“Come back a few times to check if you enjoy being here as much as you used to”



² http://www.cso.ie/multiquicktables/quickTables.aspx?id=pea18_2

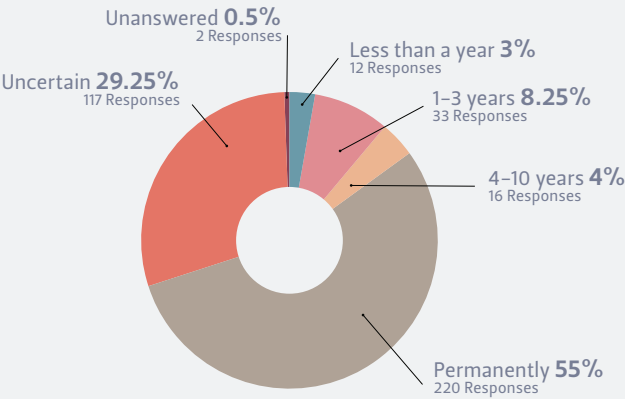
³ <http://www.news.com.au/finance/economy/australian-economy/gdp-figures-not-too-bad-think-again-were-in-for-a-rocky-2017/news-story/484dbb77a7d3af1d03b6fb80eb12f3bd>

⁴ http://www.cso.ie/multiquicktables/quickTables.aspx?id=pea18_2

Reasons for returning and plans to stay

REASON	PERCENTAGE	RESPONSES
Want to be closer to family and support networks	83%	332
Want to bring children up in Ireland	36%	143
Had only planned to live temporarily abroad	25%	98
Homesickness	23%	91
Employment opportunities in Ireland	15%	59
Education	12%	48
Immigration/visa/residency permission expired	10%	41
A family member needs care in Ireland	10%	39
Made redundant/lost income	4%	16
Other	4%	17

Period intend to remain in Ireland



Respondents had the option to select more than one reason for returning. Over half of respondents plan to stay permanently in Ireland which correlates with the high response rate of more emotive reasons for returning, such as wanting to be close to family and support networks and bringing children up in Ireland. Only 15% specifically identified employment opportunities as a significant factor in deciding to return. Notably, a quarter of respondents selected the option that they had only planned to live abroad temporarily. It would be interesting to compare this finding with any data collated on reasons for emigrating from Ireland in the years following the onset of the recession.

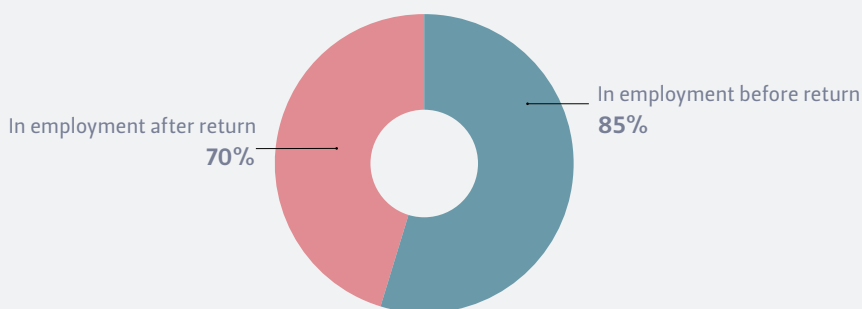
Returned with partner or spouse and children

RETURNED WITH PARTNER, SPOUSE OR CHILDREN	RESPONSES
No	147
Yes	253
With Children	112

Almost two-thirds of respondents returned with a partner or spouse, and almost a third came back with children. This is a significant proportion for a survey response rate however it could perhaps be linked to the age bracket of the majority of respondents (26–45) as the broader age group at family formation age. Responses were therefore more reflective of the impact of returning from abroad upon family life. This is indicated by references to access to particular welfare benefits (such as child benefit), schooling, healthcare, childcare, support networks, social activities, Irish culture and the general cost of living. However, 31% of the total respondents were those returning alone and are in the same age bracket of 26–45. Responses from those who returned with a spouse or partner from outside the EU

are also of interest to this study as they allow for examination of returning emigrants' experiences with the Irish immigration system. This is discussed further under the 'Immigration' section.

Employment



A total of 85% of respondents were employed or self-employed before returning to Ireland, with 6.8% unemployed and 5.8% stay-at-home parents. As such, it is evident that employment status is not necessarily a 'push factor' in making the decision to return to Ireland.

Thematic issues

Three core areas of interest are explored in order to develop a comprehensive picture of the overall experiences of Irish emigrants on their return to Ireland and help inform intending emigrants of what to expect. The more detailed responses are categorised into:

1. Challenges
2. Benefits
3. Advice for emigrants considering moving home

Challenges

Respondents were asked under question 20 of the survey 'What challenges, if any, did you face in relocating back to Ireland?'. Answers were free text and many respondents referred to more than one issue within their individual responses. To facilitate analysis, responses were grouped together according to common themes. The resulting top three challenges were:

1. Insurance and administrative issues
2. Employment
3. Accommodation



Advice

“Talk to others who have done it but mostly take your time with the decision and think about why you are doing it.”

Challenges

RATED	RESPONSES
40%	Insurance/admin/revenue
38%	Employment
24%	Accommodation
20%	Reintegration to Irish culture (culture shock, attitudes)
19%	Social support/emotional well being/ changes/loss to social networks
14%	Cost of living
5%	Weather
5%	Accessing health care
4%	Accessing social welfare/PPSNs
4%	Public services/transport
4%	Access to education
3%	Partner visa/immigration

NB: Figures indicate the occurrence of reference in respondents' answers to one or more of the grouped category themes.

Insurance and administrative issues

129 respondents (40%) referred to challenges in relation to paperwork and these are grouped as one main area of challenge in access to services, goods and entitlements, etc.

Driving licences, insurance and tax: respondents referred to having difficulties with car insurance, this was mainly to do with companies refusing no claims bonuses and clean driving licences from abroad. Several responses referred to the difficulties with expensive insurance quotes or even refusal of car insurance, often being described as 'new drivers', with some comments stating it was "nightmare",

"crippling" and "criminally expensive". Reference was made to requirements to complete a driving test despite having a foreign driving licence, the cost of 12 mandatory driving lessons, along with the impact of delays and costs in relation to accessing employment where transport is required. Confusion was also expressed in terms of driver licence exchange and the need for a 'letter of entitlement' with one respondent stating it took 6 months to receive their licence. The high cost of car tax was also mentioned.

Tax and revenue: Reference was made to the higher rate of taxes and levies such as the Universal Social Charge (USC), e.g. "the higher tax would be a reason to leave for another tempting job offer". Tax rates were often referred to in tandem with the 'high cost of living' and living on 'lower wages'. Also reference was made to PAYE and revenue as "difficult to sort".

Qualification recognition: Getting qualifications recognised in Ireland was referenced as a "long and difficult process" and costly. These responses cited professions such as nursing and teaching, with one person citing a delay of 5 months for official qualification recognition and the associated impact on their access to that labour market field.

Banking issues: Reference was made to the requirement of proof of address in order to open a bank account. This can cause delays whilst returnees seek accommodation and can act as a barrier to accessing other services. Difficulty was expressed also in accessing credit from banks.

Bureaucracy: Sample responses include reference to "bureaucracy", "too much red tape and little understanding", and "I found Ireland suffocatingly bureaucratic". Many of these responses did not elaborate or specify the cause of their difficulties.

Storage or transfer of goods and belongings: Customs duties on importing tools were cited as a challenge e.g. **“30% VAT on tools that I shipped to Australia three years ago”**. Issues were raised about hidden charges at collection in Ireland that were supposed to be covered by the removal company abroad. Importing goods is referred to as expensive and logistically difficult to manage.

Employment

122 respondents (38%) referenced finding employment and self employment opportunities as a main challenge. These references include access to the labour market, engagement with recruitment companies, short term contracts, wages, taxes, pensions, working hours and validating qualifications.

Finding employment came out as one of the most common challenges under this category, however respondents did not specify which sectors they were seeking work in. Responses referred to the length of time to secure employment (e.g. **“I couldn’t find a job for 18 months”**), difficulty finding full time permanent work, or employment as an older worker. Others referred to location as an issue saying **“Outside of Dublin there aren’t many employment opportunities”**. One comment in relation to self employment stated there was **“very little support when we were trying to set up a business”**.

Qualification recognition and registration was an issue mentioned by respondents particularly in relation to teaching and medical professions, e.g. **“My wife is a teacher and waited 3 months for her teaching number this was the most frustrating as she could not work until then”**.

Recognition of experience abroad was seen as a challenge, e.g. **“Realisation that as a teacher I will be unlikely to have opportunities or be valued like I was in Australia and that new found skills are hard to transfer to an underfunded and struggling education system”**.

Recruitment agencies were criticised as **“filling a very crafty niche”** in colluding with corporate companies to save on investment in permanent contracts. Another criticism was the lack of responses to job applications.

Contracts were referred to in the context of temporary contracts, lower salaries compared to abroad, lower salaries in the midlands, high taxes and uncertainty within certain industries



Challenges

“People expect you to just return to normal as if you have never been away”

Work culture was mentioned by some including changes of pace and work environment, poor working conditions, **“lack of respect in all aspects of work”** and feeling **“undervalued”** when they have a lot of experience that will benefit Irish industries.

Accommodation

75 respondents (24%) identified accommodation as a main challenge. Accommodation refers to issues with sourcing privately rented accommodation, availability of rental properties, rental costs, access to mortgages and buying property.

Renting accommodation is described as a challenge and **“nearly impossible”** with a **“lack of rental properties”**. Value for money is also identified (e.g. **“Horried at the cost of rent for substandard accommodation, it’s one thing paying high prices in London beside a tube stop, quite another in some Irish suburb with poor transport links”**). Others mentioned having to live with their parents as rent was difficult to find or too expensive and above Rent Supplement limits (as per the Department of Social Protection). Other references were made to **“decent housing unavailable in the right location”** and the **“housing crisis”**.

Dublin Several responses referred specifically to the Dublin rental market, e.g. **“Accommodation in Dublin is chaotic”**, **“rent costs too high”**, **“very hard to get and very expensive”**, **“accommodation is much more expensive than it used to be”**. Potential home buyers also appear to be affected in Dublin with one respondent stating **“It is impossible to save for a mortgage given the exorbitant rents in Dublin. Finding a flat, when they are rented within hours of being advertised was extremely difficult”**.

Mortgages Acquiring a mortgage is described as a difficulty for some in relation to age: **“Age discrimination is not illegal, e.g. in obtaining a mortgage pension income is not counted, foreign income is not counted, mortgage must be paid back by age 65”**. Another referred to income discrimination stating **“none of the banks would recognise my employment history or proof of ability to earn”**.

Buying property Reference was made to difficulty in buying property to live in: **“prospect of buying is also a bit depressing”**, **“lack of houses for sale in our chosen area”**, and **“ludicrous”**. Another adds **“it leaves us constantly thinking why is a country that is supposedly trying to recover putting so many obstacles in front of me and making it so difficult”**. This particular respondent admits to considering leaving Ireland again on this basis. Another refers to the length of time it takes to source accommodation, stating **“it has been a struggle, still staying temporarily with family 7 months later”**. The experience of buying property from abroad was referenced, with one respondent having **“a very bad experience”** and another unable to move into a property they bought **“as the seller wouldn’t move on and we had no legal grounds to ask her to leave. I don’t think this would happen in another country”**. Another respondent had difficulty getting their own house back from tenants which **“was extremely challenging and stressful”** and also had difficulty in getting a mortgage.

Reintegration into Irish culture, social support and emotional wellbeing

These categories have been grouped together for analysis as they cross over in relation to respondents’ perceptions of overall mental and emotional wellbeing. The level of

response particularly significant proportionally and is reflective of similar experiences expressed by emigrants on their experiences of emigrating abroad and integrating into a new country⁵. The emotional impact of returning to Ireland could be said to be one of the key findings of this report.

Reintegration into Irish culture: 65 respondents (20%) specifically referred to the challenges of ‘reintegrating’ back into the Irish community and their experiences in readapting to the culture. A number also commented on Irish attitudes compared to those in their former adopted countries. Many referred to a ‘culture shock’ or ‘reverse culture shock’ similar to when they first arrived in their former country of residence.

There are references to some negative experiences including Irish ‘attitudes’ being for example, **“more closed and insular”** and **“patriarchal and conservative”**. Others express their experiences of discrimination against their non-Irish born family members. Feelings were expressed on **“acceptance”**, **“pessimistic attitudes”**, the **“Irish way of doing things”**, prejudice from employers, and unacceptance of the change in a person’s accent.

Social support and emotional well-being: 59 respondents (19%) specifically referred to changes to or loss of their social support networks abroad and in Ireland on their return, e.g. **“leaving our Australian family and friends”**, **“homesickness for friends in Australia”**. On reconnecting with friends and support networks in Ireland, comments included **“all my friends had left in the time I was away”**, and **“the fact that my husband couldn’t find suitable employment and has remained in Canada is very hard on our family. He misses the family and I’m trying to raise our four children alone until he can return”**.

There is a distinct theme on the impact of return on emotional well being. This is expressed in many different ways and personal perspectives, e.g. **“disappointment of less exciting times, adventure is over, life is mundane here compared to abroad”** and **“through the moves I developed various forms of anxiety. A psychologist in Oz told me he could not get over the amount of English and Irish he had in his clinic for anxiety and depression.”**



Benefits

“Neighbourhood communities still exist. People still look out for each other.”



⁵ <https://www.migrantproject.ie/images/Irish%20emigrant%20perspectives%20on%20emigration%20July%202016.pdf>

Other challenges

Cost of living: 46 respondents (14%) referred to the cost of living as a challenge in returning. Comments referred to general costs such as housing, utilities, food, retail, transport and health.

Weather: 17 respondents (5%) specifically referred to the change in weather as a challenge and readapting to Irish weather. This was varied depending on where emigrants were returning from.

Accessing health care: 16 respondents (5%) referred to the challenge of accessing quality healthcare and insurance, being unable to transfer insurance and private treatment costs.

Social welfare: 14 respondents (4%) referred to the difficulties in accessing social welfare and PPS numbers. Separately 174 respondents responded to a question (Q.14) specifically about their experiences in applying for social welfare payments. Responses were mixed with a total of 73 positive comments and 101 negative comments. Issues encountered are broken down as follows

ISSUES	NO. RESPONSES
Habitual Residence Condition	5
Delays	32
Customer service/admin (forms, documents required, lack of information, staff, poor treatment as expat)	55
Eligibility criteria for claims	19
PPSNs	4 (3 for children)

Public services/transport: 14 respondents (4%) referred to public transport and general public services as being challenging.

Access to education: 12 respondents (4%) talked about barriers to accessing adult education and EU fees, with one stating they were forced to pay international fees upon return. Other references included access to schools for children, availability of places and 'religious influence'. One respondent was forced to pay private school fees; **"Getting our children into National Schools in the area. They are baptised but we could not get a place in the schools within a 7km radius. We ended up paying private fees for 2 years – no support whatsoever from the department except a threat that they must attend a school or I would be in trouble"**.

Partner visa/immigration: 9 respondents specifically referred to applying for a visa or residency for a partner as an issue, particularly on availability of information and the impact of delays in processing. Additionally question 7 recorded that 15 respondents applied for a visa for a partner before returning (*from visa required countries such as United Arab Emirates and Thailand*), and question 8 recorded that 30 respondents applied for permission for a partner on arrival in Ireland (*from non visa required countries such as Australia and Canada*).

Question 9 also specifically asked about experiences in getting official information about Irish visas and immigration permission. From a total of 44 free text responses, 28 made negative comments on their experience with the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS). The main issues people faced were communication with the INIS, processing times, website information and language, lack of availability of reliable migration agents, no embassy in country of return (e.g. Qatar), and one stating that their husband was issued with the wrong visa that did not permit him to work.



Advice

“Give yourself time on both sides to sort things out. Don’t panic if everything is not completely sorted or resolved when you leave as these things take time.”



TOP COUNTRIES OF RETURN



Australia (1)

DEMOGRAPHICS

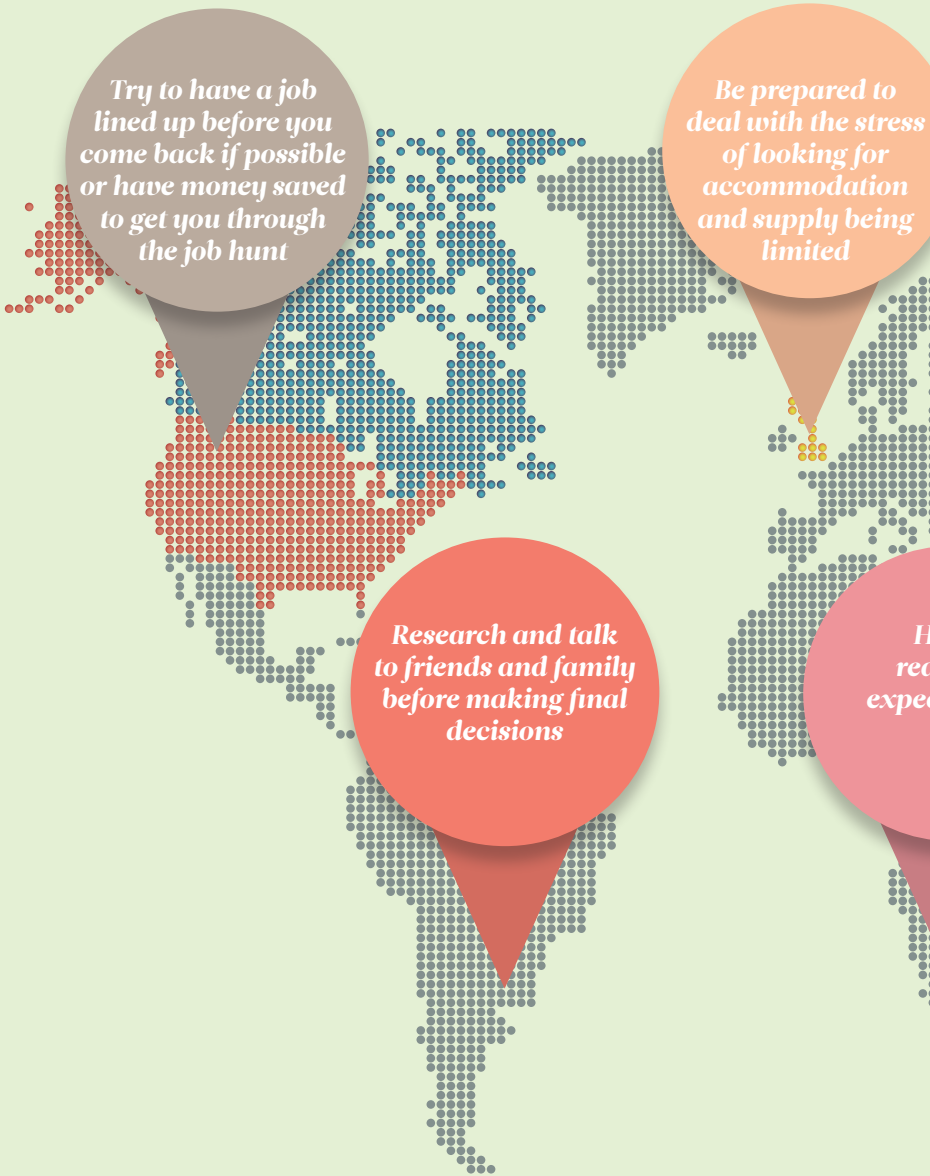
- 163/400 respondents (41%)
- Gender: 66% female, 34% male
- Most were 31–35 years old
- Most lived abroad for 3 to 5 years
- 70% returned with family
- 86% were in employment prior to return, 71% were in employment after return
- 42% applied for social welfare on return
- Most common cost of relocation was €5,000–10,000



United Kingdom (2)

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 91/400 respondents (22.9%)
- Gender: 75% female, 24% male
- Most were 26–30 years old
- Most lived abroad for 6 to 10 years
- 60% returned with family
- 87% were in employment prior to return, 69% in employment after return
- 42% applied for social welfare on return
- Most common cost of relocation was €1,000–€5,000



TOP 5 CHALLENGES



*Everything
is familiar
but different*

*Have
realistic
expectations*

*Just because
it's your home
country doesn't
mean it's easy
coming home*



United States of America (3)

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 37/400 respondents (9.3%)
- Gender: 70% female, 30% male
- Most were 36–45 years old
- Most lived abroad for over 10 years
- 60% returned with family
- 76% were in employment prior to return, 67% were in employment after return
- 65% applied for social welfare on return
- Most common cost of relocation was €1,000–€5,000



Canada (4)

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 29/400 respondents (7.3%)
- Gender: 76% female, 24% male
- Most were 26–30 years old
- Most lived abroad for 3 to 5 years
- 76% returned with family
- 83% were in employment prior to return, 76% were in employment after return
- 62% applied for social welfare on return
- Most common cost of relocation was €1,000–€5,000

modation

Reintegration

Social support and emotional wellbeing



Benefits

Question 21 asked survey respondents ‘What has been the best part of moving back to Ireland?’. Common themes emerged from the open-ended responses and are grouped into categories below:

BENEFITS	NO. RESPONSES
Closer to family	281
Closer to friends & networks	134
Sense of belonging, familiarity, Irish people & culture, no homesickness	45
Appreciating the environment & landscape	26
Cost of living, quality of life, better housing	24
Bringing up children in Ireland	16
Safety, peacefulness, happiness	12
Education	12
Weather	12
Having a 'new start' (marriage, having children, planning future, political participation)	11
Experience of working abroad, career progression, self employment supports	10
Savings, less travel costs home, can take holidays	10

Many respondents included multiple benefits in their responses, but overwhelmingly the main benefit of moving home was expressed as “being closer to family”. A number of respondents also specifically mention their children “getting to know their grandparents”. Others talk about “seeing family more often”, with one stating “glad to be in same time-zone as family”.

Proximity to friends and support networks follows family as the next highest benefit. This is best illustrated by one respondent who states that the benefit of returning is “being close to family and friends, more fun meeting up with people that you have a history with”.

For others, returning to Ireland has fostered a strong “sense of belonging” and greater appreciation for being Irish e.g. “I look at being Irish in a different way now, I respect and value it more”. One respondent notes “not feeling like a foreigner anymore” while another says “people still look out for each other”.

Comparatively, the most commonly cited benefits were emotive and related to family, as opposed to employment prospects for example. Notably, the cost of living (e.g. “money stretches a bit further here compared to Canada”) and quality of life (e.g. “the slower more relaxed way of life”) is rated relatively low with only 24 responses describing them as a benefit to returning. Responses refer more to feeling a sense of belonging and familiarity (e.g. “like-mindedness”) over the cost of living. This is perhaps reflected by experiences of 46 respondents who referred to the cost of living as a challenge.

Advice for emigrants considering moving home

The survey asked respondents what advice they would give other people considering moving home.

Question 10 asked *‘What preparation did you do before returning to Ireland?’*. From a total of 366 responses (many of which had selected several options), the top three answers were:

1. Sought advice from family & friends: 65% (237 responses)
2. Researched online: 50% (181 responses)
3. Arranged employment/self employment/started job-seeking: 42% (153 responses)

Question 13 asked *‘If you arranged employment before coming home how did you go about doing that?’*. From a total of 184 responses, the top three answers were:

1. Direct application with employers: 27% (49 responses)
2. Through recruitment agency: 23% (42 responses)
3. Through friends/colleagues: 21% (38 responses)

Question 22 follows after the question on the ‘benefits’ of moving back and asked *‘What advice would you give others considering moving back to Ireland?’*. This was again a free text question and responses are grouped into the top 10 themes in the following section.

A significant number of respondents gave direct advice to emigrants whether to return or not and were almost equally divided:

47 (12%) encouraging people to return, e.g. “Do it!”, “Just go for it with an open mind like you did when you immigrated to another country

43 (11%) advising not to return, e.g. “Don’t move back!!”, “Stay away. Too much tax, salaries are terrible, job prospects are poor, and cost of living is too high”.



Benefits

*“I am loving being home.
I am not the token Irish
foreigner anymore.”*

TOP ADVICE FROM RESPONDENTS

1 Research & budget in advance:

- be prepared for a lot of paperwork and bureaucracy
- trial a short time stay in Ireland before moving back permanently
- apply for any relevant tax refunds
- keep foreign bank account open for tax return
- seek professional advice
- apply for schools before return
- it may be challenging to access help from public services, including social welfare
- bring all relevant documents
- keep contacts in case of returning to live abroad again
- be prepared for weather, move back in spring or summer

2 Arrange employment:

- try to arrange employment before return
- re-skilling may be necessary
- career opportunities may be limited
- wages may be lower

3 Have savings:

- the cost of living can be expensive, particularly in Dublin

4 Arrange accommodation before return:

- accommodation in Dublin is very expensive

5 Have realistic expectations:

- commit and prepare mentally
- make the right choice for you
- some former support networks may have moved on

6 It takes time to resettle

- allow time to readjust and settle back into the way of life in Ireland

7. Embrace changes:

- embrace the change in yourself, in Ireland as a country and in the culture
- see it as a new start
- enjoy getting to know the country again and travel

8 Be prepared for the emotional impact:

- it can be emotionally draining to leave established networks in an adopted home
- there may be a 'culture shock'
- talk to others who have done it
- take time with the decision and think about the reasons for and against it
- know that it might be challenging
- make of a list of challenges and a mental note on how to respond to these
- have a prepared mind-set, keep positive, and have specific goals
- look after your mental health
- planning a trip back to the country of return can help with the transition

9 Shop around for car insurance:

- try to arrange to be a named driver on an existing policy if possible
- insurance can be expensive
- access can depend on experience and exchanging a foreign driving licence
- it can take 12 months to exchange foreign drivers licence

10 Reach out to family for support:

- seek advice from family and friends on the reality of life in Ireland
- reconnect with friends before returning and make time to make new ones



Challenges

***“Sometimes I feel like
an outsider in my own
country”***



ANALYSIS

Given the challenge in targeting a group who are relatively invisible in the general population, and who may not identify as 'returned Irish emigrants', the survey generated a considerable amount of interest with a response rate of 400 within a relatively short period of two and a half months. Promotion of the survey relied heavily on social media and links with emigrant support groups to help circulate the survey.

The findings outline the demographical breakdown of respondents and establish a unique record of a representative group of returned emigrants. With a majority of two-thirds of responses from women, a gender balance cannot be achieved. The purpose of the survey was to collect responses from any Irish emigrants who had returned to Ireland in the last two years, from any country of return.

In responding to reasons for returning to Ireland, environmental factors (such as political changes or economic downturn) in respondent's countries of return were not specifically referred to. The high response rate referring to family reasons for return (i.e. 'to be closer to family and support networks' at 83% and 'want to bring children up at home' at 36%) indicate that this is a major 'pull' factor drawing emigrants back to Ireland. It far outweighs any other 'pull' factors related to economic recovery or indeed any 'push' factors stemming from political or economic changes in countries of return. In terms of advantages of returning, family is once again listed as one of the main benefits.

To a large extent, the theme of support networks is a matter of importance to returned emigrants in this survey. Respondents were not asked how long they had been back and therefore it is plausible that some more recent

returnees had only just begun seeking employment. Bearing this in mind, it is positive to note that 70% of survey participants were in employment upon return and may be some reassurance to other emigrants considering a move back from abroad.

Challenges

In applying a thematic analysis, key issues can be drawn from results that indicate the challenges experienced by respondents, i.e. administrative issues, employment and accommodation. These are key basic needs for any migrant during their transition and relate to practical steps in the process of resettling.

What is more interesting perhaps and from a less obvious perspective is the level of responses describing the social and emotional impact of the return resettlement process. As the fourth most common issue expressed, it is evident that this is a hidden and perhaps unanticipated struggle experienced by returned emigrants. It is encouraging however that the respondents were open to expressing their emotional experiences and raise awareness amongst other emigrants to prepare for their wellbeing and self-care on return. It is of note that the survey launch, associated film screening and panel discussion also generated discussion amongst the audience on the social and emotional challenges of returning. It is not surprising therefore that this should be reflected in the survey results and is an area that would benefit from further research. It may also suggest a need for greater well-being related supports. That 188 of the 400 respondents volunteered their contact details may be an indication of interest in further discussion or input in this area of dialogue.

Respondents noted difficulties in accessing public services including social protection, homeless services, health and education. These presented a real barrier for some who may

have returned in crisis. Immigration permission for family members is a factor for emigrants returning with partners from non-EU countries requiring a visa before entry from visa-required countries or permission to reside on arrival from non-visa-required countries. The largest groups affected by immigration are those returning from the USA (30%) and Australia (10%).

Benefits

As would be expected, the main driver and benefit for people returning to Ireland is to be closer to family and support networks. The sense of belonging and closeness to Irish culture is expressed by many, once again reflecting the personal nature of return migration. This is a perceivably expected response from emigrants who had been feeling homesick or had always planned a return home. In smaller numbers, others speak of the advantages of peacefulness, bringing children up in Ireland, the Irish landscape, and new opportunities.

Advice

The top advice themes align with the top 'challenges' described by respondents. The top advice to 'research and budget' closely correlates with the strongest response to challenges of 'insurance and administrative' issues with paperwork, banking, taxes and public services. Car insurance again is highlighted separately with tips on how to meet that challenge.

The second highest score for advice is employment, again aligning with the second most difficult 'challenge', with the main advice being to seek work before returning and be prepared for some difficulty. Third and fourth top responses (have savings, high cost of living and arrange accommodation) are closely linked themes with responses referring to the challenges of both arranging accommodation and the cost of accommodation.

The remainder of the advice themes can again be labelled emotive responses, paralleling with the emotive responses as the fourth most significant 'challenge', i.e. *"Have realistic expectations"*, *"It takes time to settle"*, *"Embrace changes"*, *"Be prepared for the emotional impact"* and *"Reach out to family for support"*. Expressions in responses echo to some extent those in response to the challenges, such as 'culture shock', reconnecting with people, support networks, seeking advice, challenges, expectations and being prepared. The advice here is broad and a useful insight for emigrants planning to return.



Advice

"If it feels like the right thing to do then go for it"

CONCLUSION

Interest in the survey, limitations on its reach and the level of interest in further consultation highlight a growing appetite and need for supports for returning emigrants. Recent growth in online forums such as *Ireland Move Club*⁶ and the ‘*Irish Expats Returning to Ireland*’ Facebook group⁷ illustrate practical responses to this need by fostering communication between prospective returnees. Regular articles in The Irish Times Abroad section of The Irish Times feature insightful personal experiences from emigrants and increasingly more from returned emigrants⁸, in addition to a ‘Returning to Ireland Guide’⁹.

Crosscare Migrant Project continues to provide advocacy support to people returning to Ireland in crisis and contributes to information sharing, cross-organisational networking and capacity building between Emigrant Support Programme-funded organisations working for the welfare of Ireland’s emigrants. This research is conducive to all the aforementioned efforts and activity in the area of return migration and will inform the development of the work of Crosscare Migrant Project.

Sincere thanks to all participants in the survey for their time and openness. Their contributions are invaluable to the development of return diaspora research and supporting the Irish diaspora abroad.

RESOURCES

Australian News (2016), *GDP figures ‘not too bad’? Think again. We’re in for a rocky 2017.*

<http://www.news.com.au/finance/economy/australian-economy/gdp-figures-not-too-bad-think-again-were-in-for-a-rocky-2017/news-story/484dbb77a7d3af1d03b6fb80eb12f3bd>

CSO migration statistics (2016), *Emigrants by country of destination.*

http://www.cso.ie/multiquicktables/quickTables.aspx?id=pea18_2

Crosscare Migrant Project (2016), *Irish emigrant perspectives on emigration: Research report on the welfare experiences of Irish emigrants in association with the GAA.*

<https://www.migrantproject.ie/images/Irish%20emigrant%20perspectives%20on%20emigration%20July%202016.pdf>



⁶ <https://irelandmoveclub.com/>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/irisheexpatsreturninghome/>

⁸ <http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/returning-to-ireland>

⁹ <http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/returning-to-ireland/planning-to-return-to-ireland-here-s-everything-you-need-to-know-1.2231326>



APPENDIX – QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Did you return to live in Ireland in the last 2 years?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

2. What is your age?

- ☐ 18 – 25
- ☐ 26 – 30
- ☐ 31 – 35
- ☐ 36 – 45
- ☐ 46 – 60
- ☐ 61 – 66
- ☐ 66+

3. What is your gender?

- ☐ male
- ☐ female
- ☐ prefer not to say

4. Which country did you return from?

5. How long had you been living in that country?

- ☐ 0–1 year
- ☐ 1–2 years
- ☐ 3–5 years
- ☐ 6–10 years
- ☐ over 10 years
- ☐ Other (please specify)

6. Did you return with anyone? (Tick all that apply)

- ☐ no
- ☐ partner
- ☐ spouse
- ☐ children

7. If your spouse or partner needed to apply for a visa before coming to Ireland how long did this take to process?

- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ 0–1 months
- ☐ 2–3 months
- ☐ 4–6 months
- ☐ 7–12 months
- ☐ 1 year+
- ☐ Visa refused

8. If your spouse or partner applied for immigration permission after arrival in Ireland how long did it take?

- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ 0–1 months
- ☐ 2–3 months
- ☐ 4–6 months
- ☐ 7–12 months
- ☐ 1 year +

Application still in process – approximately how long is it since you applied?

9. How was your experience in getting official information about visas or immigration permission for Ireland?

10. What preparation did you do before returning to Ireland?

- ☐ Applied for Irish visa for non-Irish family member
- ☐ Applied for Irish passport for child
- ☐ Arranged employment/ self employment
- ☐ Arranged accommodation
- ☐ Arranged health insurance/ healthcare
- ☐ Did research online
- ☐ Sought advice on facebook groups, online forums or social media
- ☐ Sought advice from friends or family in Ireland
- ☐ Consulted the Irish Times Returning to Ireland Guide
- ☐ Consulted the Citizens Information website
- ☐ Consulted Irish government websites
- ☐ Consulted Crosscare Migrant Project's website
- ☐ Contacted Irish emigrant support organisation(s) in Ireland (e.g. Crosscare Migrant Project / Safe Home Ireland)
- ☐ Contacted Irish emigrant support organisation(s) abroad
- ☐ Other (please specify)



11. What was your employment status before you returned to Ireland?

- ☐ self employed
- ☐ employed
- ☐ student
- ☐ unemployed
- ☐ stay at home parent
- ☐ Other (please specify)

12. Are you employed or self-employed now in Ireland?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Other (please specify)

13. If you arranged employment before coming home how did you go about doing that?

- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Recruitment agency
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Friend/ former colleagues
- ☐ Transfer with existing employer
- ☐ Other (please specify)

14. If you applied for social welfare on your return what was your experience with this?

15. If you arranged accommodation before your return how did you go about doing that?

- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Arranged private accommodation
- ☐ Arranged short term accommodation with friends/ family
- ☐ Returned to own property
- ☐ Other (please specify)

16. If you did not have accommodation arranged in advance of your return what was your experience of sourcing accommodation on your arrival?

17. What do you estimate your relocation costs were in total?

- ☐ €0-1000
- ☐ €1000-5000
- ☐ €5000- 10,000
- ☐ €10,000 - €20,000
- ☐ €20,000 +

18. What was your main reason for returning to Ireland? Tick all that apply

- ☐ Want to be closer to family and support networks
- ☐ Immigration/visa/residency permission expired
- ☐ Made redundant/lost income
- ☐ Employment opportunities in Ireland
- ☐ Want to bring children up in Ireland
- ☐ Education
- ☐ A family member needs care in Ireland
- ☐ Had only planned to live temporarily abroad
- ☐ Deported
- ☐ Released from prison
- ☐ Homesickness
- ☐ Other (please specify)



19. How long do you plan to stay in Ireland?

- ☐ Less than a year
- ☐ 1-3 years
- ☐ 4-10 years
- ☐ Permanently
- ☐ Uncertain

20. What challenges, if any, did you face in relocating back to Ireland?

21. What has been the best part of moving back to Ireland?

22. What advice would you give others considering moving back to Ireland?

23. If you are happy to be contacted for further research purposes please leave your name and contact details below





Government of Ireland Emigrant Support Programme



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Crosscare Migrant Project is a project of Crosscare, the social support agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin. Our work with Irish emigrants is funded by the Emigrant Support Programme of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Crosscare Migrant Project www.migrantproject.ie

ISBN No. 978-1-906485-19-1