

MIND HOW YOU GO

Report on a survey of 500 Irish emigrants:
support on the various practical and
emotional challenges of emigration

March 2015

Introduction

www.mindhowyougo.ie is an information website for Irish emigrants created from the experiences and recommendations of 500 recent Irish emigrants living in 53 different countries who left Ireland at some stage between January 2009 and May 2014. While the website has general advice in terms of preparing for and dealing with emigration it has a particular focus on the emotional challenges involved. It details tried and tested means of caring for your mental health that have been proven to work for Irish emigrants. This is a report version of all the content that is on the website.

The report has two main sections, one on the Profile of Participants and one on the Advice and Experiences shared by the participants.

An outline of the content of each section is below:

Profile of Participants

- Gender
- Age ranges
- Country of residence
- Year of departure from Ireland
- Expected return date to Ireland
- Available emotional support
- Alcohol intake

Advice and Experiences

- Before you go
- After you arrive
- Changing expectations
- Most positive experience
- Most challenging experience
- Homesickness
- Final advice

This report and website is meant to give you some ideas about how to prevent, prepare for and cope with emotionally challenging experiences involved in emigrating. It is not intended as a substitute for the direct help that you may need from another person or professional. If you are worried about your or another person's mental health contact your GP or health professional wherever you are living.

There is also useful information on this Irish site:

www.yourmentalhealth.ie

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

A total of 500 Irish emigrants participated in the survey.

The only requirement was that people needed to have emigrated from Ireland at some stage since January 2009. None of the questions were mandatory so not all 500 people answered all of the 20 questions asked.

66% of respondents were female and 34% were male.

The below table outlines the ages of participants with 78% being in the broader 24 to 35 age bracket and over 50% in the specific 24 -29 bracket.

Which category below includes your age?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
18-23	6.8%	34
24-29	51.5%	256
30-35	26.4%	131
36-40	8.5%	42
40-50	5.4%	27
50 or older	1.4%	7
<i>answered question</i>		497
<i>skipped question</i>		3

The country of residence of participants is summarised below with a notably large number living in Australia.

In what country do you currently reside?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
United Kingdom	17%	76
Canada	17%	76
Australia	49%	223
United States	6%	27
New Zealand	4%	16
Ireland	8%	34
Other (please specify)		53
<i>answered question</i>		448
<i>skipped question</i>		52

Of the 53 other countries mentioned eight people are living in the United Arab Emirates, four each in Singapore and Belgium, three each in Zimbabwe and Germany, two in each of the following – Denmark, China, Spain, France and Austria with one person each stating the following as their country of residence: Kuwait, Qatar, India, South Africa, Brazil, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Japan, Indonesia, Malta, Bermuda, Korea, Finland, Italy, Scotland, Holland, Sweden, Thailand, Northern Ireland and Sierra Leone.

The year of departure was reasonably evenly spread over the five main years in question

What year did you depart Ireland?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
2009	22.2%	108
2010	14.8%	72
2011	17.7%	86
2012	23.2%	113
2013	17.0%	83
2014	5.1%	25
answered question		487
skipped question		13

A total of 6 people stated that they were undocumented, with two people indicating they were residing in the USA and one in Australia – all three of these people had left Ireland in the last five years.

When do you expect to return to Ireland?

The most common answer and sentiment expressed in response to this question was one of uncertainty. 26% (124 of 475) of respondent stated that they didn't know or were unsure as to when they would be returning to Ireland. While the majority of answers simply consisted of a 'Don't know' or 'Unsure', some answers were more detailed and revealing:

I'm a resident now, this is home. But I never say never!

God only knows.

I'm not sure, no immediate plans to move back.

I don't know. I have a two year contract here but my wife has potentially a four-year contract.

Unsure if I will ever return to Ireland

The second most common response was that people stated they would never be returning to Ireland. Again answers were generally brief, but some revealed a little more:

I hope never to return to live, only to visit

Sadly never

Never. Met an Australian partner and planning my life here now.

Others were clearer about their year/date of return:

Expected year of return	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019/ '5 years time'	2020	Date range *	Other	Jobs / econ **	Unsure	Never
Number	28	53	46	21	16	20	3	33	32	21	124	72
%	6%	11%	9.5%	4%	3%	4%	1%	7%	7%	4%	26%	15%

*Participants offered a range of possible return dates

**Jobs/Economy – participants indicated their return was dependent on getting employment

7% of respondents suggested that they would be returning within a particular date range. There was a notable degree of uncertainty in many of these answers and a minimum of another five years away was also commonly mentioned:

Hopefully in the next 5 years

Next 5-7 years

2015-2018

For good? 5-7 years

Within next five years

Hopefully in 6-10 years

I don't know not for at least four more years

I was supposed to stay for a year but really I knew it would be longer. Into my second year. Hopefully with more job experience I can go home in a year or two.

Not in the next five years

I plan on visiting at least once yearly. As far as a permanent move back to Ireland, it isn't on the cards since I've only been gone a year. It will take a couple of years to decide what my long term plan is but in the back of my mind, I would like to return home.

2015 is not longer

I don't expect to return in the next 5-10 years

Not yet sure. Maybe in the next 5-6 years.

Within a decade

A total of 21 people or 4% of respondents specifically stated that they would return once there were jobs available and/or the economy improved.

If/when I can get a job in Ireland

Would like to return as soon as possible but unsure as job prospects in Ireland are non-existent

When the economy gets better

No idea, whenever there are prospects in Ireland again

When Ireland returns to having a stable economy and house prices/rent/living expenses are not so high for the low wages

Other answers did not fit into any aforementioned category neatly or mentioned periods of 10 or 20 years. The following are some examples:

2023 maybe, so our kid can get secondary education in Ireland

In a long time

Not in the short to medium term

When my parents get too old to look after themselves

When I retire

Not in the foreseeable future

Available emotional support

In terms of your available emotional support while abroad how would you rate it compared to when you were in Ireland?		
Answer options	Response percentage	Response count
Much worse	22.1%	105
Somewhat worse	29.9%	142
About the same	31.8%	151
Somewhat better	9.3%	44
Much better	6.9%	33
<i>answered question</i>		475
<i>skipped question</i>		25

Alcohol intake

How would you describe the level of your alcohol intake compared to when you were in Ireland		
Answer options	Response percentage	Response count
Much less	21.9%	107
Somewhat less	18.6%	91
About the same	32.6%	159
Somewhat more	18.6%	91
Much more	8.2%	40
<i>answered question</i>		488
<i>skipped question</i>		12

Advice and experiences



Participants were asked 'From your own experience, what would you advise intending emigrants to do prior to departure to help them cope with the emotional challenges of emigration?'

Participants offered a wide variety of advice to intending emigrants but a number of strong themes emerged. Two interlinked themes emerged as the most common: Research and Networking.

Research

Over 21% of participants mentioned the importance of research of various kinds prior to departure. The following were suggested topics of research: planned destination, employment and accommodation situation, visa process, local culture, local clubs and societies, Irish organisations, how the systems and institutions work.

Networking

19% of participants recommended putting time into networking before departure. Four distinct types of networking were recommended, networking with:

- People who have been there – to familiarise yourself with the situation
- People who are there – to build a social network
- Social groups and organisations
- People in the same job sector in country of destination

The following are some answers related to both the research and networking recommendations:

Find out about the area you are moving to and systems

Ensure you know what you are going to do when you get there, eg. work and housing etc.

I would advise people understand their interests and investigate what the country has to offer outside work, often the social and activities side of emigration can be a challenge as you need to find something that will interest you as you don't have your friends or family near you anymore to fill that gap!

Make sure you do plenty of research!!!! speak to others who have done it!

Try to make contact with friends, colleagues who are already living in the country.

Find out as much about your intended country/city. Check out the expat forums on where to live and challenges to expect. Try and get in contact with someone from home who has already emigrated to the intended country and meet them initially to help settle in.

Make sure to have a large network of people you know or know of where you are going

Learn as much as you can about your new destination and try to make as many contacts in advance through blogs, friends of friends, etc - contact before you depart to get advice on things to bring, cost of living, comforts of home etc

Research everything, have a house set up even if it is only temporary. someones brothers mothers cousins sister is always in the place your going to- NEVER be afraid to reach out to them- they might love a connection to home- and someday you might be in a position to help some one out

Have an idea of social events such as clubs or groups that you can attend. Have an idea of how the place is laid out and how you can get around.

Bringing adequate funds

After researching and networking the next most commonly mentioned piece of pre-departure advice offered related to finances – in particular participants recommended that people ensure they have enough money with them and also that they need to budget carefully. 16% of participants made recommendations in this regard:

Have some back up money, and double what you thought you'd need.

Make sure they have enough money saved prior to leaving. Plan for at least 8 weeks worth of expenses. Make sure accommodation is booked prior to leaving for at least 2 weeks. Join clubs or meetup.com

Make sure you have a job before coming or bring enough money to survive for 6 months without work.

Have enough money saved to make moving easier. Worrying about money while being homesick, hunting for job etc makes everything worse.

Have more money in your pocket before leaving! Running out of money and stressing about finances while trying to juggle finding work, accommodation and developing social networks within the first 1-3 months was incredibly frightening.

Save a lot of money. It costs a huge amount to get yourself established.

To be wise with their money throughout their stay

Prepare for adversity/manage expectations

A total of 51 people or 12% of the respondents recommended that prior to departure people should be prepared for some adversity after arriving at their country of destination or that they should prepare for the possibility that their expectations may not be met.

Expect it to be tougher than you think

Be prepared to be homesick, and you just have to wait it out

Don't expect to live the dream, it doesn't happen to everyone

Do not have unrealistic expectations of gaining work immediately or finding a dream job/house. Be prepared to hit the lows before the highs

Be prepared for rejection from jobs and rentals

Hope for the best, but expect the worst

Be prepared to miss home

Be aware that when the initial excitement wears off it will be hard but you need to remind yourself

Go with or to people you know

Twenty-four people recommended either going with people you know or going to place where you already know people.

Maybe plan to travel with people you know - doing it on your own is really hard

Really think about it and don't come alone but come with somebody you can really trust. You don't want to end up in a different country alone. Also have an open mind!?

Try and emigrate with friends and family or alternatively try and move to places where you already have friends and family. However when you do arrive also make a big effort to meet people outside of those you already know with and get involved in things you would normally never would.

If you are traveling alone pick a destination where you will have some sort of support network (friends, family etc). It is very lonely moving somewhere new on your own, with nobody on the other side to help you settle in to a new country.

Pre-arrange employment and accommodation

A total 21 people advised people to try to pre-arrange employment before departure with 18 advising pre-arranging accommodation.

Have a job lined up, any job, just to get started.

Try and get a job sorted and a place to stay

Research as much as possible, have accommodation, work if possible, international driving license etc organised beforehand

If you can pre organise work, house and if you have children schooling. it will help with the stress of trying to find your feet.

Try and get a job in place before you leave or at least start the ground work and set up interviews for when you arrive. Getting a regular income is the first big stressor when you arrive in a new country.

Accommodation is the most important as its impossible to focus on anything else without it

Spending time with family and friends before departure

A significant number of participants (19) underlined the importance of spending quality time with close friends and relatives before departure.

Spend as much time with family and friends as possible. Enjoy being at home and go to your favourite places.

Have your last days planned out so that you see everyone and arrange Skype dates with them before you leave.

See your family and friends as much as possible before leaving. Even you get annoyed with them a bit, you'll be long enough without seeing them to forget any arguments

Really appreciate your family and friends at home, tell the ones you love that you love them. Take time to say goodbye to everyone you care about. Try your best to leave on a good note with everyone.

Don't feel that you have to say goodbye to everyone. It's the extra time with your nearest and dearest you'll value most afterwards.

Meet up with as many people as possible before you leave, esp those who may not be there when you return eg elderly members of your family

Ensure good IT access

Although only 4% of respondents it was interesting that 19 people specifically recommended that intending emigrants made sure they had good IT access prior to departure.

Get a good computer/smart phone. Set-up Skype/whatsapp/FaceTime. Get involved with "meet up" type groups if possible.

Despite the expense, make sure you have an iphone, tablet, laptop to skype home whenever you need to

Have a skype and viber account set up and contacts added before you leave.

Set up viber, skype etc before coming over and teach your parents how to use it etc. Write their usernames and passwords down so they don't forget them.

Get a good phone/tablet and set up skype, viber etc to keep in contact

Other pre-departure recommendations

A small number of people recommended scheduling a return trip before departure

Plan short trips home so that you will have a point to look forward to

Have a date set with a plan to return home for a holiday when you can see your family again, the move does not seem so final then and you have something to look forward to.

Others recommended having adequate documentation prepared

Have paper copies of all important documents from birth cert to immunisation records.

Have as many qualifications as possible signed and stamped from an official

Have a strong resume written up and all contact details of previous employers

There were also recommendations to ensure that family can use the IT you plan to use to communicate with them

Make sure parents know how to use Skype, Whatsapp, viber etc

Make sure family/friends know how to use the technology to contact you – set it up for them.

Other quotes of note were as follows;

Get all the relations addresses so you can send them the odd Christmas card

Inform your friends & family that you will need their support & to keep in regular contact. Many will keep in contact for the first into or two and after their curiosity on how you are settling in has been answered they will drift away. As the emigrant it is difficult to find the time to keep in touch with everyone individually, so send group emails, as this saves time. Invest in an iPad & use FaceTime to speak to & see family members regularly. It can be hard with the time difference to arrange a time to talk to lived ones back home but it is worth setting aside a set time at the weekend when you are free to make & receive calls. This not only helps you plan your weekend so you can get out and explore your new surroundings but also can help elderly parents back home now that they can call you and speak to you.

Speak to friends and ask them to make special efforts to keep in touch. You never know how homesick you'll be



Participants were asked the following question:

From your own experience, what would you advise intending emigrants to do after arrival to help them to cope with the emotional challenges of emigration?

There were three broad themes that emerged in answers to this question:

- Broaden social circles and networks
- Develop a support structure and routine
- Stay connected to home

The first and second themes were often inter-related.

Broaden social circles and networks

The overarching recommendation to broaden social circles and networks was mentioned by over 60% of participants making it one of the strongest pieces of advice given in the whole report.

The most common specific recommendation under this heading was the advice to join clubs or groups after arrival with the GAA and meetup.com getting numerous specific mentions:

Explore. Make friends. Join clubs/societies. Anything social to get out and speak with other people.

Join a club, attend 'meet-up' groups

Join as many groups as you can, sports teams etc

Join a GAA club or other Irish society

Get involved in some hobby or community where you can meet new people. Push yourself and make an effort with new people

Join a group or sports club with like-minded people

Be open to new experiences. Join clubs etc. The first few months can be very lonely and are much easier when you have company

Some people advised against spending too much time socialising with Irish people although more indicated the importance of Irish contacts and groups and many indicated the importance of networking with Irish and local people:

Join Irish groups around the area for support

Gather support from other Irish within your local community. But also make friends with locals.

Get out and join into group activities. It is a great way to meet new people. Also search out for an Irish Expat group – they are a great help in those early days and you will meet great people who will become friends

Try to integrate into the area as soon as possible. This can be with Irish based clubs and societies or local ones but try to get into something as soon as you can. It helps to meet people and give a sense of belonging or otherwise you will feel very much a stranger in a foreign land.

Try not to exclusively socialise with people from home. Integrate into the society of where you are living. Hanging out with Irish people all the time will make you think of home more. Socialising with people from the country helps you settle in quicker I found.

Socialise, try to meet other Irish and know ye are all on the same boat. It is hard and it is not just you feeling a whirlwind of emotions

Develop a support structure and routine

Closely related to the advice on broaden social circles and networks was the recommendation to develop a support structure and routine.

Set up a warm environment and surround yourself with good people you have a common interest with

Form a close relationship and have people you can trust and go to with problems. You won't have your family close so will rely on good friendships for support

Get into a routine, get a job, bank a/c, national insurance number etc

Get into a routine, exercise, join sports/social clubs, immerse yourself in your new country

Catch up with friends already out here, makes the transition easier

Find Irish people over here that you can talk to on a regular basis. Find people who don't seem homesick and see how they cope. Think about your next five years and how you think that will pan out. Have goals to make being away from home easier.

Get into a routine as quickly as possible, especially when you are not employed

Find accommodation and make it a home as soon as possible. Once I made my apartment a home I settled in amazingly well. Its so important to have a comfortable base to feel a home away from home.

Find some stability, build a routine and try to make friends in the new place

Stay connected to home

While the advice on 'broadening social circles and networks' and 'developing a support structure and routine' dominated the advice given under this question the other main piece of advice to emerge was that of 'staying connected to home':

Keep in touch with friends and family at home but ensure that you make an effort to mix with others in the country you emigrate to and with people outside of work also if possible

Keep in touch with home

Staying in touch with home has been very important for me, although so too has been developing important relationships in my new home. I think that developing a meaningful support network in your new home is absolutely vital, as it helps to process all of the difficult emotions and experiences around leaving home.

Make sure you schedule time every week to catch up with your family

Stay in contact with family and friends at home – don't be afraid to admit if things are going as you planned and you need help.

Keep in touch with your family for their sake and your own.

Some comments were particularly effective in summing up more than one post arrival advice theme:

Identify where the Irish community are and attend their events. Also get out of your comfort zone and mix with the people from the country, otherwise you will never integrate/settle down. Get a phone organised as you can phone home.

Invest in good internet speeds for Skype etc. Join a sports team or go to a local 'meet-up'. Surrounding yourself with Irish can be comforting but unrewarding

Keep in regular contact with family. Meet up with friends here. Join Irish clubs to help the transition

One of the repeating messages in the answers on post-arrival advice was the importance of thinking and acting outside your comfort zone and meeting different people and doing different things. This was also tempered with advice on the importance to making contact with Irish people and organising some home comforts and connections with home.



Participants were asked 'How did your expectations or perceptions change in the first month after your arrival?'

The responses to this question could be broadly categorised into those whose perceptions/expectations improved and those whose perceptions/expectations deteriorated.

64% (244) of respondents stated in one way or another that they found the experience harder than they expected. Only 11% (45) of respondents stated that the experience exceeded their expectations in the first month. The answers of the remaining 25% of respondents were neither clearly positive or negative.

Expectations falling

The clearest theme emerging from this question was that people found it much harder than expected in the month after their arrival. The reasons cited were many and varied but the following and some of the most commonly mentioned explanations:

- **Difficulty finding work**

It was a lot harder to find a job than I thought it was going to be, so that was tough. Made me realise the grass isn't always greener.

I didn't think it would have been as difficult to find a job as it was. That knocked my confidence a little

The first month was much harder than I thought it was going to be. Finding a place to live and jobs was very hard. Much harder than I imagined. I thought we would just find both in the first week! After two weeks my husband got casual work and on the third week I secured a full time job. I'm not sure I would have done it if I knew it was going to be that hard, I don't think I could go through that again. I began to feel slightly more settled after the second month but found the first month very challenging

It was harder to get work than I imagined- this caused a lot of anxiety Irish people stick together way more than I thought I didn't feel lonely but I can see how you would, you need to rely on yourself to be happy There are lots of free things to do and exercise is such a big part of life in Australia, it's a good way of tackling any negative thoughts or poor mental health

I was stressed about lack of work and the "not knowing". I couldn't support myself financially as well as I would expect. I went the wrong way about getting work because I had nobody who I knew who had gone before me.

- **Difficulties in adapting to new environment**

When you get down to the reality that you are not just travelling, that you are here to work and it's not all fun and games. Coming home to a house full of strangers after a long day at work when all you want to see is a familiar face is very hard.

The minor differences in culture became very pronounced, the differences in the job market, education system. Everything became strange and being Irish in the UK no-one seemed to think I should find it strange

I wasn't as settled as I expected. Had no friends and no job, no structure to my life.

I didn't realize how hard it would be to cope with the little things. Like knowing the banking system. People struggling with my accent. Having no credit record. Figuring out where to get bus.

Reality hits of the magnitude of what you've done. You are getting to grips with the loss of your support network and trying to juggle it with the time difference. For many the formalities of moving - getting bank accounts, finding an apartment etc are done and then it's time to find a job. This is always a difficult place to be especially if you've already been unsuccessful in Ireland

Things are difficult, you have to make a life for yourself completely independent of your friends and family back at home. It is not easy but empowering.

- **Difficulty in meeting people**

I realised it wasn't as easy as I thought to make friends and that people were very different to back home.

I found it hard to meet people. Meet ups wouldn't be followed up etc. Thought my new home was amazing, plenty of opportunities

Harder to meet other people/make friends in London than I previously expected

I didn't anticipate how difficult it would be to meet new people. So feeling very alone was not something I expected when leaving Ireland.

- **Loneliness and homesickness**

The feeling of isolation and loneliness was more overwhelming than expected

I didn't realise I'd be so homesick. I was really happy leaving to take off on a new adventure, but I didn't realise how hard it hits you.

I struggled as I realised that very few people there knew or cared about me.

The realisation that I was so far away from my loved ones hit me like a ton of bricks. It's not that I wasn't aware of the distance, I just didn't think it would affect me like it did.

After the initial excitement homesickness set in and it can be very lonely.

- **Greater financial strain than expected**

Work was tougher than I anticipated and cost of living not cheap so I went through savings very fast. Adrenaline kept me going through the first month - it was later that loneliness set in.

I was very lonely and missed home. I wished I had sorted out even a temporary job - or activities to meet people before I left. I was broke and didn't realise it would take so long to get a job.

I had radically underestimated the amount of money I would need to last the expected amount of time- I was also pleasantly surprised by Belgian people's grasp of English and their friendliness

- **Racism**

Five people who mentioned experiencing racism – two were in the UK and three in Australia

I lived in a town where it was difficult to meet people and encountered some casual anti-Irish racism in local pubs

The difficulty of finding a job. The racism and negative views towards Irish people.

Expectations rising

Perceptions changed for the better. I had always thought Ireland was the friendly place on earth but I was pleasantly surprised to find San Francisco even better

Improved as I felt very settled in my new country.

Once I had an apartment and starting doing interviews for jobs I felt much better about moving because I knew that things would work out in the end.

People and place was brilliant. It was great feeling realising I could cope on my own

I had fitted in more quickly than I thought because I'd made the effort. My perception is that the people would be very different, they weren't at all.

I found Canada and Korea to be much better than I had anticipated prior to leaving. I guess I was nervous at first but then relaxed once I found employment and could make friends

Once I found friends and made my life everything fell into place. My perceptions changed on home too. I have always felt I am a home bird but now I don't know if I will ever return. I love Ireland but to live now I don't know.

Other reactions

There were other response from people who felt well prepared and those who arrived into something they had generally expected

No things were as I had expected but I had a lot of knowledge about the city before I arrived and had a very good support network with my friends the family who I stayed with

Came with an open mind so no change in expectations

Everything went well. I made friends and started working

04

MOST POSITIVE EXPERIENCE



Participants were asked 'What has been the most positive experience since your arrival?' Responses to this question can be categorised under four major themes:

- Relationships
- Career related
- Lifestyle
- Independence and growing

Relationships

The most commonly stated positive related to the development of relationships, 39% (159) cited experiences under this category:

Meeting so many people that are very friendly - all the expats out in Singapore really bond together and are very welcoming to newcomers.

The Canadian people have been very helpful and friendly

Meeting my boyfriend and some good friends.

The great group of friends that I've made

Meeting friends for life and a nice man from the UK who will hopefully be my husband someday,

Making new friends from far and wide. Opening up my 'small island' mind, realizing that Ireland isn't the centre of the universe.

Got married here becoming resident and soon becoming citizen!

Friends and experiences along with meeting my Australian husband and having a baby

Meeting new lifelong friends

I have built a very successful and full life. I am married, have children and have a lovely home.

Career related

Responses in this category related to career type positives such as pay, work environment, progression options and job availability in general. 29% of respondents (124) gave answers under this category:

I'm in a job I would never have got at home

I got a job in my desired work area

Finally getting a job, something that I couldn't do in Ireland

Doing well in work

Getting a good paying job

Progressing in my chosen career

Eventually getting a job I love three months after arriving

Availability of great work opportunities

Lifestyle

A significant number of people (37 or 8.5% of respondents) mentioned positive experiences related to lifestyle, culture, climate or general quality of life:

Experience of a new culture, food

Everybody's energy focused on enjoying the outdoors instead of Irish binge drinking culture.

Learning a new language and culture has been incredibly fulfilling and enriching

There is more sunshine

New lifestyle, healthier focus, less stress, minimal commuting for work

The weather! (Minus Winter of course!) The facilities in Toronto are amazing, from the subway and streetcar services to the free health care. Quality of life is much higher. There is always something to do, and the morale of the people is higher too.

Independence and personal growth

39 respondents (9%) cited positive experiences relating to gaining more independence, learning, broadening horizons or personal growth:

Growing up 10 fold, learning 20 times more about myself since I arrived than I would have at home.

Most positive thing since my arrival was heading off farming by myself for three months to get my second year visa. I was so worried that it wouldn't work out. But it did and it was the best experience. Knowing that I could head off and put myself in a different situation by myself and still come out on top was great for me. Huge independence.

It has broadened my mind and caused me to view the world in a different way, particularly challenged my previous views of Ireland.

Becoming fluent in another language

Living in a different country does broaden your horizons and makes you do things you never thought you would do.

Learning that I can survive on my own but also realising how much I love my family and they me.

05

MOST CHALLENGING EXPERIENCE



Participants were asked 'What has been the most challenging experience since your arrival?'

Six broad areas emerged in their responses:

- Missing family, friends and home
- Employment related difficulties
- Difficulty in making friends
- Culture, language and climate
- Visas
- Racism

There was a very clear stand out theme in the responses to the question 'What has been the most challenging experience since your arrival?' 150 people or 35% of respondents gave answers relating to missing family, friends or home. There were clearly a high number of respondents undergoing considerable emotional suffering. One respondent referred to a past suicide attempt and another mentioned 'trying not to be suicidal'. Two other respondents mentioned the challenge of dealing with depression.

Missing family, friends and home

Missing occasions at home - birthdays, weddings, anniversaries and accepting that life at home is going on without you.

Being very homesick after not seeing my family for 15months

Not having the support of family or friends

Being so alone

Homesickness, so far away from family was hard

Coping with feeling so lonely

Preparing to have my baby in Australia without my family

Missing family and seeing nieces and nephews grow up on Facebook

Missing the things back home I took for granted and family. The fear of something happening to a loved one and the regret of not being there and missing out their lives having been away

Within this category people expressed particular difficulty around missing out on family events with bereavements particularly difficult to deal with while abroad

Missing the first Christmas at home

Missing the birth of my first niece

Being away for my grandfather's death. Away from my Dad is a daily struggle also I miss him always

Dealing with a family loss from abroad has been difficult. Missing big family events also.

I have had a break up of a serious long term relationship and the death of a family member whose funeral I could not attend. Not having your family and friends in easy reach during these times can be very stressful and isolating

Employment related difficulties

75 respondents (17%) stated that work related issues were the most challenging part of the experience. This largely related to the difficulty in finding work but also finding work that was 'career relevant', stable and fair:

Finding a job that suits me

Getting a job – it took 2 months and money was tight

Having patience to take jobs I was overqualified for and uninterested in. Also reassessing and reframing my career aspirations to meet the market here and therefore to finally feel content for once

To get long term employment

My job here, due to long hours and poor pay

Difficulty in making friends

36 respondents (8.5%) felt that meeting and making new friends was the most challenging aspect of the experience:

Making friends and finding people to rely on

Trying to create and extend social network for my kids

Meeting new people was not easy in the beginning

Making friends outside the expat community has been difficult

Making friends was the biggest challenge

Culture, language and climate

A total of 29 people (7%) cited issues related to culture, language or climate as the most challenging:

Adapting to Australian culture and although we speak English, feeling very foreign

Long cold winters

Learning a new language

I think that interacting with people who don't understand my accent has been very frustrating and embarrassing at times, as well as just feeling isolated

Learning about cultural differences and not worrying quite so much that I'd put my foot in my mouth all the time

Dealing with a totally different way of living. A new standard of living and being in a non-English speaking country

Visas

A total of 24 people cited issues with visas as the most challenging part of the experience. This usually related to issues with extending their visa or restrictions on their current visa.

Trying to get sponsorship sorted

Dealing with the legal costs of changing visas

Trying to sort visas

Visas, trying to stay after my second year

Obtaining a 457 visa

Racism

A total of 13 people (3%) cited racism as the most challenging part of the emigration experience, with Australia getting the majority of the mentions:

Dealing with racism and ignorance

The most challenging is dealing with sexist racist Australians. I work in construction and feel like I am living in the 1920s. It is a constant struggle to be taken seriously.

Being treated as dirt, had some racism come my way

Racist stereotypes particularly in social settings

06



HOMESICKNESS

The majority of respondents (58.1%) experience homesickness between the range of several times a week and several times a month.

On average how often do you feel 'homesick'?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Always	5.3%	26
Several times a day	3.7%	18
Once a day	4.7%	23
Several times a week	11.1%	54
Once a week	12.5%	61
Several times a month	15.6%	76
Once a month	18.9%	92
Less than once a month	23.0%	112
Never	5.3%	26

Triggers

42% (178) people mentioned that significant events in Ireland relating to family or friends triggered homesickness:

When there is a big match or occasion at home that I would love to attend! Sometimes I'd love to just pop home for a cup of tea and chat with my mam and dad. Getting lost when driving or not knowing where I am going is frustrating and brings on homesickness!

Big events...birthdays, engagement parties, anniversary

My father being ill and big life events like birthdays and weddings that I'm missing back home

Events happening at home that I miss out on. Family occasions, St. Patricks day, gaa games. But also when something is getting you, down whether at work, relationships etc. Long to just go home for a bit.

Seeing my child do something new like crawl or walk and knowing her grandparents in Ireland are missing out on seeing all of that. Seeing rugby and hurling games on tv and missing being at them with my Dad.

My mum passed away suddenly 2 years ago and it kills me that I wasn't there for her. I have missed out so much

A further 81 respondents (19%) mentioned simply communicating with family or friends at home brought on homesickness:

Whats Apps between various family members that I can see on our family whats app group. I feel left out and like i have lost my place within the family. I also feel guilty.

Seeing family on Skype

It can be something simple as a reference on a radio or friends I haven't seen.

Homesickness is a persistent thought and it becomes a part of you when you emigrate and something you have to live with when away.

Friends and family on social network sites

Calling home

After talking to family on Skype or if I have nothing on at the weekends I start to think about it. The worst homesickness I've had is when family have left after visiting me here - that through me off for a few weeks and had me doubting whether I was making the right decision being here

Seeing my younger brother and sister on Skype. They grow bigger each time and I'm missing this

6% of respondents (25) specifically mentioned being alone or loneliness as a trigger for homesickness:

Being on my own, thinking about the good times back home

Loneliness, big moments you can't share right away with home

Not going back to Ireland for long periods of time, being alone for long periods of time

Coping mechanisms

Participants were asked 'What do you do to prevent or cope with 'homesickness'?

Contact with friends or family

Not surprisingly a large percentage (42% or 174 people) of respondents mentioned contact with friends or family as the manner in which they prevent or cope with homesickness.

I keep up regular contact with my friends and family at home. I follow Irish media to keep up to date with affairs in Ireland and I visit home regularly.

Skype into family occasions. Plan for Christmas so I wasn't alone.

Talk to people at home, surround myself with good friends here.

I keep in touch with people through skype or WhatsApp which is much more personal than an email or facebook. I try to plan ahead and make it home for the things that really matter to me.

Reach out to friends. Talk to people at home to prevent it but if it's too late to prevent it and I already feel homesick I feel ringing home only makes it worse.

Friends become your family when you are away so it's important to have strong solid connections.

There was an interesting distinction made by a small number of respondents between different types of social media in the context of homesickness. Facebook was seen as having capacity to exacerbate homesickness. The reason it would appear is that for some people it contained a lot of images from their family or social circle at home while at the same time they were not in direct communication with them. In other words they could see but not necessarily communicate directly with their friends/family.

Delete Facebook, Download Whats App and create group chats with close friends at home, Skype/call family once a week.

I keep in touch with people through skype or WhatsApp which is much more personal than an email or facebook. I try to plan ahead and make it home for the things that really matter to me.

I don't spend too much time on facebook as that can be hard, seeing all photo's of everyone having good times

Personal processes

The second most common general response related to more internal or personal processes that people underwent in order to cope with homesickness. 27% (97) people were in this category. Some people within this category reminded themselves of the transient nature of homesickness as their way of coping with it:

It will always pass, you have to be patient.

I feel it, accept it and move on.

Ride it out; remind myself I can always visit or go back and think about how good my life and job here are.

Acknowledge it and allow myself to feel sad for a little while then get on with things

Reminisce, talk to friends and partner about it, reflect on my feelings and have a good cry otherwise it just gets too much and translates as irritation in general day to day

Other people remind themselves about their initial reasons for emigrating:

Just remind myself why I left and get on with it

You can't prevent it. I try to remember why I left and why I'm still here and that gives me focus.

There is also a pattern of positive thinking as a coping mechanism:

Think of the positives about being away.

Focus on the positives of being in Australia and count my blessings

Some people remind themselves how difficult life was in Ireland before they left:

Remembering how tough things were when I was in Ireland

I remember how I felt at home without a job.

Keeping busy

18% (75) of respondents specifically referred to 'keeping busy' or 'staying busy' or a similar phrase (such as distraction) in terms of a tactic to deal with homesickness.

Keep occupied.

Just try to keep busy, it usually passes

Keep busy, distract myself with work

Keep busy, travel at weekends, join clubs and socialise as much as possible.

Other coping mechanisms

Other coping mechanisms mentioned included getting exercise of some sort, consumption of Irish media, entertainment or food or planning trips away or home.

I call people at home. I listen to RTE or Today FM radio apps. I watch The Late Late Show on the RTE Player

Exercise always helps and avoiding Irish premises i.e. The local pub, speaking to my fiancé again helps

Think about the opportunities I have here, plan holidays and our future plans to move home and call my friends and family.



07

FINAL ADVICE

Participants were asked 'Do you have any final advice for intending emigrants to keep mentally healthy?'

- Talk to someone, make friends
- Positive thinking and managing expectations
- Caution around alcohol
- Other advice

Talk to someone, make friends

A total of 40% of respondents (160 people) gave advice related to making friends, socialising or talking to someone/reaching out for help.

Examples of advice relating to making new friends, socialising, joining a club, or 'getting out there' were as follows:

Talk! Get out amongst people. Try things you have never done. Go to every event you are invited to. Have fun! Give yourself time, when we moved to Canada, a few very wise people told us it would take us 2 years before we were finally settled! I could not agree more!

Network and connect with people whenever you can. Socialise as often as you can and keep busy with sports or travel etc

Socialise. Always ask for help. There's always someone who is feeling or has felt what you have felt. Stay away from negativity. Always think positive even in the worst and most challenging situations. Always think of it as an experience and it will make you stronger personally and probably professionally.

Reach out, put yourself out there because no one will come knocking on your door.

I'd have to say don't slip into the routine of saying I'll meet people or sort things out later, just jump right in and put yourself out there. Plenty of people out there in the same situation.

Examples of advice relating to 'talking to someone/reaching out for help' were as follows:

Remember you are not alone and never be afraid to ask for help.

Don't keep it inside. Talking about it lifts the weight off.

If you feel like you are falling into a dark place force yourself to call a friend or even that person you don't know very well and meet up. Make plans, be busy.

Always talk to friends, never keep anything in

Tell your friends if you have a problem. Its not as embarrassing as you might think.

Don't be afraid to seek professional help if you are feeling mentally unwell. There is no shame in it

Seek support if you need it. Mental health needs as much maintenance as physical health so look after all aspects of you, not only what you can see.

A number of people also specifically mentioned broadening your social circle outside of Irish people as a way of looking after mental health

Don't isolate yourself within the Irish community. Mix with local people

Try and meet as many people as you can from the country you live in – it should help with stress and make you more relaxed.

Make the effort to try and make the most of it. Recognise that no matter how much you miss Ireland this is another country with its own customs, traits and beliefs and that you need to try an integrate as best you can to get a sense of belonging. You can remain a proud Irish person while appreciating the new opportunities a country has give to you.

Don't cut yourself off completely from connections with home, but equally try to get involved in life in your new community, don't be in an "Irish ghetto" situation

Positive thinking and managing expectations

25% of respondents (95 people) gave mental health advice related to positive thinking and managing expectations

Trust yourself. Know why you are leaving and what you are trying to achieve, keep an open mind, anything can happen!

Keep your reasoning for moving in the first place at the forefront of your mind, try and keep negativity for your new "home country's" culture/ways/layout etc to a minimum it will never be home but it's someone's home

You must give it 6 months at least, even the easiest relocations take adjustments. Push yourself to meet others, re-invent yourself and have fun in doing so.....grass is always greener other side, but look at the positives around you, and remind yourself of the negatives you left behind!

*Look after your body and trust your instinct, try to think positively but it's ok to have bad days. Appreciate the experience
Keep head up and take one day at a time.*

Emigrating is tough, so go easy on yourself and recognise that you will be exhausted and find things hard. That's ok!

Try not to dwell on what you have left behind but make the most of the experience and don't wish your life away. We were counting down the days until our next visit home, it's no way to live. Friends at home are not putting their lives on hold until you return-you shouldn't either! We did this for probably the first two years. It is only in recent times that we have decided to get what we can from the situation, make new friends and have new experiences.

Don't forget the reason why you wanted to go to wherever you are. Home will always be there, embrace the opportunity you have been given.

Don't feel like you are stuck - if you really are unhappy, and you really are not feeling more settled after six months, go home.

It's not going to be easy at first it will really take a year to properly settle. Keep positive, active and busy. Get involved and enjoy all the amazing new experiences Ireland isn't going anywhere you can always go home.

Remember home is only a plane trip away and it's probably raining there!

Caution around alcohol

10 % of respondents (38 people) urged caution in the relation to the use of alcohol and drugs

Avoid increasing your drinking amounts and frequency. Get involved with a sport or activity you enjoy. Maintain a good work/life balance. Travel home when possible

Avoid the booze (it makes you more depressed and anxious) and walk or exercise more- I drink less here now than in Ireland but initially I maintained my intake as per Irish standards, which really does not work. I do not drink during the week because of work commitments.

Meet people through other activities that don't centre on the pub.

Don't drink too much when you arrive.

Other advice

Other significant final advice to keep mentally healthy included:

Keep in touch with home

Just stay in contact with home cos your calls home mean a lot to your family also

Keep up with old friends and family to discuss how you are feeling.

Keep active and in touch with people back home know that they are always there for you even if they are thousands of miles away they are only a phone call away

Don't cut yourself off completely from connections with home, but equally try to get involved in life in your new community, don't be in an "Irish ghetto" situation

Keep in contact with the people closest to you at home...be open to new challenges and people.

Prepare/research/plan

Do your research and be prepared for hard knocks, too many expect jobs, friends and a home to be waiting when they get off the plane and are not prepared to fight for a new future

Just try and do as much prep work as you can before you leave. Save, try have a job set up, have a person to meet at the other side, or join a sports club or something to meet people. Don't just socialise with Irish whose only social outlet is drinking. Do things you wouldn't/couldn't do at home. Don't have any regrets. If you don't like it- go home. Don't pressure yourself to enjoy it

Ensure you have enough money before arriving. Try to arrange accommodation before arriving, prepare cv, research jobs. All this makes arriving less stressful and helps coping

Do your research on every available service. Be mindful that most rentals come unfurnished in the uk. Very stressful

Be prepared! Have a plan for work accommodation and contacts to ease the major stress of moving and don't have set expectations as it's not what you may have thought and that's ok.

Exercise

Throw yourself into the new life and if you're spending too much time thinking about home keep busy, including continuous physical exercise

Keep fit and healthy and also get a good social circle of friends

Exercise and keep active, one of the best ways to keep mentally healthy.

Keep active, exercise is great for mental health If there is something wrong talk to someone, do not let it build up... They didn't lock the gates when you left, you can always go back one day

www.mindhowyougo.ie

If you are considering going abroad and would like some more information,
contact us by phone at +353 (0)1 873 2844
or by email at migrantproject@crosscare.ie.

You can also see our website: www.migrantproject.ie

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