

USEFUL RESOURCES & CONTACTS



You can find links to useful organisations at

www.migrantproject.ie/fifo

Mates in Construction offer a 24/7 phone helpline on **1300 642 111** for people working in construction who might need help dealing with suicidal or depressive thoughts. See www.matesinconstruction.org.au

This leaflet is produced by **Crosscare Migrant Project**. We are a Dublin based organisation that provides information to Irish people leaving Ireland & returning to Ireland from abroad. Crosscare is the social support agency of the Dublin Archdiocese. Find out more about what we do at www.migrantproject.ie



AN ROINN GNÓTHÁÍ EACHTRACHA AGUS TRÁDÁLA NA hÉIREANN
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE OF IRELAND



FIFO

FLY-IN-FLY-OUT FOR IRISH WORKERS IN AUSTRALIA

WHAT IS FIFO?



This leaflet is aimed at people thinking about or doing FIFO: Fly-in/Fly-out work in Australia. It's based on the findings of research about FIFO carried out in the last few years, and from feedback from ex-FIFO workers and from Irish support organisations. It's designed to give an overview of the main things to consider so you can prepare for the experience.

FIFO involves workers travelling to remote mining areas to work on roster for a number of weeks then returning home for a fixed break. It's most common in Western Australia and Queensland.

There are benefits and down-sides to FIFO work:

- **Positives** include high salary, expenses paid, compact schedules with extended rest days off, stable income, travel, new friendships and the opportunity to study on-site
- **Negatives** include fatigue, relationship strain, strain on mental and physical health, limited social life & holidays, extended periods away from family & friends, living on-site and limited down time

WHAT TO EXPECT?



There are many different standards of employment in FIFO work, so **it's good to do some research into what on-site and local conditions will be like.**

Things to look for in an employer:

- **Information on Health & Safety policies.** Make sure you know the company policy on using safety equipment, safely operating machinery and alcohol consumption - some companies have a zero-tolerance approach to breaches of these policies
- **Flexible rosters.** A typical roster or 'swing' is 4 weeks on, one week off. 12 hour shifts are standard. Rosters vary between projects. Consider how long it will take you to travel home on your 'off' days
- **Quality accommodation facilities,** such as an en-suite toilet or bathroom, air conditioning, television and internet access, good insulation from sound and temperature
- **Sporting and recreation facilities** such as a pool, gym, tennis or basketball courts, team sports and so on
- **Mobile phone reception and free Wi-Fi**
- **24 hour on-site medical facilities** with a doctor on call
- **Opportunities for family to visit**
- **Quality fresh food** with lots of variation and healthy options

WHAT TO EXPECT?



Accommodation

During your work 'swings', you will spend considerable lengths of time on-site. You will need a comfortable and relaxing space where you can wind down in between your shifts and have undisturbed sleep. It's important to find out about where you will be staying and what type of accommodation you will have.

The **quality of accommodation varies** largely depending on the company and project site. Accommodation sites are **remote** and often basic with a fenced perimeter and security checkpoints (including bag checks). **'Motelling'** is common on some sites where you stay in a different room each time you return to site. It can make it harder to become familiar with other workers, which can lead to isolation. **'Hot bedding'** is another practice where the same room and same bed can be used by two occupants on opposing shifts.

What you can do:

- **Find out about the type of accommodation and other facilities available on-site** before signing your contract
- Look for benefits like air conditioning, fresh food, gyms and other recreational outlets

WHAT TO EXPECT?



Adjustment

The harsh weather conditions, the remoteness of sites and poor communication technology on-site can be challenging for most workers, particularly if you are not from Australia. **It takes time to adjust when both coming home and going back on-site**, especially as you may be working in a different time zone to where you are permanently resident. Adjusting to a different time zone and shift work sleeping patterns can be tough.

What you can do:

- Make time to **relax** by reading, watching TV or listening to music
- Make time to **be sociable** both on-site and at home
- Keep in touch with friends & family
- Make time to **exercise** at the gym, walk during shifts, and take part in sports activities
- Get a copy of the **FIFO toolkit 'Keeping your head screwed on'** for helpful tips on how to relieve stress (*see link on last page to useful resources*)

WHAT TO EXPECT?



Fatigue

Working 12 hour shifts over a period of 4 weeks combined with travelling long distances to and from site can lead to fatigue. Fatigue can increase the risk of accidents at work, especially for night shift workers and towards the end of 'swings'. It can be hard to concentrate and stay alert when working long shifts and performing repetitive tasks.

Night shift work may affect your short term memory. Poor quality sleep can make you irritable and tired, impacting on your relationships, work performance and mood. Working and living in close quarters can lead to conflict, competitiveness and in some cases bullying. There can also be a macho culture where you are expected to fit in.

What you can do:

- Socialise, but take time for yourself when you need it
- Take **regular breaks, sleep & eat well, and keep hydrated**
- Enquire about alternative roster options if you feel you need a change
- Look into what supports are available on-site and at home
- Get support if you need it. **It's ok to ask for help**

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF



Health

Studies show that FIFO workers are at higher risk of mental ill-health and suicide. When working extended hours, you may experience exhaustion which can prevent you from looking after your health. You may find that your mood is affected and this could lead to stress and worry. In some cases substance abuse and relationship breakdowns have also been associated with living a split lifestyle.

What you can do:

- **Talk to your peers** if you are finding things difficult, they may have had similar experiences
- Find out if your employer offers an **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** which can provide support with your mental health
- **Talk to your trusted family members or friends** about how you are feeling
- Choose **healthy eating options** and **exercise**
- **Get enough sleep**
- Get involved in **social activities** on-site
- **Contact Irish support organisations in Australia** for information on how to get involved in your community (*see link on last page for contact details*)

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF



Drinking and drug use

FIFO work has been associated with **higher instances of drug and alcohol abuse** due to long periods of separation from family, a higher income and lack of activities. Alcohol is available at some sites and the wet mess (bar) is a popular venue for socialising. Non-drinkers can find it difficult to socialise and may feel more isolated. **Random alcohol and drug tests** are administered on-site with a strict zero tolerance policy when going on shift. Boredom and stress can lead to binge drinking and drug use especially on days off.

What you can do:

- Find an activity that is fulfilling and gets the most out of your limited time off on-site, such as using the gym or recreational facilities
- Prevent boredom and isolation by taking the time on-site to study after work or get involved in sport or other available activities
- Make plans for what you'll do when you're off work
- If you feel you're relying too much on alcohol or drugs, speak to someone who can help (*see link on last page*)

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF



FIFO for women

The majority of FIFO workers are men, and women are sometimes under greater pressure to conform to the expectations of a male dominant culture. Women can face issues such as increased male attention, sexual harassment, discrimination and lower wages.

What you can do:

- Establish a **support network** of female friends in work and keep in contact with friends and family for support
- **Talk to your employer** about what their policies are in relation to the experiences of women in the work place
- Check out womeninmining.com

FIFO for families

Your family may find it difficult to manage day to day life without you, particularly if you have children and they are lone parenting while you are working. There are FIFO family support groups and networks where they can share their experiences.

What you can do:

- **Talk to them** and **encourage them to seek support**
- Check **supports available** like fifowife.com and FIFOfamilies.com
- Encourage them to **contact Irish organisations** to get involved in the community

LOOKING AFTER YOUR RELATIONSHIPS



Being away from home for long periods of time can place a strain on your relationships. Communication with loved ones is essential for combatting isolation, however there may be problems with the Wi-Fi or networks on-site, and your family or partner may be based in a different time zone.

Some workers can experience anxiety or depression about their relationship. Partners of FIFO workers can also feel isolated. Having sole responsibility for parenting can be difficult for partners with children at home.

What you can do:

- **Look after your relationships.** Family and friends can listen, provide support and may be able to help
- **Stay in contact** with your family and friends through internet, social media and phone calls in your free time
- **Schedule family holiday celebrations** to dates when you'll be home – if you miss an important event try to celebrate it on an alternative date
- **Get involved in everyday family life when at home.** Help with everyday things like homework and kids' bedtime

LOOKING AFTER YOUR FUTURE



FIFO work can sometimes lead to financial difficulties and conflict within relationships. An influx of income can be difficult to manage, and some FIFO workers have reported falling into a credit trap forcing them to work for longer than initially planned in order to pay back big loans. It is important to remain financially responsible in order to make your FIFO work worthwhile.

FIFO work may not be a long term option or choice for everyone. Long absences from home and long hard shift-work can lead to burn-out.

What you can do:

- **Make a financial plan** and have an exit strategy before you start FIFO work
- **Prepare yourself financially** - save and limit your spending
- Find out whether your employer offers any **financial advice**
- Some companies offer **Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)**, which can be used by FIFO workers for support with issues such as stress and financial difficulties