



Emigrant Support Service



ADVICE &
INFORMATION



OUTREACH
VISITS



HOUSING
ASSISTANCE



CONNECT

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**Thinking of returning or
moving to Ireland?**

Get in touch

Welcome from our CEO

As the world continues to grapple with Covid-19, here in Ireland we are just one week in to a nationwide six-week lockdown, where the highest level of restrictions are now in place. In our September Newsletter we reported on the National Framework for Living with Covid-19, and while there was much talk about a 'second wave', none of us anticipated such extreme measures would be implemented so soon and for so long. We had hoped we could return to some sort of normality, while at the same time observing public health advice, but this is not yet possible. We must continue to adhere to the restrictions in place in the hope that we can come together for Christmas.

Our offices have remained opened throughout the past seven months and we have been busier than ever. Our outreach and home visiting service is a vital life-line for many people who have returned home in both planned and crisis situations in recent months. Coming home in a pandemic has been very challenging as most front-line services have been closed or are operating at a reduced scale since March. Furthermore, people have been unable to reach out to friends and relatives in the same way as pre-Covid times. We know that our service has been one of the few 'in-person' contact many have had since their return.

We were delighted to attend virtual network briefings with Irish in Britain recently and take part in other online forums with groups in Ireland and abroad. In early October, we also partnered with Irish in France, Crosscare and Citizens Information to co-facilitate a Returning to Ireland webinar. It was great to meet with so many diverse groups and individuals across France and to form new alliance with some who are considering returning home in the future. We look forward to strengthening this relationship in the coming months.

Our lives have become virtual since March and while we have adjusted well in some ways, we know this is no substitute for human contact. Human interaction is normal and as social beings we need each other. We have all missed not meeting family and friends and welcoming our relatives home on holidays this year. We have missed attending weddings, funerals and other rituals that are so important for us all. We continue to encourage people to reach out to each other to get us over this crisis. While live human connection is best, a phone call, with a real voice, is better than text, and if possible a video chat is better than a phone call. Let people know how much you care about them and we can get through this together.

Alone We Can Do So Little; Together We Can Do So Much: Helen Keller



Government of Ireland
Emigrant Support Programme
an Irish Cultural Enterprise in association with
Department of Energy, Affairs and Trade

Some announcements from Budget Day (13th October 2020)

- Fuel Allowance to increase by €3.50 a week to €28 a week from 4th January 2021
 - Living Alone Allowance for qualifying welfare recipients will increase by €5 a week, to €19, from 1st January 2021
- Carer's Support Grant will be increased by €150 a year, bringing it up to €1850 annually, from June 2011 (the CSG is paid in June each year)
- Illness Benefit – the waiting period will be reduced from six to three days so that people can be paid from their fourth day of illness. (effective from end of February 2021)
 - Disability Allowance – the earnings disregard is increasing from €120 per week to €140 per week with effect from June 2021.
 - Extension of Parent's Leave and Benefit. It will be increased from 2 weeks to 5 weeks from April 2021 and it will apply in relation to all children born since November 2019.
 - Widowed or Surviving Civil Partner Grant – increased from €6,000 to €8,000.
 - Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP); Self-employed people on PUP can recommence work and earn up to €480 per month while retaining their full PUP entitlement.
 - State pension age will remain at 66 years.
 - From midnight on 13th of October, cigarettes went up by 0.50 cent, bringing the cost of a pack of 20 to €14. There was no change in the excise duty on alcohol

Brexit measures (of €340 million) announced in the Budget were prepared on the assumption that there will be no bilateral trade deal between the UK and EU. Funding will be provided to put in place the controls and checks needed for agri-food exports to, and imports from Britain, from 1st January 2021. Compliance funding will be available to carry out work at ports and airports. An additional 500 staff will bring the total number of staff to 1,500 for carrying out checks.

This new flexible Recovery Fund of €3.4 billion will allow for specific measures in response to Brexit and COVID-19 to be introduced as needed. It will focus on three main areas: infrastructure development, reskilling and retraining, supporting investment and jobs.

Expenditure of €100 million has been provided to various Government departments in relation to Brexit preparations.

Housing opportunities for Safe Home applicants; Co. Kerry & Co. Mayo

Co. Kerry; A Housing Association in **Castleisland** has a one-bedroom apartment available. The unit is part of a scheme of 4 newly constructed apartments, finished to a high standard. The scheme is set in a central location, close to services and amenities. Interested parties must be registered and approved on the Kerry County Council housing list. Maximum weekly rent is €73, tenants on low income may qualify for some assistance with rent costs. For more information, please contact the Safe Home office, as soon as possible.

Co. Mayo; Ballyhaunis Social Housing have a one-bedroom bungalow coming available shortly. While priority will be given to Mayo applicants who are registered on the Mayo County Council housing list, the Housing Association will also consider suitable candidates who are not on the housing list. Those who are not approved by the Council will have to cover the full weekly rent (€55), without assistance

Driving Matters

UK/NI Driver's licence exchange and Brexit

The National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) is issuing a final reminder to anyone resident in Ireland with a UK / NI driving licence that they need to exchange it now, as their UK/NI licence will not be valid to drive here after 31st December 2020.

While the UK has left the EU, a transition period was agreed that allowed for the exchange of driving licences to continue. That transition period ends on the 31st of December 2020.

If you are resident in Ireland and using a UK licence to drive it will no longer be valid to drive in Ireland after this date.

As it can take longer to process a UK / NI licence exchange, and there may be further delays caused by a last-minute increase in applications, plus extra demand on the service caused by Covid 19, you should make an application as soon as possible.

To exchange your licence, you must complete a licence application form and present this, the correct fee and your UK licence at any NDLS centre. You must make an appointment online at www.ndls.ie to attend any of the 36 NDLS centres. **Note!** some restrictions may apply due to Level 5 guidelines, so contact NDLS in advance.

Q. Will I be able to exchange my UK/NI licence after 31 December 2020 when the UK/NI have left the EU? A. The Government is planning to put in place appropriate arrangements for people residing in Ireland, that will allow for the exchange of a UK/NI driving licence for an Irish driving licence after the transition period end of 31 December 2020. However, your licence is only valid at that point for the purpose of exchanging it for an Irish licence, it is not valid as a licence in its own right to drive here.

Notes!

- **Visitors** to Ireland holding a UK/NI licence, will continue to be entitled to drive in Ireland as a visitor with their existing driving licence. Visitors won't be required to carry an International Driving Permit in order to drive here so long as they carry their UK/NI driving licence with them.
- As yet, there is **no clarity on how holders of UK /NI licences who move to Ireland after the transition period will be affected.** We will report on any developments on this side of things as soon as that information becomes available.

Living in Ireland, aged 70 years+ and need to renew your driver's licence?

As a result of Covid19 and for a limited period, people aged 70 years and over, living in Ireland will be contacted directly by the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) and invited to renew their licence or permit by post, rather than having to present in person at their local NDLS Centre. The process of contacting drivers 70 years and over will begin this coming week and will initially target renewals due in October 2020.

Applicants do not have to contact the NDLS directly. All those 70 years and over who have previously presented at an NDLS centre in the last 5 years, and whose licence or permit is due to expire, will receive a renewal pack in the post and invited to apply by post. The pack will include a partially completed application form that the customer must then complete.

If a medical report form is required, this must be included along with the completed application form in the pre-addressed envelope provided (postage stamp required) and posted back to the NDLS. However, applicants are reminded that **unless they have a specific medical condition (as listed on the application form), they do not need to provide a medical report when applying to renew their licence.** This temporary exemption was introduced to remove pressure on the health system at a time of crisis and is in place until 31st December 2020.

There is no fee required as customers 70 years of age and over are exempt from paying the cost of a driving licence or permit renewal.

If someone does receive an application pack in the post and plans on renewing this way, **but may have already booked an appointment at an NDLS centre, you must cancel this appointment by logging on to www.ndls.ie** or contacting your local NDLS centre.

COVID19 Restrictions – Ireland - Level 5

Ireland moved into Level 5 restrictions for six weeks from Thursday October 22nd until December 1st. Please see the graphic below for an outline of what Level 5 restrictions mean for 'day to day life' in Ireland.

 Visitors	No	Own household only - no visitors
1  Other gatherings	Limited	Meet with 1 other household in an outdoor setting which is not a home or garden, such as a park
2  Indoor gatherings	No	No organised indoor gatherings should take place
 Outdoor gatherings	No	No organised outdoor gatherings should take place
3  Funerals	25	Up to 25 mourners can attend
4  Weddings	25	Up to 25 guests can attend a wedding ceremony and reception
 Education	Open	Schools, early learning and childcare services will continue to remain open
5  Sport	Limited	Elite sport and GAA inter-county championships will be played. Children can train in small groups
 Domestic travel	5k	Stay at home. Exercise within 5 kilometres of home
 Hospitality	Limited	Take away food or delivery only
 Wet pubs	Limited	Take away or delivery only
 Retail	Limited	Essential retail only. All other retail and personal services closed.
 Public transport	Limited	Capacity restricted to 25%. Walk or cycle where possible. Essential workers and essential purposes only

EU member States recently adopted a coordinated approach to travel restrictions in the context of COVID-19. This **'traffic lights' approach** provides for regions across the European Union (EU) and European Economic Area (EEA) to be categorised as green, orange, red or grey, on the basis of the risk levels associated with COVID-19. A combined indicator map will be published each week by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), based on agreed criteria, including the 14-day cumulative incidence rate, testing rate and testing positivity rates. In line with the EU recommendation, there will be no entry restrictions on passengers travelling from green regions.

The 'traffic lights' approach is set to come into effect in Ireland from 8th November. There are currently no countries on Ireland's 'green list'. People returning/coming into Ireland must complete the COVID Passenger Locator Form. They should also restrict their movements for 14 days after arrival (this means staying at home and avoiding contact with other people and social situations). After the 14 days, they must adhere to the relevant public health guidelines and Government restrictions that are in place.