



Emigrant Support Service

December 2020 – Issue 227

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### Safe Home office hours:

Monday–Thursday:  
9am-5pm

Friday: 9am-4pm

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

**Get in touch**



ADVICE &  
INFORMATION



OUTREACH  
VISITS



HOUSING  
ASSISTANCE



CONNECT

### Welcome from our CEO

2020 has been a difficult year in so many ways but we wait in anticipation in the hope that 2021 will be a year of change and positivity and that we can get back to some sort of 'new normality'. While we have all faced unprecedented change, loss, uncertainty and our lives have been turned upside down, we have also witnessed so much kindness, love, good will and community spirit right around the world. We have connected with each other in ways we never could have imagined before COVID.

The outpouring of kindness and giving leads us well into the Christmas season. While many of our loved ones will not be able to travel home for the holiday season this year, we know novel ideas of connection are being explored and some families will be marking Christmas on Zoom or on the many other virtual platforms. We came across a wonderful online 'Festival of Christmas of Kindness', funded by the Department of Community and Rural Development, and includes carol singing, bingo, storytelling, yoga, quizzes and much more. You can join for FREE at [www.workitout.info](http://www.workitout.info)

On the 18th November, the Irish government published its new Diaspora Strategy for 2020–2025. We welcome its launch and its continued focus on supporting the most vulnerable, marginalised and under-represented of the Irish diaspora abroad through the Emigrant Support Programme (ESP). We also welcome its renewed emphasis on minimising the challenges and removing the barriers faced by individuals and families returning. We were particularly encouraged to see a focus on celebrating the diversity and breadth of the Irish diaspora and its impact. We now look forward to working with the Irish Abroad Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs and the broad network of stakeholders to advance its implementation.

We welcome an upcoming call later this month for applicants for the very successful 'Back for Business' initiative for returning emigrants by the Department of Foreign Affairs. This initiative is tapping into the entrepreneurial potential of those who have lived abroad for at least a year and have returned to Ireland in the last three years and are starting or have recently started a business. If you are, or know someone who might be eligible, see; [www.backforbusiness.com](http://www.backforbusiness.com) to register your interest

As the year draws to a close we are excited that Safe Home will be marking our 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary in the coming year! This is a momentous occasion for us and we will be launching an online calendar of events early in the New Year.

On behalf of the staff, volunteers and board, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a safe, healthy and peaceful holiday season; look out for each other and check in on those who are alone or vulnerable at this time. We know it will not be like previous Christmases, however, we are already looking forward to welcoming our loved ones home in 2021.

I would like to end on a famous Seamus Heaney quote, which seems to have captured our mood and our need for hope in a time of collective anxiety; *"If we winter this one out, we can summer anywhere."*

## Frequently Asked Question: Transfer of Unemployment Benefit

I have been in receipt of unemployment benefit in France for the past 3 months.

### **Q. Can you tell me if I can continue to receive this if I move back home to Ireland?**

**A.** In general, to receive unemployment benefits you need to stay in the country which pays your benefits. However, **under certain conditions**, you can go to another EU country to look for work and continue to receive your unemployment benefits from the country where you became unemployed.

### **Staying abroad for 3 months**

You can carry on receiving your unemployment benefit for at least **3 months** from the EU country where you were last working - and **up to a maximum of 6 months**, depending on the institution paying your benefit.

You can only do this if you are:

- **wholly unemployed** (not partially or intermittently) and
- **entitled to receive unemployment benefits** in the country where you became unemployed.

**Before leaving**, you must:

- have been registered as an unemployed jobseeker with the employment services in the country where you became unemployed for at least 4 weeks (exceptions can be made)
- apply to your national employment services for a **U2 form** (formerly E 303) – this is an authorisation to export your unemployment benefits.

**On arrival** in Ireland, you will need to:

- register as a jobseeker with the local Intreo/social welfare office **within 7 days** from the date on which you ceased to be available to the employment services in the country you left and
- submit your U2 form
- agree to any checks made on unemployment benefit claimants in your new country as if you were receiving unemployment benefits there.

**Note!** It is advisable to explore your rights and duties as a jobseeker in Ireland. They may be very different from those in France.

### **If you want to stay for longer than 3 months**

You will need to apply for an extension from the national employment service in the country where you became unemployed. They **MAY** extend the 3-month period up to 6 months.

**Note!** Not all countries grant extensions so you will need to verify this in advance.

Most of the countries that do grant extensions have clear criteria for assessing requests. They could, for instance, ask you for:

- evidence of any efforts you made to find a job during the first 3 months
- evidence that you have a better chance of finding a job abroad during the extended period
- information about job opportunities on your host country's labour market.

**!** Ensure you apply for the extension as early as possible. You must apply before the end of the initial 3-month period.

## Living Alone Increase (known as Living Alone Allowance)

The Living Alone Increase is an extra payment for people on social welfare payments who are living alone. The Living Alone Increase will go up by €5 per week from (€14 to €19), from the week beginning 6<sup>th</sup> Jan 2021.

**Rules;** If you are 66 years or over and live alone, you will qualify if you are getting one of the following payments;

- State Pension (Contributory)
- State Pension (Non-Contributory)
- Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Contributory) Pension
- Widow's/Widower's Pension under the Occupational Injuries Benefit Scheme
- Incapacity Supplement under the Occupational Injuries Benefit Scheme
- Deserted Wife's Benefit
- You will also qualify if you are under 66, live alone and are getting Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Incapacity Supplement or Blind Pension.

**Note!** People who are living alone abroad and are in receipt of one of these qualifying payments can qualify for the Living Alone Increase. For more information, contact the office paying your primary welfare payment.

To get the increase in your payment you must live completely alone. However, there are some exceptions:

-If you are living in an extension of a family member's home, for example, in a granny flat, you can qualify for the increase if you can show that you have facilities to cook and eat alone. You must also have your own living/dining and sleeping accommodation.

- You may also qualify as living alone if you are aged or infirm and have a friend or relative to stay for security reasons at night-time only OR if the you go to stay with relatives at night (while maintaining your permanent residence elsewhere).

- People who live in sheltered accommodation may qualify if they are regarded as living independently within that accommodation.

## To BE Irish @Christmas – Join in or register an event

The Department of Foreign Affairs recently launched the *To Be Irish @ Christmas* initiative, which will feature events being run from the **21<sup>st</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020**.

Through this campaign, the Department is inviting members of the Irish community abroad to promote events, join in and connect with the global Irish diaspora, in particular with those who will not be able to return home this year due to COVID-19. It is also aimed at the wider Irish diaspora and those who have a grá or are interested in Ireland and Irish culture.

Some examples of events that can be highlighted;

- Online events and activities that celebrate Irish heritage and uniquely Irish seasonal traditions.
- Events and activities showcasing Irish Culture engaging all types of audiences both in Ireland and globally.
- Other relevant events including theatre, art, performance, visual art, food, literature, spoken word, comedy, talks, discussion, dance, music, circus, cabaret or storytelling.

**For more information** or to register your event (deadline for registration is 12<sup>th</sup> December), please see; **[www.tobeirish.ie](http://www.tobeirish.ie)** or email: **[info@tobeirish.ie](mailto:info@tobeirish.ie)**

### UK Winter Fuel Payment

If you were born on or before 5 October 1954, you could get between £100 and £300 to help you pay your heating bills. This is known as a 'Winter Fuel Payment'.

You usually get a Winter Fuel Payment automatically if you are eligible and you get the State Pension or another social security benefit (not Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, Child Benefit or Universal Credit).

If you're eligible but do not get paid automatically, you will need to make a claim.

The deadline for claiming payments for winter 2020 to 2021 is 31 March 2021.

Most payments are made automatically between November and December. You should get your money by 13 January 2021.

If you do not receive your payment or if you want to report a change in your circumstances, e.g, if you stop getting a benefit, move house or go into care, contact;

Winter Fuel Payment Centre Telephone: 0800 731 0160

Telephone from outside the UK: +44 (0)191 218 7777

You can claim a Winter Fuel Payment abroad if ALL of the following apply:

- you were born on or before 5 October 1954
- you live in Switzerland or a European Economic Area (EEA) country (except for Cyprus, France, Gibraltar, Greece, Malta, Portugal or Spain)
- you have a genuine and sufficient link to the UK - this can include having lived or worked in the UK, and having family in the UK

**Note!** you do not need to have claimed Winter Fuel payments in the UK before you go abroad.

### Overview of COVID-19 Regulations– December 2020

Ireland is currently in Level 3 restrictions and the below info-graphic below details what is permitted under these restrictions.

| Activity                       | From 1 December                                 | From 4 December                                 | From 18 December       |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Visitors to your home          | No visitors, apart from those in support bubble | No visitors, apart from those in support bubble | 2 other households     |
| Places of worship              | 50 max                                          | 50 max                                          | 50 max                 |
| Museums, galleries and cinemas | Open                                            | Open                                            | Open                   |
| Restaurants                    | Closed                                          | Open                                            | Open                   |
| Pubs operating as restaurants  | Closed                                          | Open                                            | Open                   |
| Wet pubs                       | Delivery and take-away                          | Delivery and take-away                          | Delivery and take-away |
| Retail                         | Open                                            | Open                                            | Open                   |

**Note!** Face coverings are now recommended in busy or crowded outdoor areas.

## Brexit..... What now?

The UK left the European Union on 31 January 2020 after both sides concluded a Withdrawal Agreement to facilitate an orderly departure. The Withdrawal Agreement provided for a transition period until the end of this year, 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020. A Memorandum of Understanding between both Governments outlined commitments to maintain existing arrangements under the following key areas;

**Healthcare:** Ireland and the UK have a number of areas in the provision of healthcare where they are interconnected. Both Governments have committed to maintaining the current healthcare arrangements under the Common Travel Area. Under the CTA, Irish citizens and British citizens who live in, work in, or visit the other state have the right to access healthcare there. Other North South cooperation arrangements will also continue on the island of Ireland.

The Irish government is working to ensure that new arrangements will provide, to the extent possible, for continued access to the health services between Ireland and the UK, including on the island of Ireland, which patients in both jurisdictions currently access.

Irish citizens and British citizens who live in, work in, or visit the other State will continue to have the right to access healthcare there.

**Residency and freedom of travel:** The status of British citizens in Ireland will remain unchanged. British citizens will not need a visa or any form of prior authorisation to travel to Ireland, any form of residence permit or employment permit. In Ireland, they will continue to enjoy the right to live, work, study and access services, as they currently do.

Irish citizens can continue to travel freely between the UK and Ireland in the same manner as before. There are no requirements for passport controls in operation for Irish and British citizens travelling within the **Common Travel Area** i.e. between Ireland and the UK, and there will be no change to this as a result of Brexit. However, as regular passengers would be aware, all air and sea carriers require some form of identification and some carriers regard a passport as the only valid identification.

For journeys on the island of Ireland, British and Irish citizens do not require any travel documents when crossing the land border.

**Social welfare:** Because of the unique nature of the **Common Travel Area** and the associated rights and privileges which it provides and will continue to provide for Irish and British citizens in each other's countries, Ireland and the United Kingdom have formalised the pre-existing Common Travel Area social protection arrangements in a legally binding agreement.

Under the terms of the agreement, all existing arrangements regarding Social Insurance entitlements will be maintained in Ireland and the UK. This means that Irish citizens living in Ireland maintain the right to benefit from Social Insurance contributions made when working in the UK and to access Social Insurance payments if living in the UK and vice versa.

### Note!

The information above gives a broad overview of 'commitments' post-Brexit in a number of key areas. However, at the time of going to print, there remains uncertainty across the board and confusion as to how any agreements will actually work in practice after 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020.

As reported previously, no arrangements have been put in place as yet regarding the exchange of driving licences between Ireland and the UK. While there is 'talk' of a reciprocal arrangement being put in place, **nothing** has been finalised in relation to this ..... Watch this space!

## Christmas holiday arrangements

The Safe Home office will be closed from 5pm on Tuesday 22nd December and will re-open on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 9am



### A festive 'snap' from Christmas of olden days (December 2019!)

Safe Home staff, from left; Brenda Fleming, Karen McHugh, Mary Ann Fadian, Noreen Mulrine



*Nollaig Shona agus athbhliain faoi mhaise daoibh go léir  
From the Safe Home Ireland Board members & staff*



Government of Ireland  
Emigrant Support Programme

An Boinn Góidéal Eachtracha agus Trádála  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Safe Home Programme CLG trading as Safe Home Ireland

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