



SAFE HOME IRELAND
DIASPORA SUPPORT SERVICE

Dec '25 – Issue 278

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Monday to Thursday:

9.00am to 5.00pm

Friday:

9.00am to 4.00pm

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

Get in touch with us!

Safe Home Programme CLG
trading as Safe Home Ireland
Charity No: 20049119
Company Reg No: 351678

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Government of Ireland
Emigrant Support Programme
An Buidéal Ceathrúcháin agus Tuisle
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



Welcome from our CEO

As 2025 draws to a close, I am pleased to share some key highlights and achievements from what has been a busy and impactful year for Safe Home Ireland.

In **February**, we were pleased to join partners in Ireland and the US to launch a campaign for reciprocal US–Irish driver licence exchange, which is now a key commitment in the 2025 Programme for Government. We continued to raise the issue across all relevant fora, and there has been encouraging progress to date. The [Minister for Transport, Darragh O'Brien TD](#), has written to the Governor of New York, the first State formally approached. The Road Safety Authority is examining its feasibility. We will continue to share updates as they arise; in the meantime, please consider subscribing to the campaign mailing list [HERE](#).

Also in **February**, we welcomed our partners from the European Return Migration Network (ERMiNe) to Dublin for the project launch at [EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum](#). This is our first European Erasmus+ project, coordinated by [Werkstatt für Sozialforschung e.V. \(Germany\)](#) and delivered by key organisations from [Germany](#), [Spain](#), [Latvia](#), [Italy](#), [Poland](#), as well as [Crosscare Irish Diaspora Support Project](#) here in Ireland. The project aims to strengthen support for intra-European mobility and return through shared learning and best practice. Further project meetings were held in Brussels in June and Berlin in November. We look forward to working together to explore continuation and expansion of this Project in 2026. Further information on the Project can be found on our website [HERE](#).

One of the standout moments of the year was the launch of our new [Safe Home Ireland Website](#) in **September** at EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum in Dublin. Our new site significantly improves access to information for returning emigrants and partner organisations. To mark both the launch and our 25th anniversary, we hosted a stakeholder's event, bringing together partners from the US, Australia, the UK and Ireland. We encourage you to explore our new website [HERE](#) and to share it with colleagues, partners, networks, and anyone who may be thinking of returning or moving to Ireland.

A special highlight of the year was my **US Outreach** trip, to New York and Boston in **October** and **November**. Funded by a separate grant from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Emigrant Support Programme - this was an invaluable opportunity for me to connect with Irish diaspora, some of whom are thinking and planning to return or moving to Ireland (some voluntarily and some involuntarily). It was great to visit so many Irish Centres and meet with all of the dedicated staff and volunteer teams. A special thank you to everyone I met and for the warm welcome. The Centres are a lifeline for many in our diaspora and a 'home away from home'.

Our **UK outreach** also remained strong, with visits by our Outreach & Advocacy Officers to Irish Centres in London, Luton, and areas mainly in the South-East, hosting Moving/Returning to Ireland Information Clinics, and meeting many of our housing applicants too and others thinking about moving/returning to Ireland. We look forward to broadening this work in 2026 across other locations in the UK.

We continue to work closely and meet regularly with our **key partners here in Ireland**, [Crosscare Irish Diaspora Support Project](#), [Citizens Information](#) and [Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas](#), to ensure we work together to offer a co-ordinated and seamless service to the Irish diaspora and those who are considering or have returned home to Ireland. We also worked in partnership with many [Irish Embassies and Consular Services in Ireland and Abroad](#) to support, guide and directly assist those who required our support to return home. We were also delighted to visit **Irish Embassies** and to meet with **Consular** teams in-person in Brussels, Berlin, New York and Boston on our trips abroad during the year.

Throughout the year, our **Returned Emigrants Network (REN)** continued to meet in Laois, Sligo, and online. REN provides returnees with a space to connect, share the positive aspects of returning to Ireland, and address some of the challenges, with the aim of advocating for a smoother journey home for others. We hope to extend REN gatherings to additional locations in 2026. If you would like more information or to get involved, contact our office directly [HERE](#).

We wish you all a safe, healthy and peaceful holiday season. Christmas can be challenging for many, so look out for each other and check in on those who might be alone at this time. For the latest news and updates, be sure to stay connected with us on all the main social media.

A Heartfelt Thank you to our Funders, Sponsors, Donors and Supporters

As we reflect on the year, we would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest appreciation to all those who supported Safe Home Ireland throughout 2025.

We are particularly thankful for the continued support of the [Emigrant Support Programme](#), managed by Irish Abroad Unit at The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, for multi-annual core funding of our work, but also for an additional grant this year that enabled us to travel to the US to meet with and assist diaspora there, particularly those in challenging situations. Their contribution, alongside their ongoing backing since our inception, plays a crucial role in allowing us to support Irish citizens abroad and those seeking to return home.

January marked the third anniversary of **Friends of Safe Home Ireland**, a group who have done so much to support and promote Safe Home Ireland and introduce us to many new partners, donors and supporters. We are grateful to all the members, who prefer to work quietly behind the scenes, but whose impact is felt far and wide. Their dedication and generosity enable us to continue our vital work, and we look forward to continued collaboration again in 2026.

In **May**, we walked the [National Famine Way](#) (in reverse) for the third year, travelling from [EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum](#), Dublin to [The National Famine Museum | Strokestown Park](#), Co. Roscommon. This year we completed the 167 km route over nine stages in just two days. We look forward to taking part again in May 2026. We welcome you to join us, for details see [HERE](#). We want to sincerely thank our partners at EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum, The National Famine Way and the National Famine Museum at Strokestown Park for their continued support and commitment to our mission.

In **September** we were pleased to unveil our new Website designed by [Growth Digital Marketing](#). This was made possible through the sponsorship by Seán Brogan of [UTS Technologies](#) to whom we are indebted. Seán has been a strong supporter of Safe Home over the past three years, also providing sponsorship for our annual Calendar and merchandise for our annual Fundraising walk of the National Famine Way. This partnership means so much to us.

We want to acknowledge and thank our **Ambassador**, [Seán Keane](#), for his continued and unwavering support for our mission. Seán has been excellent in spreading the word about our work at concerts in Ireland and abroad – it is now common for someone to ring us and say they heard about Safe Home when attending one of his concerts. We look forward this weekend (14th December) to yet another Seán Keane fundraising Concert in Dublin. A heartfelt thank you also to **Fr. Alan Hilliard**, Administrator of City Quay and Westland Row Parishes, Dublin, for his warm hospitality and continued support in hosting us for a third year!

We would also like to express our sincere thanks to all our **regular donors, sponsors and planned givers**, some who wish to remain anonymous; also to the many **new donors** this year from both Ireland and abroad. Your support is invaluable, and we are deeply grateful for your ongoing commitment.

Finally, a special thank you to our **2026 Calendar sponsors and photographers**, whose support has helped make the Calendar an important fundraising tool for our work.

Your collective generosity and support helps us reach out to Irish citizens abroad and to those seeking to return home, ensuring they have the support they need during what is often a challenging transition. **Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.**

Slán agus Beannacht - A special Tribute to our former Patron, Michael D. Higgins

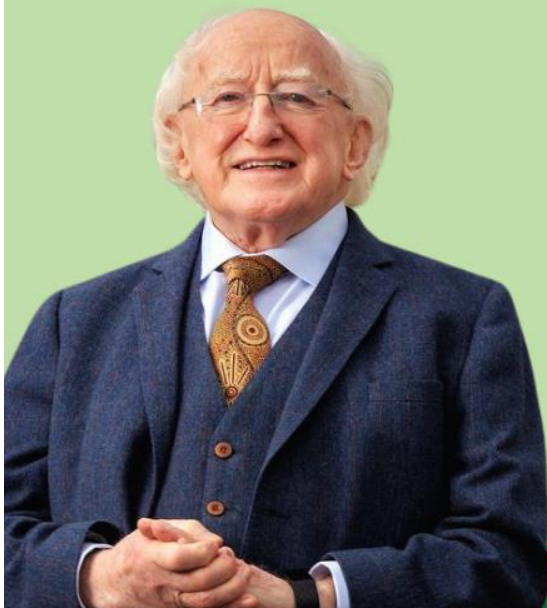
In **November**, we said goodbye to our Patron of 14 years, former President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins. It has been an enormous honour for Safe Home Ireland, and for all those we work with, to have had the President as our Patron. With his own deep family links to emigration, Michael D. has long demonstrated empathy, understanding and unwavering support for Irish emigrants worldwide.

One of the most enduring symbols of that support is the Tilley Lamp that shines from an upstairs window at [Áras an Uachtaráin](#). First placed by President Mary Robinson and maintained by every President since, the lamp serves as a warm and constant beacon for Irish emigrants, reflecting Ireland's tradition of guiding strangers home. President Higgins continued this tradition with great sincerity and pride. We would like to extend our very best wishes to Michael D. and his wife, Sabina, for a long, happy and well-deserved retirement in Galway.

Christy Moore released a special tribute to Michael D Higgins, *Music to our Ears*, with beautiful words by our very own Johnny B Broderick and music by Gavin Murphy. You can watch it on YouTube [HERE](#)

Also, we were especially grateful for the warm message the former President shared with us to mark 25 years of Safe Home Ireland for our website launch in September

Message from Our former Patron Michael D. Higgins former President of Ireland



UACHTARÁN NA hÉIREANN
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT MICHAEL D. HIGGINS 25th Anniversary of Safe Home Ireland

Mar Uachtarán na hÉireann, may I extend my warmest congratulations to all involved in Safe Home Ireland on the occasion of your 25th anniversary, Traoslaím libh.

This is a most fitting moment to acknowledge the immense contribution that Safe Home Ireland has made over the past quarter of a century in assisting thousands of our citizens, particularly older and more vulnerable members of our Irish family, in returning home to Ireland.

In doing so, you have not only offered practical support, but also the gift of belonging, reconnecting individuals with the communities, landscapes, and culture that shaped them. In helping people to return, you are also helping to weave back into our shared story those threads that might otherwise have been lost.

This work speaks to the very best of our national values, those of compassion, solidarity, and a steadfast commitment to the dignity of each person, efforts that represent, too, the spirit of active participation and engaged citizenship at its very best.

I am delighted to learn that your ambassador Seán Keane, whose musical gifts brought such joy to those gathered at Áras an Uachtaráin earlier this year, will be part of your anniversary celebration. His presence is a testament to the enduring role of music in connecting hearts and telling the story of Ireland, wherever our people may be.

May I once again extend my warmest congratulations to all involved in Safe Home Ireland as you celebrate a quarter of a century of dedicated service.

May I wish you continued success as you continue with your important work.

Traoslaím libh, is beir gach beannacht d'ón toidhail.



Michael D. Higgins
Uachtarán na hÉireann
President of Ireland

Applying for an Irish Contributory Pension, if you live abroad

Please see [HERE](#) for an overview of the **Irish State Contributory Pension**

Depending on the level of contributions made in the Irish system, applicants may be entitled to a full or pro-rata pension (where contributions made in other qualifying countries can be combined). Applicants should apply for the Contributory Pension about 6 months before they reach pension age (currently 66 years).

Please be aware that it is possible to start the application process even if you do not have an Irish Insurance Number/PPSN.

The Pension Services here in Ireland will then liaise with you directly in relation to issuing a PPSN. If you qualify for any pension, your application will be back-dated to the date you applied, rather than the date a PPSN was issued to you.

Applying from the USA & Australia: Application and any supporting documents should be submitted by post* to:

The Pension Services Office, Department of Social Protection
State Pension Contributory Section, College Road, Sligo, F91 T384, Ireland
(*unless the client has a verified MyGov account to submit an online application*)

Pension services here can engage directly with the US Embassy in Dublin to check US contributions. This will be relevant in cases where a pro-rata pension applies.

Applying from the UK/EU: Application should be submitted via the Pension Services in the country of residence. This route makes it easier/quicker for the Irish pension services to access information on combined contributions history. The relevant application form for this is EUP65

In all cases, **follow-up queries** in relation to a pension application that has been submitted can be sent via email to: state.con@welfare.ie

UK State Pension – Entitlement to annual increase if resident outside of the UK

Q. Will I still get my UK State Pension annual incremental increase if I leave the UK?

A. Your State Pension will only increase each year if you live in:

- The [European Economic Area \(EEA\)](#)
- Gibraltar
- Switzerland
- [countries that have a social security agreement with the UK](#)

You cannot get increases in Canada or New Zealand.

Note! Your pension will go up to the current rate if you return to live in the UK.

For more information on how your pension might be affected if you leave the UK permanently, [Contact the International Pension Centre](#) Telephone: +44 (0) 191 218 7777

UK Based Support Services for Survivors of Institutional Abuse

[Fréa Renewing Roots](#), [Coventry Irish Society Midlands Irish Survivors Service](#) and the [London Irish Centre Survivors Integrated Service](#) offer specialised support for survivors of Ireland's institutions and their family members based across Britain.

The services offer trauma-informed support, by specialist staff making applications to the different payment schemes, searching for records and accessing the Irish Government tracing service. Services are free of charge and completely confidential.

In addition, each service offers regular group activities to survivors such as social events and educational activities.

If you know anyone who may benefit from accessing these services or wish to make a referral you can contact;

- [Fréa Renewing Roots](#) - Patrick Rodgers at 00 44 7432 138682; Monday to Friday 9.00am-5.00pm
- [Coventry Irish Society Midlands Irish Survivors Service](#) - Manisha O' Malley at 00 44 2476 256629; Monday to Friday 10.00am-4.00pm
- [London Irish Centre Survivors Integrated Service](#) - 0800 519 5519 Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 10.00am-4.00pm

Please Note! The Freephone number might not be available outside Britain.

Frequently Asked Questions – Driving in Ireland

Q. I am returning to live in Ireland **from the UK**. Can I keep driving on my UK licence until it expires?

A. You can drive on a valid UK driving licence in Ireland for up to 12 months, but only while you remain a visitor.

As the UK is no longer part of the EU, anyone becoming resident in Ireland must exchange their UK licence for an Irish one. This applies even if your UK licence is still valid for several years.

You can find full guidance on exchanging a UK licence, including required documents and booking an appointment for your licence exchange via: **www.ndls.ie**

For more information, contact: [National Driver Licence Service \(NDLS\)](#)

Tel: 0818 06 06 46 (within Ireland)

Tel: +353 1 671 0580 (from UK/Abroad)

Q. I am returning to live in Ireland **from the U.S.** Will I have to surrender my U.S driver's licence when I apply for an Irish one?

A. No, as there are currently no reciprocal /exchange agreements in place between Ireland and the U.S. at present, you will not have to surrender your U.S licence.

However, please be aware that once you are issued an Irish learner's driving permit, that permit will take precedence over your U.S licence here in Ireland and you must abide by all the relevant rules and regulations attached to that - please see [HERE](#) for more information.

Safe Home Ireland, together with a range of other agencies and individuals, is currently campaigning for the introduction of reciprocal driver's licence exchange arrangements between Ireland and the U.S.

For more information, to follow the Campaign's progress or spread the word, please sign up [HERE](#)

UK Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Living Abroad

If you move abroad, the way Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is paid can change. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) reviews claims to ensure that people continue to receive the right amount of money.

Mobility Component: The Mobility component of PIP is not payable outside the United Kingdom. If you move abroad, entitlement to this part of PIP will stop.

Daily Living Component: You may still qualify for the Daily Living component of PIP if you move to Switzerland or a country in the European Economic Area (EEA). However, certain conditions must be met:

- You, or a family member, must be receiving a UK benefit such as a state pension, Incapacity Benefit, or a bereavement benefit.
- Alternatively, you or a family member must have paid enough National Insurance contributions in the UK to qualify for a sickness benefit.
- You must not be working or claiming a benefit in the country where you live.
- You must also be covered by the Withdrawal Agreement.

Changes You Must Report: You must inform the DWP straightaway if there are any changes that could affect your PIP, such as:

- Starting work or claiming benefits in your new country of residence.
- Beginning to receive another UK benefit, or if an existing benefit stops.

Reconsiderations and Appeals: If you disagree with a decision about your PIP, you can request a reconsideration within one month of the decision letter. Only after a reconsideration can you appeal the decision.

Support and Advice: Further information about PIP can be found at www.gov.uk/pip

Email: team.exportability@dwp.gov.uk

Claiming UK benefits abroad; <https://www.gov.uk/claim-benefits-abroad/disability-benefits>

Immigration and Stamp 0 in Ireland – An Overview

Stamp 0 indicates permission to stay in Ireland for a temporary period, subject to conditions.

Summary of qualifying conditions:

- You must be of independent means, fully financially self-sufficient.
- Alternatively, your sponsor in Ireland must be of independent means and can support you fully.
- You cannot receive any benefits or use publicly funded services, for example be treated at a public hospital. You must have private medical insurance.
- You must not work or engage in any business, trade or profession unless specified in a letter of permission from Immigration Service Delivery.

Examples of when Stamp 0 is used - you may be given **Stamp 0** if you have permission to:

- Retire to or live in Ireland as a person of independent means
- Visit as an academic at an Irish university or college
- Live in Ireland as the elderly, dependent relative of an Irish National, or a non-EU/EEA or Swiss citizen.

Some examples of documentation required:

- Cover letter explaining your circumstances and confirming self-sufficiency.
- Copy of your passport
- Financial evidence: 6–12 months of bank statements, pension documents, savings/investment proof.
- Private medical insurance covering treatment in Ireland.
- Proof of accommodation in Ireland.
- Police clearance for any country lived in for 6+ months in the last 5 years.
- For dependent parents: evidence of dependency, sponsor's financial records, and proof the parent cannot live independently abroad.

Where to Apply - Applications are made by post only to; Stamp 0 Unit Immigration Service Delivery (ISD), 13–14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2, Ireland

For more information: Email: stamp0unit@justice.ie Website: www.irishimmigration.ie

Costs: There is no application fee. However, when registering in Ireland (following approval), there is a €300 IRP registration fee for issuing your Irish Residence Permit card.

The **average processing time** for applications can vary, it is currently 4 months. However, additional delays can be expected when applicants do not send in all of the required documents with their original application. Applications are processed in chronological order.

Important! Please be advised that this is a brief overview. The Stamp 0 application process can be complex and requirements may vary depending on your circumstances. It may be worthwhile to consult official agencies or immigration advisers before submitting your application.

Christmas Concert



We are looking forward to our annual **Christmas Concert** with our Ambassador, [Seán Keane](#), on **Sunday 14th December** at [St. Andrew's Parish Church](#), Westland Row, Dublin 2. Seán will be joined by the [Timahoe Male Choir](#) and special guest [Kate Dineen](#). This year's concert is particularly special, as it marks **25 years of Safe Home Ireland** supporting Irish emigrants globally and those who have returned home. We are delighted to celebrate this milestone with an evening of music and gratitude for everyone who has supported our mission over the years.

We are incredibly grateful to parishioners of **Dublin's South Inner City Parishes** and in particular to their Administrator **Fr. Alan Hilliard**, for his ongoing support of Safe Home Ireland.

See Eventbrite [HERE](#) for tickets **OR** contact the Safe Home Office. Tickets will also be available 'on the door'.

Our 2026 Calendar – An Ideal Christmas Gift



Our 2026 Calendar features scenic photographs from across Ireland. All images featured have been donated by the contributors named and accompanying each image are original reflections by our very own, Johnny B Broderick! The Calendar has been made possible thanks to the generous support of the sponsors mentioned each month, to whom we are most grateful. For pricing (incl p&p) and to order online, click the relevant link below or contact the Safe Home Office:

- Post within [Ireland](#)
- Post to [UK/Europe](#)
- Post to [USA/Canada](#)
- Post to [Australia/Worldwide](#)

Safe Home Office Christmas Holiday Arrangements

The Safe Home office will be closed from **4pm on Friday 19th of December** and will re-open on **Monday 5th of January 2026, at 9am**

Nollaig Shona agus athbhliain faoi mhaíse daoibh go léir
From the Staff, Board, Ambassador, Life President & Friends of Safe Home Ireland



For the latest news and updates, be sure to stay connected with us on all the main social media platforms!