

Coming Home in Crisis

Experiences of Irish emigrants returning in crisis situations





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Finally, we give particular thanks to all the returned emigrants who shared their experiences of return as part of this report.

Foreword

Ireland has a long history of support for the most vulnerable of our diaspora, not least through the Emigrant Support Programme (ESP). Ireland's Diaspora Policy commits to continuing this support for Irish emigrants around the world, particularly those who find themselves in difficulty abroad.

At home, ESP funded groups like Crosscare Migrant Project are often the first port of call for Irish emigrants who have returned in crisis. In these uncertain times, this commitment to supporting those in crises sends a strong message that Ireland cares for its Diaspora.

Return migration is not a new phenomenon, but it is one that has garnered more attention in recent years as our Diaspora make their way home from all over the world. Obstacles to return are well documented at this stage – from bureaucratic red tape to elevated car insurance premiums. Minister of State for the Diaspora and International Development, Ciaran Cannon, must be commended for making strides in addressing economic barriers for returning Irish emigrants.

As Senator for the Irish Diaspora, I continue to lobby for the rights of Irish emigrants. I therefore welcome the constructive insights provided by this report and thank Crosscare Migrant Project for continuing to provide support

to returned emigrants in their time of need.

I have no doubt that the recommendations made in this report will inform the Government's continued efforts to remove barriers for returning Irish emigrants. I for one will continue to work towards ensuring our emigrants are not disproportionately affected by their emigration.

Yours Sincerely,

Billy Lawless
*Senator for the Irish Diaspora,
Seanad Éireann*

Executive Summary

Crosscare Migrant Project is an Irish-based, non-governmental organisation that provides information and advocacy support to Irish emigrants at the pre-departure, pre-return and post-return stages of their migration journeys. This report draws on the organisation's extensive experience of working with emigrants to identify and analyse the main reasons why they return to Ireland in crisis circumstances. It presents an in-depth study of the impact of return migration on emigrants who face risk or vulnerability, and sets out recommendations to address the range of challenges they encounter on return. These aim to inform the development of the new Diaspora Policy by outlining practical and immediate policy and procedural changes, as well as suggestions for longer-term strategic developments.

The report contributes to the knowledge base on contemporary Irish migration, the Irish diaspora, and the highly valuable work of Irish emigrant support groups globally. It is based on a welfare-led study that aims to illuminate the broader experiences of Irish emigrants returning to Ireland in crisis situations, following their journey back from abroad, while identifying their needs and the supports available to them on their return.

The research presents real-life experiences that draw on the personal perspectives of returned emigrants, along with perspectives from Irish emigrant support groups assisting Irish emigrants – both abroad and in Ireland – on their return. It draws on the project's direct work with Irish emigrants, contemporary literature on Irish migration and return, and a review of government policy and strategies to support the Irish diaspora. Additionally, it includes an analysis of interviews with emigrants who had returned in crisis circumstances between 2018 and 2019, and interviews with representatives from emigrant support organisations abroad.

Emigrants return to Ireland in many different circumstances. Many make a well-planned decision, often a year in advance of returning, making prior arrangements that aid their reintegration once back in Ireland. Those making planned returns can experience practical challenges with matters such as car insurance, school places and fees, and driving licences, as well as the emotional impact of their return. Others may have no other option but to return to Ireland in unplanned and crisis circumstances.

These people are much more likely to experience significant challenges in access to housing, potential homelessness, medical and health needs, income deprivation, and social isolation.

Findings from this research identify seven areas of challenge experienced by Irish people returning to Ireland in crisis:

- 1 **Housing Insecurity**
- 2 **Financial Insecurity**
- 3 **Family and Support Networks**
- 4 **Health**
- 5 **Immigration Issues and Detention/ Deportation**
- 6 **Threats, Violence and Fleeing Conflict**
- 7 **Discrimination**

Many Irish emigrants may experience more than one of these issues, which compounds their situation abroad. The interviews corroborate findings of the literature review and provide personal insights into the stresses and difficulties of returning to Ireland as an emigrant in challenging circumstances.

The support available from emigrant support groups and consular services abroad can help to ease their level of stress and risk and ensure a safe return to Ireland. Although some emigrants

may have the support of family and support networks on their return, others will not, particularly if they have been abroad for a long time or did not have strong supports in Ireland before they left. Emigrant support groups in Ireland, many of which receive funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT's) ESP, assist emigrants in this position and help to prevent further stress, health deterioration, isolation, poverty and homelessness on their return. Without these supports – both abroad and in Ireland – emigrants in crisis circumstances would be at greater risk.



Housing Insecurity

Housing crisis and trying to access homeless supports.



Financial Insecurity

Difficulty satisfying the Habitual Residence Condition for social welfare support.



Family and Support Networks

Returning alone without family or support networks in Ireland.



Health

Getting access to physical and mental health supports.



Immigration Issues and Detention/Deportation

Having to leave a country due to being undocumented, prison release or deportation.



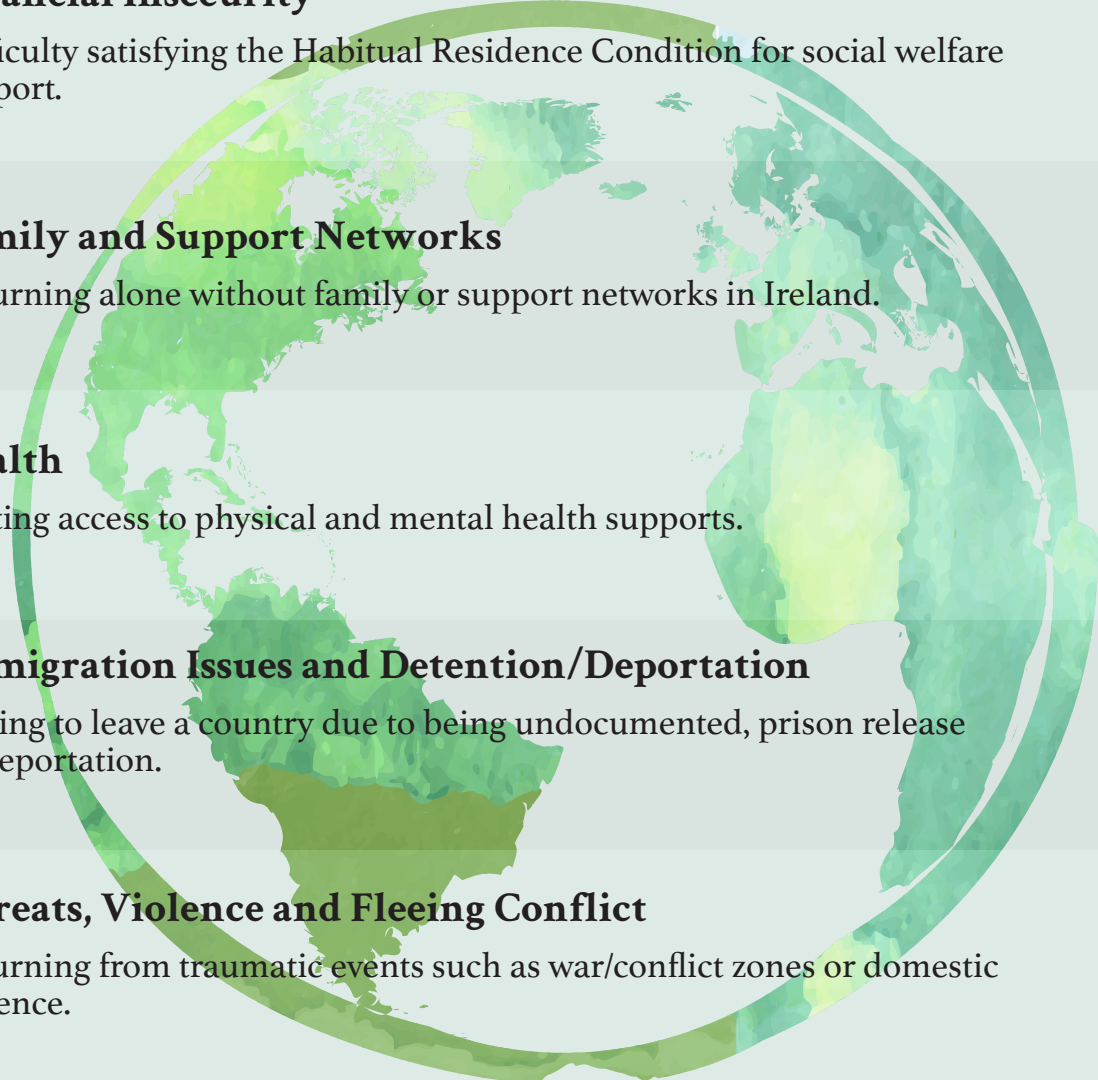
Threats, Violence and Fleeing Conflict

Returning from traumatic events such as war/conflict zones or domestic violence.



Discrimination

Poor recognition of emigrants' rights and entitlements by authorities on return to Ireland, particularly experienced by persons of minority ethnic groups.



Recommendations

The following supports should be available for all emigrants returning in crisis situations:

Housing Support

- Access to local authority emergency homeless accommodation immediately on return, with longer-term placements for families
- Expedited registration with the local authority for housing supports, including the social housing list and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)
- Extension of Family Homeless Action Teams and support in local authorities nationally to assist returned emigrants in crisis situations in sourcing HAP/ appropriate accommodation.

Financial Support

- Immediate access to emergency social welfare assistance, such as Exceptional Needs Payments
- Expedited primary and secondary social welfare claims, including jobseekers' allowances and family payments
- Free interim travel passes for adults and children to assist them with accessing supports and services.

Family and Support Networks

- Assistance for families to secure immediate school placements for children, on their return.

Health Support

- Free medical care from the HSE for those in urgent need of medical attention for physical and mental health supports, while their medical card applications are being processed
- Access to affordable and appropriate counselling support for adults and children
- Expedited medical card applications.

Support for Immigration Issues and Deportation/Detention, and for Those Experiencing Threats and Violence, or Fleeing Conflict Zones

- Recognition by key statutory services that people arriving home from these situations may not be able to provide all the required documentation usually needed to access homeless accommodation, social protection support, etc.
- Expedited protocol to address the immigration permission needs for immediate non-EEA family members returning with Irish citizens in these situations.

Discrimination

- **Development of training and service provision across relevant statutory services on the support needs, rights and entitlements of returned emigrants.**

Cross-cutting Longer-term Actions

- **Formalised recognition of the needs of vulnerable returning emigrants in cross-departmental policy and procedures**
- **Investment in developing shared knowledge and collaborative work between emigrant support groups**
- **Expansion of the Central Statistics Office's annual Population and Migration Estimates to capture more information on return migration of Irish citizens to Ireland.**

I Introduction

As part of the current Diaspora Policy's welfare objectives, the Irish Government's Emigrant Support Programme (ESP) funds Irish welfare, heritage and capital projects operated by Irish emigrant support organisations worldwide. These groups are significant ports of call for many emigrants in need of assistance and support, offering comfort in times of need or emergency. With more Irish people returning home from abroad in recent years, the Government has also been addressing barriers facing returnees, including through the implementation of 20 of the 30 recommendations from the Indecon Economic Report on Addressing Challenges Faced by Returning Irish Emigrants (2018).

Crosscare Migrant Project has researched and developed policy submissions and reports on a number of challenges experienced by returned emigrants and has lobbied stakeholders and parliamentarians for changes based on its findings and recommendations. These matters will continue to be pursued to achieve solutions that will adequately address the challenges faced by returned emigrants and emigrants wishing to return.

Building on the organisation's previous work, this research captures a more in-depth picture of Irish emigrants returning in unplanned or crisis circumstances. It is a welfare-led study that aims to illuminate the broader experiences of Irish emigrants

returning to Ireland in crisis situations, following their journey back from abroad, while identifying their needs and the supports available to them on their return. The research presents real-life experiences that draw on the personal perspectives of returned emigrants, along with perspectives from Irish emigrant support groups assisting Irish emigrants – both abroad and in Ireland – on their return.

This research sets out a broad overview of the main reasons why Irish people living abroad make a return to Ireland in crisis circumstances. It contributes to the knowledge base on contemporary Irish migration, the Irish diaspora, and the highly valuable work of Irish emigrant support groups globally.

2 Crosscare's Work with Returning Emigrants

Crosscare Migrant Project supports Irish citizens who are planning to emigrate abroad by providing information and resources to assist with their preparation, pre-departure. We also work with people who are returning to Ireland, providing information and resources for those who can manage independently, and advocacy support for those who need further assistance. Crosscare Migrant Project has been a recipient of Emigrant Support Programme (ESP) funding from the Irish Government on an annual basis for over 10 years, which has enabled us to continue to provide information, advocacy and referral support to intending, current, returning and returned Irish emigrants.

2.1 Casework

For emigrants who have returned in particularly unplanned and crisis circumstances, we offer information and advocacy support on matters of social welfare access, housing and homeless services, immigration, health and education. One-to-one advocacy casework is provided, particularly for individuals and families who do not have other family or support networks to assist them, or who are in vulnerable circumstances such as homelessness, lack of income, or with health needs.

2.2 Irish Abroad Networking

Our Irish Abroad Networking activities include engaging with Irish organisations around the world in enhancing support for Irish emigrants in need. The key areas of work include promoting information sharing and learning between Irish emigrant support organisations, collaborating and building strategic partnerships between Irish emigrant support organisations worldwide, providing capacity-building training, and raising awareness of services available to Irish emigrants and emerging issues facing Ireland's diaspora.

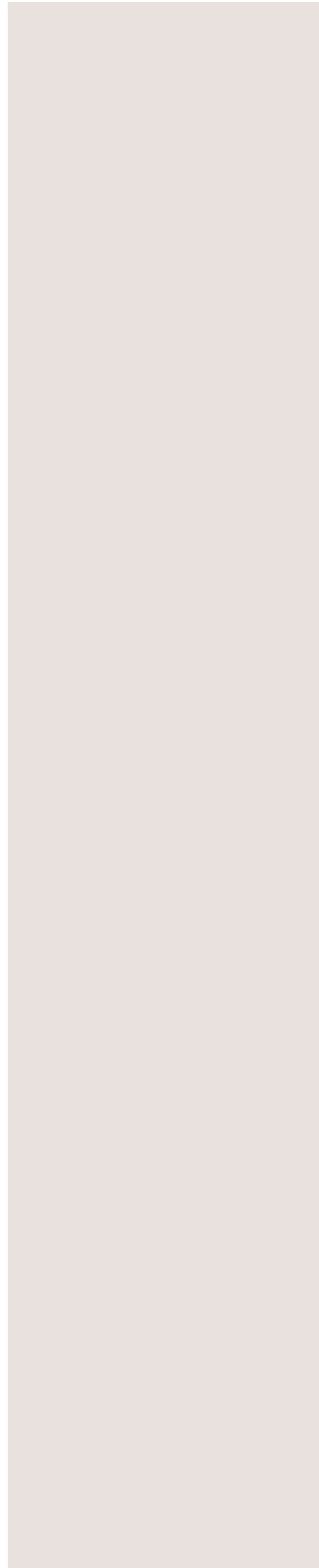
2.3 Policy and Research

Through engagement with the people who use the service, and in collaboration with other groups and stakeholders, we undertake policy work to bring about positive change in policies that affect Irish emigrants, particularly those returning in vulnerable circumstances. Policy issues affecting Irish emigrants are monitored through casework and engagement with other Irish emigrant support groups. Research, policy analysis and submissions are developed with the objectives of raising awareness of the issues that affect Irish emigrants and bringing about positive change in related policy. We disseminate our recommendations through campaign work involving engagement with government departments, political representatives, and other relevant stakeholders.

3 Research Objectives

The primary purpose of this report is to identify and define the experiences of Irish emigrants living abroad who experience challenges or crises that lead to their return to Ireland in unplanned and difficult circumstances. The report establishes the main drivers that lead to crisis situations for emigrants living abroad and details how they are supported while they are abroad, and prior to their return.

The report also documents how such emigrants are supported on their return to Ireland and defines the experiences and challenges they face on their return. Finally, it identifies key difficulties encountered by emigrants who are in crisis, both while abroad and on their return, and the main service and policy provisions that are in place to support them.



4 Overview of Return Migration to Ireland

4.1 Setting the Context

Irish emigrants choosing to emigrate have traditionally tended to move to mainly English-speaking countries such as the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. While many of these regions are still popular with Irish emigrants, countries in Europe, the Middle East and Asia are emerging as destinations of choice for new Irish emigrants. Though there is increasing contemporary non-academic research into the emergence of Irish communities outside traditional English-speaking destinations, this has yet to be fully reflected in academic research.

From our 2017 survey of 400 emigrants who had returned in the previous two years, the majority of respondents (41%) had returned from Australia, with an average of 3 to 5 years living abroad (Crosscare Migrant Project, 2017). Only 23% had returned from the UK, with an average of 6 to 10 years living abroad. The oldest age category came from the USA, aged on average 36 to 45, spending over 10 years abroad. Canada-based returnees were younger and had spent 3 to 5 years abroad. However, these findings do not identify emigrants affected by crisis situations.

4.2 Challenges for the Irish Abroad

When considering challenges faced by the Irish abroad, much of the contemporary research tends to focus on elderly Irish emigrants, new arrivals, short-term

emigrants (such as 'Jis'), undocumented Irish, those with mental health and addiction support needs, and members of LGBTQ+ communities.

Discrimination and racism are acknowledged as things that Irish people experience outside the country. For this reason, some, such as Northern Irish Protestants, prefer to not get involved with Irish groups, while others from Northern Ireland can struggle to gain acceptance into Irish diasporic networks (Gilmartin, 2015). Other migrants prefer to identify through their county rather than national identity.

Other research on Irish emigrants in Chicago (Kennedy and McNulty, 2017) shows that mental health and addiction have affected Irish emigrants in Chicago, with just 43% of those with a diagnosis having received treatment or care. This underlines the difficulties these people have in accessing the health system. The most significant problem linked to mental health is depression, which poses serious risks.

Further research argues that social isolation is a major issue among Irish communities abroad, and that factors such as marital status or wellbeing can reduce this issue (Barrett and Mosca, 2013). Information on support needs for emigrants in difficult and crisis situations is very limited and it is therefore difficult to assess the extent of their access to appropriate supports while abroad.

5 Return Migration Policy Context

The changing migration pattern that has seen emigrants returning to Ireland has drawn increasing attention to the phenomenon of return migration and challenges experienced in terms of employment, housing, health, and insurance. This section reviews policy developments and progress over the past five years in relation to promoting the welfare of Irish emigrants abroad and returning emigrants.

5.1 Current Government Strategies and Policy

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) launched the first Irish Diaspora Policy in 2015. This was part of a new focus taken by the Government to develop a stronger connection with Irish networks and diaspora abroad, building opportunities to expand Ireland's influence and success both abroad and at home. The policy is a strategic plan to support, connect, facilitate, recognise, and evolve with the diaspora. Among these objectives, the plan to "support those who have left Ireland and need or want support" focuses on the welfare and wellbeing of Ireland's diaspora. The commitments under this area include keeping welfare at the heart of the approach to diaspora issues.

In 2017, a review of the Diaspora Policy was published by the DFAT, highlighting the progress and learning from its introduction and presenting emerging

matters of interest and concern, such as the changing migration patterns with more people returning home. In this review, the Irish Government committed to delivering support to the Irish diaspora that is more accessible, targeted and prioritised, accountable, joined up and comprehensive, and strategic.

Arising from the Diaspora Policy, the Interdepartmental Committee on the Irish Abroad was established to ensure the realisation of the objectives of the diaspora strategy, including addressing issues affecting the Irish abroad and those seeking to return. A report, to which Crosscare Migrant project contributed, was commissioned by the Government to identify barriers to return. The report (Indecon, 2018) outlines 30 recommendations for addressing challenges faced by emigrants returning home. These will remain relevant for the forthcoming Diaspora Policy. The development of this new Diaspora Policy over the next five years has included a public consultation series to inform its development. It will cover the period 2020-2025.

5.2 Irish Consular Services

Ireland has an extensive and growing network of embassies, consulates-general and honorary consulates around the world. Together with the Consular Assistance Unit in Dublin, this network provide a range of consular

supports to Irish citizens in distress abroad. Launched in May 2019, the DFAT's Consular Assistance Charter outlines the type of practical support available to Irish citizens experiencing difficulty abroad (DFAT, 2019).

This includes:

- Advice and support in the case of family bereavement, serious illness, detention, or emergency
- Local linguistic and cultural support
- Emergency travel documents
- Details of English-speaking doctors and lawyers
- Contacting family or friends, on request
- Responding decisively to major crises abroad
- Providing comprehensive pre-departure travel advice.

Latest figures show that over 2,300 Irish citizens received assistance from the DFAT in 2018, including support in relation to arrest (371), welfare (217), mental health (77), deportation (77), and imprisonment (50) (DFAT, 2019).

5.3 Emigrant Support Programme

Established by the Irish Government in 2004, the Emigrant Support Programme (ESP) is a tangible expression of Ireland's commitment to supporting global Irish communities in line with Ireland's Diaspora

Policy. To date, a total of €170 million in funding has been granted to more than 530 organisations in 36 countries. The ESP prioritises support to organisations offering frontline advice and community care to Irish emigrants in vulnerable and marginalised situations.

With consistently high numbers of Irish people needing help abroad in recent years, collaboration between Irish consular supports and welfare-focused ESP-funded organisations at home and abroad is invaluable to the provision of emergency safety nets for Irish citizens in crisis situations overseas. For instance, the partnership between the Irish Council of Prisoners Overseas (ICPO) and consular services extends the level of support available to Irish citizens detained or imprisoned abroad, as well as to their family members in Ireland.

5.4 Contributions from the Non-governmental Organisations Sector

The community sector has simultaneously been developing contributions to the identification and awareness of concerns for returning emigrants. Research published by the Maynooth-based ICPO, *A Step at a Time: The Resettlement Needs of Irish People Returning From Prison Overseas* (2015), discusses the resettlement needs of Irish citizens after release from prisons abroad. Key issues identified include accommodation, education, training and employment, health and addiction,

finance, and family. Access to housing, social welfare supports, medical cards, counselling and peer support are specifically highlighted as essential resettlement needs. Equally important are supports for family members in preparing for the return of their family member from prison, particularly for specific needs such as managing addiction.

Crosscare Migrant Project published a report entitled *Home for Good?: A Report on the Experiences of Recently Returned Irish Emigrants* (2017). This was on the experiences of recently returned Irish citizens and was based on findings from an online survey conducted with over 400 respondents. The most frequently cited reasons for return were family and support networks (83%) and to bring children up in Ireland (36%), with 253 respondents returning with children. The main challenges highlighted on return were insurance and administrative issues (40%), employment (38%), accommodation (24%), and reintegration to Irish culture (20%). Other challenges mentioned include access to health care (5%) and social welfare (4%), as well as difficulties with accessing health insurance. Over a quarter of respondents (115 in total) reported issues with accessing PPS numbers and social welfare payments. The survey also identified challenges for some emigrants returning with a non-EU family member

from non-visa required countries, particularly from the USA and Australia.

Following this, Crosscare Migrant Project published a research report on access to social welfare supports for returned emigrants, entitled *A Hundred Thousand Welcomes?* (2018). It comprised an online survey of returned emigrants' experiences with accessing social welfare supports, case studies from Crosscare Migrant Project's casework, and contributions from other emigrant support groups. The report found that 50% of 22 survey respondents had been denied access to social welfare due to the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC).

Recommendations called for updated training for Deciding Officers, the development of a guide to HRC for returning emigrants, the removal of administrative barriers, and the annual publication of HRC-related refusals being overturned on appeal for Irish citizens. In early 2019, Crosscare Migrant Project met with senior officials from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) to discuss these findings and recommendations. Returned emigrants continue to contact Crosscare Migrant Project for assistance with difficulties in accessing social welfare in relation to the HRC, and the majority of HRC-related appeals are successful.

Other emigrant support groups in Ireland and abroad have engaged with various political, governmental and stakeholder representatives on various issues regarding access to health care, social welfare, housing and immigration. While resources are limited, these groups emphasise the importance of raising awareness and engaging influential stakeholders to support action to address ongoing issues and to lend support to emigrants abroad and those returning to Ireland. Additionally, Senator Billy Lawless (the first sitting Irish politician to be based abroad, who is located in both Chicago and Galway) is heavily involved in raising awareness and addressing issues affecting Irish emigrants abroad, particularly in the USA, and those returning home. John Deasy, T.D. was also appointed in 2017 as special US envoy to advance the position of Irish emigrants, particularly undocumented Irish living in the US.

6 Profile of Participants

6.1 Returned Emigrant Participants

Ten returned emigrants participated in semi-structured interviews undertaken to inform the present research report. The emigrants had all returned to Ireland in crisis and were assisted by Crosscare Migrant Project. The interviews were conducted from June to July 2019 in the offices of Crosscare Migrant Project, or at an agreed place chosen by the interviewees. Eight were interviewed individually and two were interviewed together, as a couple. Six of the interviewees were male, and four were female. Six were single and four had partners. Further demographic details of the interviewees are as follows:

- Five interviewees returned with children under the age of 18 (7 in total)
- Average ages ranged from 30 to 70 (2 aged 30-40, 2 aged 41-50, 2 aged 51-60 and 4 aged 61-70)
- Countries from which they returned: Canada, Libya, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Thailand, UK, USA
- Time spent abroad: 3 between 1 and 5 years, 4 between 6 and 20 years, 3 more than 20 years

6.2 Emigrant Support Group Participants

The research additionally included interviews with support workers from 11 organisations funded by the Emigrant Support Programme (ESP). They were interviewed about their perspectives on working with emigrants based in Australia, Canada, Ireland, the UK, and the USA.

Additionally, the Information and Advocacy Officer from Crosscare Migrant Project was interviewed, in order to draw on their experience of casework with returning emigrants. All the ESP groups included in the research provide welfare, and in some cases immigration-focused support, to Irish emigrants experiencing difficult circumstances. Details of the participating groups are listed on page 17.

Name	Location	Services
Emerald Isle Immigration Center	New York (USA)	This centre has been providing immigration information, social, employment- and education-related services to Irish emigrants in New York since 1988. It has two offices, one in the Bronx and one in Queens
London Irish Centre	London (UK)	This centre was founded in 1954, to support the needs of thousands of newly-arrived Irish emigrants in London. It has developed into the largest Irish welfare and community organisation in Britain
Irish Community Care	Manchester (UK)	This centre provides welfare advice and information, lunchtime events, and Irish Traveller support to Irish people in Manchester
Irish International Immigration Center	Boston (USA)	This centre has been supporting Irish emigrants since 1989. It specialises in learning exchange programmes between Ireland and the USA and offers immigration, advocacy, wellness and education services
Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas	Maynooth (Ireland)	This organisation provides information and support to Irish prisoners overseas and their families
Irish Support Agency NSW	Sydney (Australia)	This agency provides welfare related support to Irish people in Sydney and wider New South Wales.
Irish Community Services (Midwest)	Chicago (USA)	This organisation is an immigration and social services provider. It serves the Irish community of Chicago, and beyond, with senior, legal, pastoral, student and J1 programmes
Irish Australian Support Association Queensland	Brisbane (Australia)	This organisation provides welfare-related support to Irish people in Brisbane and wider Queensland
Safe Home Ireland	Mulranny (Ireland)	This organisation provides advice, information, outreach and housing assistance to people who are thinking of returning to Ireland
Irish Outreach San Diego	San Diego (USA)	This organisation provides assistance to Irish citizens, those of Irish ancestry, and Irish visitors (summer students) in San Diego
Irish Canadian Immigration Centre	Toronto (Canada)	This centre provides outreach and information on employment, social services, and immigration to newly arrived Irish immigrants across Canada

7 Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, in person, with emigrants who had returned to Ireland in crisis circumstances and had been supported as clients of Crosscare Migrant Project over the previous two years. Supplementary data and detail from casework was included to complement the interviews with returned emigrant clients. The personal experiences recorded are entirely subjective and offer deep insights into how the individuals interpret their experience. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and all personal details were anonymised.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with emigrant support groups – both abroad and in Ireland – that receive funding from the Emigrant Support Programme (ESP) under the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Eight were conducted by phone and video-call, two were conducted in person (including one with our own staff member), and two by email communication. Primary data was supplemented with desk-based research on existing contemporary literature, media articles and available data on Irish migration. The interviews were an important and valuable element of the research for identifying and elucidating the emigrant communities they work with abroad and the services and support they offer.

The information from all the interviews was supplemented with information from Crosscare Migrant Project's casework in relation to access to housing, social welfare, immigration and medical supports.

8 Findings and Analysis

Interview data was collated and analysed to present varied personal and organisational experiences of Irish crisis return. This helped to uncover a broad understanding of the processes which returned Irish emigrants must navigate during their time of need, along with an overview of the supports available to them.

Certain recurring themes emerged from the interviews undertaken with both the returned emigrants and the workers from emigrant support organisations. Combined with the information drawn from the interview with our own Information and Advocacy Officer, the findings and analysis are presented under the following seven themes:

- 1 **Housing Insecurity**
- 2 **Financial Insecurity**
- 3 **Family and Support Networks**
- 4 **Health**
- 5 **Immigration Issues and Detention/ Deportation**
- 6 **Threats, Violence and Fleeing Conflict**
- 7 **Discrimination**



8.1 Housing Insecurity

All the returned emigrants interviewed required access to statutory housing supports in Ireland on return. Some had also been homeless abroad or were at risk of homelessness. This section focuses mainly on the experiences of people on their return to Ireland, as the interviewees' experiences abroad were too disparate to extrapolate a detailed comparative analysis.

When Abroad

Availability, access to and engagement with housing and homeless supports abroad varied between the returned emigrant support group interviewees. In some cases, emigrant support groups abroad assist emigrants in crisis to access emergency accommodation locally prior to their return – via statutory services or the local Irish community. Emigrants are assisted with arranging their return to Ireland, often through reconnections with family members, who can support them on their return with accommodation. Direct referrals are made to support groups in Ireland (the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO), Safe Home Ireland, and Crosscare Migrant Project) for support with access to homeless services and social housing, when there is no alternative form of accommodation.

A number of groups also mentioned that emigrants who are homeless abroad need support to organise documents, in order to get ID, which is essential for facilitating their return, and that this can be provided by their own service or by other external charity services. One USA support group is linked with a local homeless shelter and makes outreach visits to the shelter, offering support to Irish emigrants. They also refer emigrants to this shelter who present to the service as homeless, and they work with them to arrange their return to Ireland, if they wish to return. One UK support group referred to a family living on the streets, as they were unable to access emergency accommodation there. The family were supported to link with family members in Ireland, who helped them to return to stay with them.

On Return

According to support groups abroad, emigrants returning in crisis are frequently unaware of the extent of homelessness and unavailability of housing in Ireland: this lack of awareness was echoed by the returned emigrant interviewees.

Some groups engage in raising awareness among emigrants on the housing situation in Ireland, when considering their return, and refer people regularly to the Irish-based groups, including Crosscare Migrant Project, Safe Home Ireland and the ICPO. Many groups try to

link in with the person's family members in Ireland, who can support them on their return. Several groups mentioned that most people they deal with who are returning in crisis circumstances tend to have family support in Ireland.

Access to housing supports for people returning to Ireland in crisis was a dominant and significant issue discussed by most participants. There was a common acknowledgement that the extent of the Irish housing and homelessness crisis has made it more difficult for returning emigrants over the past few years. All 10 of the Irish emigrants interviewed returned to Ireland without secure housing.

Housing supports and homeless services in Ireland are managed by the local authority in each council area. Supports can vary and are dependent on the local authority's own policy and provision. For emigrants returning to Ireland in unplanned or crisis circumstances, preparation in gathering documents is not always possible, which can lead to problems with access to accommodation supports and services.

Safe Home Ireland runs a programme to help secure long-term housing for people over the age of 57, but in the current housing situation, the number of places available to them in voluntary housing has reduced significantly. The organisation cannot secure

accommodation for every applicant, as in the case of two of the interviewees who applied for housing.

Variance in available local authority housing supports was described as resulting in inconsistent access for returned emigrants in different parts of the country. Local authorities process applications for social housing and this can be problematic for some returned emigrants, where requests are made for documentation that can be difficult or impossible to obtain from abroad.

8.1.1 Stages of Homelessness

The following section outlines the stages through which the returned emigrants interviewees went, and gives an overview of their experiences relating to accommodation and homelessness. All had returned to Dublin and therefore their experience may differ from other emigrants returning into homelessness in rural Ireland.

Stages of Homelessness

- **Short-term unstable accommodation (staying with friends/family/good Samaritan/Garda station/sofa surfing/tourist hostel/B&B).** Several emigrant interviewees outlined their reliance on various different people with whom they could stay intermittently and often in cramped spaces, or borrowed money from people to pay tourist accommodation immediately on arrival.
- **Registering with Local Authority homeless services for access to emergency accommodation and making an application for social housing.** Several of the emigrant interviewees experienced difficulties and delays in finding accurate information on which Dublin local authority they should register with and required assistance and advocacy from support groups to navigate housing services.
- **Placement in one-night-only accommodation via Homeless Freephone (in Dublin) / relevant Local Authority.** A Homeless Freephone system is in place to provide night-by-night emergency accommodation in Dublin for people waiting assessment for registration with the local authority for social housing. Several of the emigrant interviewees were referred to the Homeless Freephone. Some experienced an unacceptably long delay in accessing a 'rolling booking' to stay in one place for a longer period
- **Decision on social housing application. Placement on waiting list if approved, becoming eligible for Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).** Successful registration and placement on the housing list deems the person eligible to access HAP to assist with the cost of private rented accommodation.

Some of the interviewees who experienced difficulties with this registration expressed feelings of stress and anxiety.

- **Rolling accommodation placement / interim accommodation provided while seeking private rented HAP tenancy.** Once registered on the housing list, the returnee can be referred to stay in one place continuously, a booking that is renewed every few weeks until they find a private rented tenancy. Delays were experienced at this stage by some interviewees, generally due to unavailability of rental places in the local area. These placements generally do not offer access to cooking facilities.
- **Searching for a private rented HAP tenancy.** Many of the interviewees expressed their shock at how difficult it is to find a private rental tenancy, with many saying that many of the tenancy inquiries they make are not answered or are unsuccessful. They stated that it is difficult to find a landlord who will accept a HAP tenant and that the general rent rates are above the HAP rate, even in cases where they are eligible for the 'Homeless HAP rate'.
- **Exit homelessness into stable tenancy**



8.2 Financial Insecurity

Lack of or insecure income was identified as a dominant driver for emigrants returning to Ireland in crisis circumstances. Returning to Ireland in a situation of homelessness often goes hand-in-hand with financial difficulties, such as the loss of an income or depletion of savings.

All 10 returned emigrants interviewed experienced some level of financial difficulty on their return to Ireland. Five out of 10 returned with a small amount of savings that allowed them to manage expenses in the immediate short term. All 10 interviewees had to apply for social welfare support and all were supported through the application process by Crosscare Migrant Project. The level of engagement, personal experience, administrative barriers and claim decisions varied somewhat between the returned emigrants. Some were able to seek work on return, some secured employment quickly, others were of retirement age or unfit to work, and others felt they needed support to retrain or access job-seeking supports.

8.2.1 Loss of Income

Unemployment or the loss of a job or income was noted as a significant factor contributing to return. Among the emigrant support groups, some returning emigrants are identified as being unable to find work after their savings have dried up, such as young people travelling to Canada on a working holiday visa, or young people who moved to the UK and ran out of savings before managing to find a job or set up social welfare payments. Another group of emigrants experienced difficulty with accessing full pensions, such as men who worked in the trade industry and who may have had difficulty tracing their employment record in the UK. Gambling was also mentioned as a specific financial stressor for some emigrants that can lead to high debts and an urgency to return home, when they can no longer sustain living abroad.

One couple interviewed returned due to loss of employment and gradual loss of savings. One single parent interviewed had a secure job, but her work permit was not renewed, and she was forced to end her employment. A second single parent had previously been employed and returned with minimal savings. Young backpackers in Australia have also been referred to by groups interviewed as at risk of financial abuse, who can be denied their wages, run out of money and need support to return home.

Emigrant support groups are often limited in their capacity to provide any financial assistance. US-based groups and one Australia-based group referred to supplementary charitable funds or internal funding that is accessed for booking emergency accommodation and flights to return to Ireland in particularly difficult circumstances. The other Australia based group referred to “informal Irish community supports” that they can draw on, to raise emergency funds to assist an emigrant in crisis circumstances. Again, these groups address both emergency homelessness accommodation needs and basic needs in terms of food, clothing and transport. The majority of groups, however, contacted the emigrant’s family members in Ireland, where possible, to intervene in matters of funding emergency accommodation, health care and air travel costs to get back home. While embassies and consulates abroad are unable to fund such emergency needs for emigrants abroad, they can direct and refer people to appropriate support services abroad and emigrant support groups in Ireland. Links between embassies and consulates are maintained on an ongoing basis with many of the emigrant support groups both abroad and in Ireland, in order to facilitate support for emigrants returning in difficult and unplanned circumstances.

Two of the emigrants interviewed had secured a new job within a few months of returning to Ireland. The first had returned from a conflict zone and found a job within

three months, with the help of a contact. This person said:

[I was] not comfortable accepting social welfare; I do not like someone giving me money, I want to work, I like to work. But at that time, it was so helpful because I did not have any money and I was so broke. I needed to find out what to do.

The person explained that on finding work, they informed the social welfare office to stop further payments. The second was a single parent, whose work permit was not renewed abroad found a job within two months of returning, during which time she was staying in emergency accommodation for five weeks on one-night-only placements with three dependent children.

One emigrant interviewee being supported by Crosscare Migrant Project to access a US pension expressed a desire to work part time if conditions for his Irish non-contributory state pension allowed. This person, like others, talked about a desire to seek work even part time:

It kills me not to have structure.

One emigrant fleeing an abusive relationship expressed a wish to retrain, feeling unable to continue working in the same sector due to trauma. The same person was even mistakenly sent to a beginners' English language course by

a statutory service, stating that this may have been as a result of being mistaken for a foreign national:

You really have to go out there and look for help and courses because no one helps you.

The ICPO interviewee talked about the inconsistency between prisons in different jurisdictions in the courses and the training they offer, which can increase prisoners' opportunities to obtain work on release. They acknowledged that getting work can be difficult because people will have a record leaving prison. The organisation can offer a small grant to Irish emigrants leaving prison abroad. Where appropriate, the ICPO also links former prisoners with probation services in Ireland and abroad, one example being prisoners who are out on licence from the UK and serving the remainder of their sentence in Ireland.

One of the interviewees who was deported back to Ireland was assisted by both the ICPO and Crosscare Migrant Project on return. The person also had a small amount of savings derived from employment while in prison, which was invaluable for providing for temporary accommodation and basic necessities until they could access state emergency accommodation and Supplementary Welfare Allowance. Safe Home Ireland and Crosscare Migrant Project offer

information and advocacy to support access to social welfare assistance and do not offer financial support to returned emigrants.

8.2.2 Social Welfare

Abroad

In the UK and EU countries in particular, Irish citizens may access social welfare assistance. However, people returning in crisis circumstances are sometimes unable to do so, or are unaware that they can. Particularly in the case of new arrivals to the UK, it was noted by one group that they can be deterred from applying for Universal Credit due to the complexity involved, and instead try to survive on minimal incomes. They will rely on savings while looking for work and if they cannot find any, their savings may dry up. People of pensionable age who have worked in the trade industry are also at risk of securing an insufficient pension, where there are difficulties in tracking their employment record to issue their full credits.

One group noted that in Canada, people are not very knowledgeable about access to social services and that their access can depend on which province they are in. This barrier can lead to a return home in crisis. Among the interviewed emigrants, one couple attempted to apply for social welfare abroad, but the bureaucracy and language barrier made it too difficult:

They didn't have patience with us ...they were unbelievable.

They stated that they waited weeks and eventually gave up on the process. In this case, the delays and depleting savings eventually led to their return in difficult circumstances.

On return

The social welfare system in Ireland is highly administrative and was referred to by several interviewees as bureaucratic. Access to social welfare supports was said to be challenging in terms of access to information about entitlements, navigating application forms, clarity on which payment or office to apply to, information on which documentation to provide, and access to required documentation. There was reference by several groups and returned emigrants to the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) and the issues around the assessment of this for emigrants returning to live in Ireland. A UK support group referred to its efforts to raise awareness among people working with Irish emigrants by hosting sessions with Crosscare Migrant Project and Safe Home Ireland on access to social welfare entitlements on return. In order to follow the experiences of the interviewees regarding access to social welfare, a brief outline of the social welfare process for emigrants returning to Ireland in crisis is required. This is detailed below.

The Social Welfare Process for Irish emigrants who are homeless in Ireland upon return

- (1) **Apply for a Social Welfare payment:** After registering as homeless with the local authority (City or County Council office), a returned emigrant applies for a primary social welfare payment and/or Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) from the Homeless Person's Unit if in Dublin (under the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection). For people who are homeless outside of Dublin, an application for SWA can be made through the local Community Welfare services.

This payment is means assessed on the emigrant's savings and assets. It also involves assessment of their eligibility under the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) based on five factors: main centre of interest, the length and continuity of residence in Ireland, the length and purpose of any absences from Ireland, the nature and pattern of employment, and future intention to live in the Republic of Ireland for the foreseeable future. The HRC guidelines outline a specific provision relevant to returning Irish emigrants who, providing they meet the standard assessment criteria, may be found habitually resident immediately upon return to Ireland, once they can

demonstrate that they are resuming their previous residence.

- (2) **Request an Exceptional Needs payment:** Whilst the SWA claim is being processed, they can apply for an Exceptional Needs Payment (ENP), which is a discretionary (often once-off) payment that may be paid depending on circumstances. Processing times can vary and can be dependent on individual officers and the capacity of returned emigrants to engage with the process whilst in flux or experiencing health issues.
- (3) **Apply for any other entitlements:** Whilst dependent children will be added to a returned emigrant's SWA claim for a weekly qualified dependants, a separate claim for secondary payments such as Child Benefit can be made. This is also assessed under the HRC.
- (4) **Receive a decision:** If the applications are successful, the emigrant will be issued with a weekly payment. If however an application is refused, an appeal can be made to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office.
- (5) **Appeal the decision if refused:** The appeals process can take approximately 6 months for a final decision to be made on a claim.

Meanwhile, if the claim being appealed is for SWA, their last resort is for continued requests for discretionary ENPs until a decision is issued on their appeal. Some may seek to borrow money from people, or request support from the St Vincent de Paul.

- (6) **Receive a decision on appeal:** If an appeal is successful, the payment will be issued and often backdated to the date of the first application. This often has implications for other applications they have made that have been dependent on the decision of the appeal, such as their application for social housing - which in turn determines their eligibility to access the Housing Assistance Payment. Proof of social welfare payment is also required for medical card applications to access free health care.

Emigrant support groups abroad stated that they refer returning emigrants to support groups in Ireland to seek information and support with access to social welfare in Ireland, including Crosscare Migrant Project, Safe Home Ireland, the ICPO, and the Citizens Information Service. In general, most of these groups have some awareness of issues in relation to accessing Irish social welfare, especially with the HRC, but only the Ireland-based groups work directly with social welfare applications for returned emigrants. The returned emigrant interviewees all had personal experience

of applying for one or more social welfare payments.

Emigrants who have been deported back to Ireland are recognised in social welfare guidelines as generally satisfying the HRC, as they are unable to return to the country from which they were deported. They are therefore less likely to encounter problems with accessing social welfare. However, the Crosscare Migrant Project staff member interviewed noted that it is helpful if they have been in contact with the Irish Consulate abroad, in advance, as they can confirm their situation, which *“can help cut red tape for access to social welfare”*. In some cases, people do not have any documentation, so it can be difficult to determine if they have been officially deported, in order to determine entitlement to social welfare.

Interviews with Crosscare Migrant Project and Safe Home Ireland staff, as well as returned emigrants themselves, highlighted the following issues.

Unawareness among some returning emigrants of the application process. Some make the assumption that because they are Irish they will be eligible, but then come across problems or are disallowed claims.

Very limited information is offered from the social welfare office on what specific documents are required for claims, with some experiences described as *“unhelpful”* and with several references to interactions

with social welfare officers as dependent on “*who you meet on the day*”. Several returned emigrants expressed disappointment and offence to the way they were treated by some officers: “*The social welfare were no help whatsoever, they would say ‘you need to go there, you don’t have residence’ and one person told me that I should go back to (host country of return). That was crazy.*” This particular emigrant had fled a long-term abusive relationship in a country with restrictive rights for women. Unable to provide any documents, such as bills, tax returns or driving licence, the person stated: “*I had no proof so that was so hard*”

Difficulties with gathering certain documents on return that may only be available to access abroad or have been lost, stolen, destroyed, or are non-existent. In the case of the interviewee who fled an abusive relationship, all official documents were in the ex-partner’s name.

Difficulties for a non-EU spouse or partner in providing immigration-related documentation, and where there were any delays in getting immigration permission issued.

Inconsistencies in decision-making across social welfare schemes and offices throughout the country, including decisions on ENPs.

Difficulties with access to PPS numbers for emigrants who had never worked

in Ireland, or left very young, or for family members who had never lived in Ireland. The office requests specific proof of the need for a PPS number. Delays in issuing PPS numbers can delay further any claims for social welfare. The Safe Home Ireland interviewee noted that some emigrants making a planned return to Ireland are able to make an advance application for PPS numbers from abroad, which takes six weeks, but those making an unplanned return must present in person on their return, then wait for the PPSN to be issued by post.

Advocacy support required for returned emigrants who have been unable to advocate successfully for themselves and have already had difficulties with an application or social welfare office or who have been disallowed a claim. Several interviewees said that if they had not received support, they would not have been able to access a social welfare payment.

In such cases, people require advocacy services to navigate the social welfare system and often feel disempowered during this process. The Crosscare Migrant Project interviewee also stated that the organisation has encountered advocacy difficulties with requesting responses from some social welfare offices. Also, three of the returned emigrant interviewees enlisted the help of a local TD to advocate for them on accessing social welfare and emergency

accommodation. One believes this is the reason they were allowed their claim and avoided having to make an appeal.

People who are not issued with ENPs while they await a decision on their main social welfare application are at risk of extreme poverty, with little option other than to seek support from charities for free meals or food vouchers. The Safe Home Ireland interviewee commented that the Society of Saint Vincent De Paul provides invaluable assistance, without which many people would be unable to survive.

Naturalised Irish citizens are experiencing more difficulties with access to social welfare supports. Four out of the ten returned emigrants interviewed were naturalised Irish citizens and all experienced longer waiting times and complications. They can be asked to prove that they do not have any assets in another country or will be directed to a different office and asked to complete the same forms multiple times, without explanation as to why certain information is needed. They are sometimes asked for things that are not required, in order for an assessment to be made on the claim. However, these additional requests are presumed standard process by these citizens.

Single parents with small children who return in crisis can find it hard to navigate the social welfare application process, as they are caring for their children full time, while in a crisis situation, especially if their

children have special needs. Child Benefit can be particularly difficult to access when it is a requirement for children to be enrolled in school, which can be difficult to prioritise when they are in a situation of crisis

With the added pressure when trying to sort everything else.

During the summer, it can be particularly difficult to enrol children when schools are closed.

People returning with mental health needs, and/or needs related to addiction need more support,

Particularly if they are met with adverse reactions in local offices.

The Crosscare Migrant Project staff member interviewed explained that such intimidating attitudes can have a negative impact on mental health and confidence, and give the emigrants the feeling that they should not be entitled to anything. This causes a knock to their confidence, especially

if they are already feeling some shame in returning.

The social welfare assessment process can be seen as invasive and may be interpreted as doubting or accusing by applicants, especially if there has been no explanation of why such questions are being asked, or why such documents are being requested.

Safe Home Ireland specifically discussed issues with **access to Carer's Allowance** for family members who have made an unplanned return to care for a family member in Ireland. These included difficulties with means assessments and eligibility criteria, as well as inconsistencies in decision-making.

Ongoing problems with suspensions, delays and reduction of payments. One interviewee had their SWA payment stopped for two weeks, pending the outcome of a pension application. The same interviewee experienced an incorrect reduction in payment when their child turned 18, despite the fact that the child was still in full-time education. The same person then had their state pension application refused, based on the HRC, a decision which was in the process of being appealed at the time of interview.

Returned emigrants were described by the Crosscare Migrant Project staff member interviewed as being **nervous to make a complaint**. Making a complaint can be daunting if the person needs to continue to engage with the same office for their payments.



8.3 Family and Support Networks

Most of the emigrant support groups

interviewed identified many emigrants as being supported by family members in Ireland before and after their return to Ireland in crisis situations. However, Crosscare Migrant Project's work with returned emigrants is mainly with those in crisis circumstances who do not have family or support networks to support them on their return. Therefore, the findings from the interviews with the Crosscare Migrant Project staff member and the returned emigrants differed from those of the support groups on this account.

While one interviewee was the family member supporting their brother who had returned at an older age, and with serious health needs, the returned brother still needed support to navigate the social welfare system, such as making a declaration to swear that he had no means, in order to access a social welfare payment. The sibling in Ireland assisted with completing forms and accompaniment to appointments, but they also feared losing their own social welfare entitlements (such as the living alone allowance) if the emigrant sibling stayed with them long term.

I helped him with all his applications while he was staying with me [...] He had an operation when he was in [host country]. I think he is still unwell; I never heard the full story. He lost his memory. He is unable to do much for himself.

They expressed having a good experience with the local social welfare office, and this emigrant's family had sent him money while he was living abroad over several decades. However, none of the other returned emigrants interviewed had family or support networks to support them financially. Some were cut off or estranged from family members. Others, such as naturalised or dual national citizens, had no family in Ireland and could not seek financial support from family living abroad, particularly if they were living in conflict zones.

None of the emigrant interviewees had support networks such as friends or co-workers abroad who could help support them financially. Equally, the majority did not have family or support networks in Ireland to support them financially with their return to Ireland. Of the emigrant support groups interviewed, most noted that in the majority of crisis cases they dealt with, the person did not have family support abroad and typically family support in Ireland came from parents of younger adult emigrants.

The emigrant interviewees often referred to family and support groups as a central topic, when talking about returning home. Family was found as the compelling reason not only for returning home, but also for originally emigrating.

I was dying to get out of here; there was no room in our house, and I'd got married so I could leave.

In fact, 6 out of 10 interviewees left the country for family reasons: 4 of these got married or had started a relationship, one to help their own family abroad, and one to follow his parents abroad. Family, therefore, remains central to their decision to emigrate. For others, family is the reason to return to Ireland, particularly on foot of the news of an illness of a close relative and the need to return to help in some way, usually as the son or daughter.

On an emigrant's return, the impact of having family support (or not) makes a big difference. This is emphasised by the ICPO, which observes that those who receive family support are more likely to avoid crisis situations, including homelessness, at least initially. Some of the interviewees experienced significantly stressful situations without the help of their relatives, whether it was down to not having any family members in Ireland, or not having a good relationship with family in Ireland.

Indeed, almost all of the emigrant interviewees relied more on support from friends rather than family. Friends therefore are considered a strong support network for most interviewees. Some interviewees were able to secure some support by staying at a friend's house for a while on arrival home. From this group of emigrants, it is evident that support from friends and family was of benefit to returnees in crisis.

Furthermore, friends or family offer emotional support. The emigrants who have this kind of support seem to be more optimistic about their future:

In the hostels, I was worried about people talking to me and people injecting and the hygiene, etc. It was a bad experience, but now, it is sorted. I have to think about my future, my wife ... I do not really want to think about bad things in the past.

On the other hand, people who do not have contact with friends or family seem to be more stressed and less optimistic about their future.

8.3.1 Negative Impact

In some cases, emigrants have strained relationships with family members in Ireland, which can have an impact on their decision to leave or return.

A negative judgement on an emigrant's choice to leave the country can undermine the relationship.

In other cases, the relationship was not close, but on return to Ireland, the particular situation brought them closer together:

My sister is in Ireland, but we did not use to talk. But now we are starting to talk again.

Others fell out of contact with their family while abroad, but some were trying to build up the relationship over the years:

He lost contact with us all, which was very upsetting for my mother.

I left Ireland very young, and I'd always kept in contact.

Some choose not to contact their friends or family on their return. However, this can also suggest a sense of fear in being judged a "failure" for returning home in crisis, which prevents them from asking for help.

8.3.2 Positive Impact

It is evident that a significant number of people in crisis circumstances are supported to re-establish contact with family, often through emigrant support groups. For younger emigrants in particular, parents can provide ongoing emotional and financial support both while they are abroad and on their return. Due to the housing crisis in Ireland, more are returning to Ireland with the only option of staying with their family, which is perhaps less attractive for some.

Despite a reluctance among some interviewees, several others said they had reached out to family and friends for assistance on their return, especially for accommodation purposes.

One, who is currently still in temporary emergency accommodation, talked about going to a friend's place to cook, or to use a washing machine, because these facilities are not available in the

temporary accommodation provided to them by the local authority.

Family and friends were also found to have a positive impact by encouraging the returned emigrants to socialise, in turn improving their outlook.

I didn't really want to be meeting people at the start, but one friend here is trying to encourage me to meet people and go out. I will, but now I need time.

8.3.3 Resettlement for Children

Children can be significantly impacted by a return in crisis, particularly a homeless situation. Five of the interviewees returned with children and reported varying experiences of settlement and culture shock among the children.

For some of the interviewees, children were the main reason to return; for others it was a strategic choice for their educational opportunities or their overall happiness for those who missed Ireland:

I am not settled yet. I will stay here permanently. If my children are happy, I am happy. I put them first. I try not to let them see me cry. Some days it is hard.

Experiences in registering for schools and settlement in schools varied across the families. One family found that the English language support in school was insufficient for their son, for whom English was his second language. Others

for whom English is their mother tongue experienced additional difficulties with the school system, such as new subjects. One interviewee felt very strongly about the importance of accessing extracurricular or youth supports for the integration of their teenage child. This was particularly of note in more remote areas, where there are fewer facilities and opportunities for children to make new friends.

There is nobody to tell you if there are services available. I am looking for something for him [son]. He's 13, there are no local youth clubs; it's a shame there is nothing for him. There's no support for him.

Single parents can particularly struggle when they are experiencing homelessness, without an income and parenting alone.

This experience is complicated, especially if they are initially moving daily to one-night-only emergency accommodation. They are prevented from restarting a 'normal' life and it can be difficult for their children, eventually affecting their physical and mental health.

However, when children have settled well, interviewees seem to have a more positive attitude and are more relaxed. One parent expressed that their child missed their classmates and living in Ireland, but that they now feel at home again. Another parent, whose children came from a conflict zone to Ireland for the first time, described them as having settled in particularly well:

When I came here at the end of March, and they [children] weren't in school, they had to come with me to every appointment [...] Now they love the school; my daughter is very happy.

Other children experience difficulties in settling in Ireland, having never lived here before. They may experience isolation where there are few social outlets to socialise and to develop friendships.

In some instances, it seems that the parents' desire to return is transferred onto their children in returning to Ireland and the feeling of belonging to Ireland. However, for others, the fact that their children had felt isolated abroad, without any friends, helped determine the parents' decision to return.



8.4 Health

Health support needs, including physical, mental and addiction support needs, were evident in the experiences of both the returned emigrants and the emigrant support groups interviewed. Drivers leading to a crisis return can also originate from significant health issues experienced by those who cannot access appropriate health care without health insurance or funds. Often, these needs

will require an eventual return to Ireland to seek health care at home, with some being in crisis health situations.

The Irish Government has bilateral agreements for reciprocal healthcare provision in other countries, such as all EU countries, or emergency health care in Australia and Canada for visitors. However, this is not accessible to emigrants who are undocumented, or who are short-term visitors or have temporary residence, such as new arrivals on working holiday visas. These emigrants are at risk of very limited access to health care when they need it most. Emigrant support groups in both Canada and the USA identify access to health care as the dominant barrier for emigrants with health needs who are in crisis and making an urgent return to Ireland.

Emigrants who are identified as undocumented in the USA, Canada and Australia were particularly highlighted as being at risk of progressing into crisis circumstances, where they do not have entitlements to access health care. While some of the support groups can offer wellbeing support and to some extent counselling, mental health care and supports for addiction are also noted as areas of concern, where access is very limited for emigrants.

8.4.1 Healthcare Needs

Abroad

Emigrants returning in crisis health circumstances were noted as commonly occurring across a range of emigrant groups. Senior Irish citizens living abroad are particularly at risk when access to support and long-term health care is required.

Emigrant support groups in the USA and the UK referred to cases of older Irish emigrants suffering from debilitating and independence-stripping conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, and physical frailty or injury, leading to a gradual impact on their mental health. This can necessitate a return to Ireland for their safety and wellbeing, for example when they have family support and can access full health care in Ireland if returning from the USA.

Sustaining an injury that can put someone out of work is a risk among some emigrants, particularly where there are no rights to statutory support in countries lacking reciprocal agreements with Ireland. In the case where an emigrant can no longer work, they are at risk of losing their income, housing and ability to survive abroad. This can lead to arriving in Ireland homeless, with no income. One emigrant described health issues as a driving force behind their reason to return home, as they were unable to work and became dependent on their partner's income, which became unsustainable. The family member interviewee of one emigrant also indicated

some physical health issues that their returned emigrant family member was experiencing, requiring ongoing surgery and treatment.

One concern raised by some emigrant support groups was that some undocumented Irish citizens cannot get access to health insurance or afford health care in the USA. Poor health can lead to a loss of employment, driving the person to return to Ireland for health care and financial support. One US-based emigrant support group noted that the majority of its social care cases are with people with socioeconomic constraints, often with underlying health issues, who lack the financial capacity to fund their journey home. One older returned emigrant with significant physical health support needs had no income and initially relied on the family member interviewee to help. Another returned emigrant who was struggling financially also suffered from significant ill health for an extended period and had lost their employment abroad.

On return

Health care at home is the key reason to return for those in urgent need of medical attention. It can be difficult for emigrants to establish outcomes in terms of access to health care in Ireland, once they have returned, as they may not be in contact with support organisations post-return. Access to medical cards was raised as an issue both by the interviewees from Safe Home

Ireland and Crosscare Migrant Project. Returned emigrants cannot apply for a medical card until they have evidence of income or are awarded a social welfare payment as proof of having a minimum income.

Access to medical services is limited across the country, while the returned emigrant is awaiting both social welfare payment and a medical card. Those who require the services of a GP must pay for these in the interim, sometimes out of very depleted funds. Where available, some can be referred to free health clinics (Safety Net Primary Care, for example). However, most of these are based in cities, such as Dublin and Cork.

Safe Home Ireland noted the worrying concern that access to local GPs in rural areas can be a huge barrier for older emigrants who are isolated and managing health conditions alone. There is a serious deficit in the availability of GPs in some rural areas, making it difficult for even those with a medical card to access primary health care. Access to nursing homes for elderly returned emigrants can also be difficult.

8.4.2 Mental Health

Mental health needs are often linked to or overlapping with other difficulties. Indeed, it can be a cause or an effect of a crisis situation. Though some returned emigrants suggested that their situation had negatively affected their mental health, notably most preferred

not to discuss their mental health. As a result, most of the insights into mental health comes from the experience of the emigrant support groups, rather than from interviewees' personal perceptions.

Abroad

Some of the groups discussed how low income and/or loss of employment could escalate to homelessness and even addiction. They noted that mental health conditions can lead emigrants to become isolated abroad, without any personal support there. In certain instances, emigrant support groups can reach out to the family members of a person in crisis, to provide additional assistance. Mental health can also be a consequence of other crisis factors, such as abusive relationships. Fleeing an abusive relationship is linked to leaving the host country quickly, without time to prepare, making the situation more critical.

It was noted by interviewees that people who suffer from mental health needs abroad are often unable to access mental health services there, so they decide to return to access health care in Ireland. An emigrant support group in Australia discussed the experience of one emigrant who was suffering from schizophrenia and could not afford to access Australian health care, as they lacked health insurance.

Many of the groups interviewed stated that people presenting at their services with mental ill health needs are

increasing. Most groups maintain that it is mainly single men who are presenting with mental health issues. These can be exacerbated by physical health problems. These more complex needs can make it more challenging for small groups to offer support. Poor mental health can lead to depression, isolation and suicidal ideation. Emigrant support groups talk about their work as potentially life-saving in some of these more serious cases. However, while some groups have resources to offer professionally trained mental health support staff, others have limited resources.

Undocumented emigrants in the USA were identified by a number of the groups as developing anxiety and fear of being detected and detained for deportation, putting them at greater risk of returning to Ireland in crisis. Some of the groups assist undocumented Irish emigrants to manage this anxiety and reduce this risk. Emigrants at risk of deportation worry about the impact it will have on their family members in the USA, such as their US-born children, partners, spouses, and their income, career, and livelihood. This group is at increased risk of returning to Ireland homeless and without an income.

Emigrant support groups noted that these emigrants will often lack access to housing in advance of their return. One group identified some emigrants as revealing hidden mental health needs only after seeking assistance on other issues.

On return

Some of these emigrants may be referred directly to mental health supports on arrival or rely on help from family members on their return. Some may return to Ireland with the intention of stabilising their health, taking time to recover, and eventually returning to their host country. Ageing emigrants were also identified by the groups as experiencing gradual mental health issues such as isolation, dementia, and Alzheimer's disease.

As previously acknowledged, there is very limited information on what kind of mental health supports people access on their return to Ireland, as many are not engaged with the emigrant support groups in Ireland. Support groups surmised that required services are not easy to access in a timely manner on the emigrants' return, particularly in crisis situations. They also mentioned that it can be harder for those without the support of family or friends to engage with support services.

This can be amplified by difficulties associated with accessing supports or poor treatment, resulting in increased pressure on their mental health. Additionally, some returning emigrants may develop mental health needs on their return. The Crosscare Migrant Project interviewee referred to a case of a returned emigrant who stated they had suicidal thoughts following an incident of poor treatment in a statutory service office. In this instance, the person

had stated that they were made to feel judged and dishonest at a time when they were already in a vulnerable state of mind, following their escape from a long-term abusive relationship. One emigrant interviewee also disclosed how the impact of their crisis experience eventually hit them some weeks after their return, leading to a brief “breakdown”.

8.4.3 Addiction

There was regional variance in the experiences of the emigrant support groups regarding addiction. The Australian-based emigrant groups more commonly associated addiction with older people and young people between 18 and 35 years. The group in Canada said it was easy for Irish emigrants to come into contact with drugs in Canada and mentioned that they are contacted more by young Irish emigrants who have become dangerously engaged with drugs there.

While not particularly prevalent across the support groups, the drinking culture is referenced by groups in Australia and the USA as still affecting emigrants abroad and leading to the same risks as other forms of addiction: unemployment, ill health, homelessness and isolation. While many of the emigrant support groups connect addiction with isolation, two emigrant interviewees alluded to the relationship between alcohol and “toxic”

friendships abroad:

You could end up drinking everyday over there. In a way it would be great to still be there, but the friendships there were artificial and linked to the alcohol; they weren't real.

Access to appropriate addiction supports, detox and rehabilitation can be expensive abroad and inaccessible to those who cannot afford the treatment or do not have health insurance. These emigrants are supported to consider the best option for them to manage their addiction and recovery, and when a decision is made to return to Ireland, contact is often made with family members in Ireland to arrange support and accommodation on their return. Often, returning to stay with family will be seen as best in terms of ongoing emotional wellbeing and safety, and in meeting their accommodation needs. Their access to addiction services in Ireland is seen by groups abroad as easier for emigrants to access and more culturally appropriate for their needs.



8.5 Immigration Issues and Detention

8.5.1 Expired or Temporary Immigration Permission

Several support groups discussed working

with people who are at risk of overstaying their visa and who are unable to renew their visa or gain permanent residency in time. If they do not renew their visa, they can no longer stay legally to work or exit and re-enter the country, and are at risk of deportation. One emigrant cited difficulty after living and working legally abroad for three years in renewing their visa. This person was parenting alone with three children and needed to stop working in advance of return, which limited their savings and capacity to afford housing independently on their return. They therefore required access to emergency accommodation on their return.

It is the experience of one USA support group that some people have difficulty in accessing required documents for a travel document application to travel home, for example, if they cannot remember important details if experiencing mental health or addiction issues, or if they lost their documents while they were homeless. Embassies and consulates are regarded as essential sources of information and assistance for many of the organisations supporting emigrants in accessing travel documents and foreign birth registration for children of Irish citizens.

8.5.2 Deportation and/or Release from Prison

Emigrants deported from abroad did so following release from prison, or from immigration detention. This is particularly the case for emigrants identified as returning from the USA, Australia and

Canada. Three support groups in the USA, one in Australia and all three in Ireland work with this group of emigrants. This group is identified as making an involuntary return to Ireland.

Some people who may have overstayed their visa and are at risk of deportation can fear coming to the attention of the immigration authorities and can associate engaging with Irish emigrant support groups as putting themselves at risk of being identified and detained. Some USA groups support awareness-raising campaigns with undocumented Irish emigrants, advocating for their regularisation and offering information and support to Irish emigrants for securing immigration permission as part of preventative measures. They engage with the Coalition of Irish Immigration Centers network in supporting undocumented emigrants and those at risk of becoming undocumented.

These emigrants may have been working, sometimes even running their own businesses, and can lose everything in an instant if they are deported and will be barred from re-entering those countries long term. Others who overstay and fall out of work may no longer be able to afford to pay for their accommodation and can become homeless, with no entitlement to social welfare assistance.

Older undocumented Irish citizens can have issues with access to pensions on coming to pensionable age, which is compounded by having no access to affordable health care. Other deportees, such as those leaving prison, are linked in with the ICPO and Crosscare Migrant Project. They generally return to no income, particularly if they have been away for a long time and are not supported by family. They may have minimal savings from the jobs they worked in while in prison.

8.5.3 Immigration Permission Dependent on Non-Irish Family Members

Emigrants who are dependent on a partner or spouse for their immigration permission while living abroad can be at risk of losing this on separation. In the case of domestic violence, the Irish emigrant can also be put at risk if financially dependent on their partner, pushing them to consider returning to Ireland under constrained circumstances. In either case, it is the lack of autonomy over their own immigration permission that is the driver behind issues arising if the relationship breaks down (see 8.6.2 below for more detail).



8.6 Fleeing Threats, Violence and Conflict Zones

8.6.1 Returning from War and Conflict Zones

Emigrants who have returned from conflict or war zones were identified as predominantly returning from Middle Eastern countries with protracted and ongoing conflict and war. They commonly return to Ireland under the advice of the Irish embassy or consulate for the region. They are often risking their safety by staying in the country and there is also a risk involved in making the return journey to Ireland. They are dual Irish citizens who have either been born in Ireland and have another nationality from their parent's country of origin or have acquired Irish citizenship via naturalisation in Ireland. They often

have family members returning with them and need to apply for immigration permission for their family members of a different nationality. They may include mixed status families, where children may be entitled to Irish citizenship based on one parent's Irish citizenship, but the other parent will have a different nationality.

These emigrants are returning from a war/conflict zone, and it can be difficult for them to have any funds, in turn preventing them from being able to arrange and pay for accommodation in Ireland in advance of their return. Additionally, immigration requirements such as a visa for a non-Irish spouse, foreign birth registration to obtain passports for children to travel, and registering for PPS numbers, social welfare allowances, and the council housing list all contribute to extended delays in access to emergency housing support on arrival. Two of the returned emigrant interviewees returned from war/conflict zones. Both Safe Home Ireland and Crosscare Migrant Project work with this group of emigrants, with Crosscare Migrant Project encountering them on a regular basis.

Embassies and consulates issue warning alerts and advice to Irish citizens to leave a country that is experiencing war or conflict. This can be very useful for helping the emigrant and support groups to advocate for their assistance and access to emergency social welfare and housing supports on their return.

8.6.2 Domestic Violence

Domestic violence and coercive control are identified less commonly as drivers of return in crisis circumstances. However, one Australian-based support group referred to domestic violence as one of the biggest challenges they come across, especially where the person is not yet a permanent

resident or citizen and therefore not entitled to housing or social welfare supports. Access to local domestic violence services is extremely limited and court proceedings can take a very long time to be resolved, leaving the victims with huge legal bills. They struggle financially and rely on charities for assistance.

As mentioned, the emigrant's visa is also at risk if based on a de facto or spouse partner and can be particularly difficult if there are children involved. The Irish support group is limited in how it can assist and discussed one case in which it helped a woman with four children who had left an abusive relationship. It assisted the woman with obtaining bridging visas and paid for two nights' accommodation, food and clothing and engaged with the consulate and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to arrange their emergency return to Ireland, as well as referring the family to Crosscare Migrant Project, on their return.

A UK-based support group mentioned supporting members of the Traveller community who have been involved in a conflict or have experienced threats being made to one or several family members. This sort of situation can lead to their unplanned return to Ireland and their need to set up accommodation again.

One returned emigrant interviewee went abroad to escape domestic violence, with the intention of returning eventually. She found it difficult to settle abroad and

decided to return on hearing that the ex-partner had left the country. A second emigrant interviewee cited her reason for return as fleeing a long-term abusive relationship in a country with restrictive rights for women. She left employment due to suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and returned to Ireland without any savings. Conversely, the returned emigrant couple interviewed described their main reason for return as being to support an adult child who was experiencing coercive and domestic abuse from a partner in Ireland, the full extent of which they did not realise until they returned.

8.6.3 Personal Threats and Intimidation

On a less frequent basis, personal threats and intimidation against emigrants abroad caused concern for their personal safety and led to an unplanned return to Ireland. Members of the Traveller community in the UK not only received threat from family members: such threats also came from non-family members. The UK organisation assists these emigrants to make contact with family in Ireland, with a view to sending them money to help them to escape the situation and return to Ireland. This support group also supported an elderly transgender person over some time and assisted them eventually with an unplanned return to Ireland, following threats and intimidation. Another

emigrant returned in crisis due to threats to their life following a legal case.

Emigrants experiencing threats and intimidation are assisted in the same way as those with other drivers, by providing information and advocacy to support them with referrals to other support services, in cases where they will be returning to Ireland homeless. One UK support group referred to reaching out to other family members in Ireland who can support an emigrant with their necessary return. The interviewee who returned to Ireland following threats on their life was assisted by an associate who paid for their flight. They were also provided

with a letter by the ambassador in the UK, explaining their circumstances, and referred to Crosscare Migrant Project.



8.7 Discrimination

Discrimination is another challenge faced by some returning emigrants. It is detected in their expression of how they have been treated by individuals and services with a lack of empathy, and with elements of ignorance and racism. Many of the interviewees expressed their experiences in terms of being rudely or unfairly treated, and in some cases, prolonging the

delay in their access to services. In turn, this poses further risk to their health, adding to their stress and mental wellbeing:

One woman in one office told me to go back [to host country]; that was crazy.

We went to the council, but they refused us and suggested we stay with friends, but I was not in touch with anyone.

I gave the council the proof of payment; they let me self-accommodate. They did not give me a list, they told me to look myself.

Returned emigrant interviewees often preferred not to elaborate on their negative experiences, concentrating on moving on with their lives and expressing their appreciation of the assistance they received from supports such as friends and Crosscare Migrant Project.

We did not feel we are rejected, not even my wife. Crosscare always made me feel welcome and our neighbours in hotels etc.; we didn't feel any sense of racism. The decision to question my Irish citizenship [DEASP], I think it was just a mistake. When they told me I just laughed, I have an Irish passport. I think maybe they are ignorant, or they don't know the situation in [conflict zones], or the last possible thing is: could she be racist?

Discrimination was also an issue raised by emigrant support groups who had identified experiences faced by emigrants both abroad and on their return. As referred to in 8.6.3, a UK-based organisation in particular referred to the experience of both the Traveller community and transgender emigrants who had received threats or experienced violence based on their identity and had needed to make a crisis return to Ireland. In the US, it is evident that Irish migrants who are undocumented or overstayed their visa are experiencing fear of exclusion, isolation and deportation. An Australia-based organisation talked about the development of anti-Irish sentiment there.

On their return, naturalised or dual nationality citizens of minority ethnic groups experienced issues with regard to access to emergency accommodation and social welfare. Access to these services is also noted as an issue for other returned emigrants, particularly those who are questioned on the validity of their reason for their return, such as fleeing domestic violence and their local connection to the local area.

9 Further Discussion

Housing insecurity is the most concerning of the experiences among emigrant interviewees. The experience of emigrants who are homeless in advance of returning to Ireland is linked mainly to loss of income or work, and particularly where physical health, mental health or addiction are an issue. Access to supports abroad are too limited or unavailable, ultimately leading the emigrants to return to Ireland to seek appropriate supports. However, the sustained housing and homelessness crisis has affected people returning to Ireland, often to their surprise and dismay. Emigrant support groups abroad may relay advice to emigrants that accommodation can be difficult to obtain on return, but the extent of the crisis is not realised until they have returned, with the number of people and children registered as homeless reaching over 10,000 in Ireland consistently from January to April 2019 (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2019).

Even when returning to Ireland in a planned and supported way emigrants can still have problems finding appropriate accommodation in a timely manner. Anecdotes online and in the media point to the shock among emigrants returning on the extent of the crisis in accessing rented accommodation or buying property. For emigrants returning in crisis with insufficient resources or support, their crisis is

exacerbated. Evidently, as in the case of two interviewees, both with children, this can result in an extended period in homeless services and experiencing uncertain and stressful circumstances. For some, the impact can affect the health of children and women, indicating a link to acknowledged concerns raised by several Irish organisations (Children's Rights Alliance, 2018; National Women's Council of Ireland, 2018; Focus Ireland, 2017).

This is not only a concern for families, children and single parents, but also for those in vulnerable situations of mental and physical health needs, addiction, and rehabilitation of ex-offenders, who are at risk of reoffending or committing crime where they cannot access accommodation (ICPO, 2015).

The Government's attempts to tackle the housing crisis have been met with many challenges and criticism, with growing numbers of people registering as homeless and the slow growth of new housing. Returned emigrants are entering into this predicament and becoming part of the population experiencing homelessness and therefore can be lost in the midst of the crisis as a unique group of citizens encountering specific challenges.

Financial insecurity dominates as the precursor to losing one's accommodation abroad and health deterioration where health care is inaccessible. Access to social protection abroad is also identified as a problem for the majority of emigrants who are in crisis. On the other hand, health deterioration, addiction and fleeing domestic violence or conflict zones are drivers, pushing people into poverty and risk. Logically, as a last resort or requirement, they return to Ireland with the hope (and either limited knowledge or assumptions) of the possibility of securing social protection back at home. However, the process of making applications for PPS numbers and social welfare payments is more complicated and delayed than anticipated.

The experiences established from the interviews demonstrate a continuation of the issues raised in *A Hundred Thousand Welcomes?* (Crosscare Migrant Project, 2018). In particular are the occurrences of poor treatment, inconsistency or misinterpretation of the HRC guidelines, summary decisions, requests for unobtainable documents, and overturned decisions through the Appeals Office. One especially concerning issue is the continued disproportionate experience among dual or naturalised Irish citizens in their engagement with the DEASP. The evidently additional support that is required for dual and naturalised Irish citizens to access social welfare would not be needed

in the first instance if there were consistency in decision-making. This research again outlines an absence of requisite training for frontline DEASP staff and the need for improved customer service.

Emigrants who have the advantage of returning with limited funds find that their funds quickly become depleted with the immediate costs of accommodation, while they navigate access to homeless services and social protection. Younger emigrants returning to parents in Ireland are financially more stable and have the added benefit of social and emotional support. Financial capital can therefore vary between emigrants returning in crisis circumstances, depending on their savings or social capital. Those returning and seeking work immediately on return will still rely on immediate access to Jobseeker's Allowance. Securing employment generally takes a few months for those returning after a shorter period abroad. Those returning after a longer time or who are of an older working age experience more difficulty in finding work.

Family and Support networks for returning emigrants have proved to be central to many in crisis. As also shown in previous research, the choice to return is influenced mainly by family and friends. The security of being able to count on a network in Ireland to be there for them when they need them in some cases helps them to resolve a difficult situation.

Access to a support network can therefore make a real difference for emigrants returning in crisis. Those who return to Ireland generally face a great deal of stress and physical and psychological burnout. Hence, those who can count on family and friends to ask for help with their children, or who have a fixed place to stay for some time, are at a lower risk of this impact compared to those without support networks. Those who are not so lucky and have returned out of necessity will almost certainly have difficult months ahead of them. Hence, having good and positive networks can make the difference between coming back in crisis or not.

Health features as a prominent driver for people to return, when they have crisis health support needs and their access to health care is limited. Reciprocal emergency care is available to Irish citizens in several countries. However, ongoing treatment and care is predominantly only accessible at a high cost via health care or personal expenses. This can be a major problem for people with low incomes or those who may have overstayed their visas and cannot take up health insurance. Emigrant support groups abroad provide an important and vital service for those who need support to access appropriate health supports, whether physical, mental or addiction, and either in their host country or on their return to Ireland. Isolated

individuals in particular are noted as being at higher risk and require more intense support from groups.

Older returning emigrants with particularly long-term and intensive care needs are in need of concentrated support from emigrant support groups who receive referrals from hospitals such as cases discussed by a group based in New York. A lack of clarity on access to supports on return to Ireland, particularly if family relatives are difficult to contact, or even distant relatives for isolated Irish emigrants, can delay the move and add stress to the emigrant.

Returned emigrants in need of urgent medical care on their return are found to experience delays in accessing free health care until they have applied for and received a medical card based on their low income or reliance on social welfare. Immediate access to GPs or necessary medication or treatment is delayed, particularly in rural areas, with only limited options of access to free clinics in a few locations across Ireland. Alternatively, they have to spend the few savings they have or borrow from others. The added stress of this does not aid their health condition. Current waiting lists for appointments with HSE consultants have risen 800% in the past three years, perhaps much longer than anticipated by returned emigrants (Irish Examiner, May 2019).

The Fair Deal scheme that offers support for elderly citizens to access nursing home care has been highlighted as a particular issue for families organising access for parents or relatives returning to Ireland in need of full-time care (Larkin, 2018). This is particularly problematic if the emigrant is returning urgently, following discharge from hospital abroad, and has no social support networks. If interim support is not available, the emigrant will be referred directly to hospital on return, where there is a serious risk to their health and wellbeing. Supported living options appear to be accessible, so long as an advocate is available to pursue registration and access.

Emigrant support groups note that they are seeing people with increasingly complex needs, especially in relation to mental health. There are some mental health supports available (based in Ireland) specifically for Irish emigrants abroad, such as Solas House in New York, Immigrant Counselling & Psychotherapy (ICAP) in London, and Helplink, that provide culturally appropriate counselling online and by telephone for Irish emigrants abroad. These are only available in certain regions.

Mental health needs can also develop among emigrants following their return to Ireland. Very often, situations of stress and mental health risks arise due to various factors, such as being homeless, unemployed, parenting alone, and lacking emotional support. Isolation often

compounds these experiences. It also seems that the precariousness of being homeless has adverse effects on children. These effects are not only psychological, but also physical. According to recent studies, a lack of personal space or even a cradle for an infant can have severe effects on the proper physical growth of the child (Pollak, 2019).

Addiction is a complex support need for emigrants that is often linked to both physical and mental health needs. These emigrants are at risk of unemployment, homelessness, ill health, and isolation, with very limited access to appropriate supports. Their return to Ireland is facilitated by support groups and families, in order to improve their chances of access to appropriate supports and recovery at home.

Immigration issues and detention affect fewer emigrants, but circumstances can vary greatly. Whether emigrants have to leave their host country due to an expired visa, are deported for overstaying a visa, are released from a prison abroad, or are left in a precarious immigration status due to a separation, all experience crisis circumstances that need specific responses to each situation. More importantly, for those who are returning without family or support networks the need for support is more critical both in advance of and following their return. The concern, again, for these emigrants is the immediacy of their need to access emergency accommodation and financial support. For those who have

spent time undocumented abroad, the impact on their lives can be exponential if they are separated from their family: they lose their income or business, and their whole planned future abroad can be lost.

Threats and violence are defined as returning from war or conflict zones, domestic violence, and personal threats and intimidation. Emigrants returning from such harrowing experiences can suffer from trauma, which is added to the stress of return migration and restarting their lives all over again in Ireland. The more concerning issue is that engagement with statutory services and urgent access is linked with further stress and trauma. Support from embassies and consulates can help to ease the pressure for those advised to leave conflict zones. Emigrants fleeing from abusive relationships have also experienced an impact on their own support networks, with one interviewee being reluctant to re-establish old friendships.

Discrimination is presented as an issue for emigrants, both explicitly and implicitly. Discrimination affects mainly Irish emigrant citizens of minority ethnic groups interviewed in this report. It causes difficulties for the emigrants in accessing statutory services, housing and employment, and affects their overall ability to resettle in Ireland.

10 Conclusion

The key themes identified in the research present a unique insight into the experiences of Irish emigrants returning to Ireland in crisis – what drives them to return, how they are supported before and after they return, how they deal with their circumstances, and their resettlement in Ireland.

This group experiences multiple and multifaceted difficulties, resulting from a combination of personal, organisational, legal, financial, policy and political influences. The research reveals that poverty, homelessness, isolation, mental and physical health needs, and risks to personal safety are affecting the most vulnerable returning emigrants. Irish emigrants can be unaware of the supports available to them both abroad and on their return to Ireland, especially in relation to their wellbeing, immigration status, and financial security.

Irish emigrant-focused support organisations offer an invaluable safety net for Ireland's diaspora communities. However, there are potentially many more Irish emigrants outside the reach of such groups who may need assistance, and who are struggling to access local services and culturally appropriate support. For these individuals in particular, Irish consular supports are vital.

Representatives from many of the emigrant support groups interviewed noted that demand for their services outweighs their resources and that there is a need for the expansion of resources, shared learning, and collaboration. The breadth and depth of these services vary considerably and are dependent on the organic development and objectives of individual groups, often in response to regional needs. Their commitment to assisting those most in need can be life-saving in some cases, also providing much-needed support to families back in Ireland to reach their relatives abroad.

Successful resettlement in Ireland is of concern and has become a more acute issue as a result of the country's protracted housing and homelessness crisis. The additional stress, resources needed, and time required to find a stable home again in Ireland have placed returned emigrants in much more precarious situations than they anticipated prior to their return. Many arrive straight into homelessness and face prolonged administrative processes for accessing stable accommodation, social welfare and healthcare supports. Single parents and children, much like their peers in the resident population, are at higher risk of homelessness.

The more recent trend of emigrants returning from conflict zones and the emergence of dual-nationality and naturalised citizens of black, Asian and minority ethnic communities or heritage, offer insight into the diversity of the Irish diaspora. These groups can have additional needs requiring different responses.

Support for returned emigrants has increased since the introduction of the Diaspora Policy in 2016. However, closer attention must be paid to the protection of returning emigrants in crisis and those in vulnerable circumstances. In particular, they urgently need efficient access to vital statutory services and supports, including expedited access to stable emergency accommodation, social welfare and medical and psychological care. Particular attention is also required to ensure the prevention of institutional racism against returning Irish emigrants who are from minority ethnic groups.

As far as possible, support groups in Ireland help meet the support needs of emigrants who have been deported or released from prison, older emigrants with long-term support needs, and emigrants who arrive homeless, without income, and with physical and mental health support needs. These supports, along with supports abroad, including Irish consular services, continue to be essential for people arriving in difficult

circumstances and help to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

Emigrant support groups and Irish consular services are providing essential services for people in crisis circumstances, and these need to be included as a key component of the forthcoming Diaspora Policy 2020. The following recommendations are proposed for supporting the duty of care for emigrants returning in unplanned and crisis circumstances.

10.1 Recommendations

The following supports should be available for all emigrants returning in crisis situations:

Housing Support

- **Access to local authority emergency homeless accommodation immediately on return, with longer-term placements for families**
- **Expedited registration with the local authority for housing supports, including the social housing list and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)**
- **Extension of Family Homeless Action Teams and support in local authorities nationally to assist returned emigrants in crisis situations in sourcing HAP/ appropriate accommodation.**

Financial Support

- Immediate access to emergency social welfare assistance, such as Exceptional Needs Payments
- Expedited primary and secondary social welfare claims, including jobseekers' allowances and family payments
- Free interim travel passes for adults and children to assist them with accessing supports and services.

Family and Support Networks

- Assistance for families to secure immediate school placements for children, on their return.

Health Support

- Free medical care from the HSE for those in urgent need of medical attention for physical and mental health supports, while their medical card applications are being processed
- Access to affordable and appropriate counselling support for adults and children
- Expedited medical card applications.

Support for Immigration Issues and Deportation/Detention, and for Those Experiencing Threats and Violence, or Fleeing Conflict Zones

- Recognition by key statutory services that people arriving home from these

situations may not be able to provide all the required documentation usually needed to access homeless accommodation, social protection support, etc.

- Expedited protocol to address the immigration permission needs for immediate non-EEA family members returning with Irish citizens in these situations.

Discrimination

- Development of training and service provision across relevant statutory services on the support needs, rights and entitlements of returned emigrants.

Cross-cutting Longer-term Actions

- Formalised recognition of the needs of vulnerable returning emigrants in cross-departmental policy and procedures
- Investment in developing shared knowledge and collaborative work between emigrant support groups
- Expansion of the Central Statistics Office's annual Population and Migration Estimates to capture more information on return migration of Irish citizens to Ireland.

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Government of Ireland Emigrant Support Programme



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
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