

Review of Ireland's Engagement with the Diaspora Consultation Paper

At the Third Global Irish Economic Forum, on 4th and 5th October 2013, the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr. Eamon Gilmore T.D., announced that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade would undertake a Comprehensive review of our Diaspora policy to examine all elements of our engagement with the Irish abroad.

The review is now getting underway and **the Department is inviting those at home and abroad who are interested in and affected by issues of emigration, and the wider questions of engagement with the Diaspora, to contribute their views to the review.**

Ireland has an enormous Diaspora, estimated by some as totalling some 70 million people worldwide who can claim some Irish descent. The scale and reach of that Diaspora is a result of successive waves of large-scale emigration, over a period of more than 150 years. The Irish Diaspora, however, is not an homogenous group and should not be viewed as such – members of the Diaspora include those who have left Ireland in recent years, as well as those who are descended from emigrants of many generations past; those who left Ireland to develop their careers, as well as those who moved away for personal and family reasons. It includes some who have been enormously successful and some for whom emigration has been a less positive experience.

Government engagement must be sensitive to how these disparate groups experience their connection to Ireland and the policies in place must reflect this. Engagement must also be a two-way process, to ensure that the links between Ireland and its Diaspora continue to evolve and remain vibrant.

Engagement with the Diaspora has long been of enormous importance for Ireland. It has been a distinctive feature of efforts to bring a lasting peace to the island. It has built economic links resulting in trade, investment and tourism. The achievements of the Diaspora, both Irish born and those of Irish descent, have enhanced Ireland's profile and reputation internationally, and are a source of pride to people in Ireland. Members of the Diaspora have shown Ireland, and Irish culture and sports, in all parts of the world.

The review will examine how the Diaspora can continue to feel connected and actively engaged in the development of Ireland, economically and socially.

Support for Emigrants

In 2002, the Report of the Task Force on Policy Regarding Emigrants was published.

Following the report of the Task Force, funding for services to emigrants was increased significantly. Funding delivered through the Emigrant Support Programme, managed by the Irish Abroad Unit, increased from €2.959m in 2003 to reach a peak of €15.183m in 2008 and

2009. Since then, in line with reductions across the public sector, the allocation has been reduced and the allocation for 2014 stands at €11.595m.

Organisations in Britain and the United States receive the largest amounts of funding but recent years have seen grants made to organisations in locations as diverse as Brisbane, Singapore, Dubai, Shanghai and Zimbabwe, in addition to more traditional locations.

Recent years have seen a new wave of emigration from Ireland. For those leaving due to economic necessity, this can be a difficult and challenging process. Many are heading to traditional centres of emigration but others are heading to new locations, building new communities, for example, in Western Australia, Western Canada and the UAE. These new emigrants face challenges on arrival in these countries and face challenges if and when they wish to return to Ireland.

Existing Structures for Engagement

Ireland's network of Embassies and Consulates engages with members of the Diaspora on an ongoing basis, across a range of sectors, including culture, sports, business and education.

The Irish Abroad Unit in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was established, in 2004, to meet the objectives set out in the Task Force Report: to 'protect and support' the Irish Abroad. The Irish Abroad Unit (IAU) manages a range of engagement between the Irish Government and the Diaspora; including support and recognition for Irish overseas in the form of the Emigrant Support Programme, the Presidential Distinguished Service Awards for the Irish Abroad, and structured engagement with the Diaspora geared towards economic development, through the Global Irish Network and Global Irish Economic Forum.

With the onset of the economic crisis, engagement with members of the Diaspora on issues related to economic recovery and growth became more structured, through the Global Irish Network and the meetings of the Global Irish Economic Forum.

In early 2010, the Global Irish Network was launched and currently comprises more than 350 senior Irish and Irish connected business people based in some 40 countries. Network members come from a diversity of disciplines. They have demonstrated a strong connection to Ireland and have a record of high achievement in international business or in assisting in the promotion of Ireland. They provide Ireland with an invaluable resource of international expertise from which we can draw as we work towards continued economic recovery.

To date, there have been three meetings of the Global Irish Economic Forum, in 2009, 2011 and, most recently in 2013. Over these successive meetings, there have been changes in how they are conducted. For example, in 2013, mentoring sessions were held to bring Enterprise Ireland clients together with Network members. In addition, meetings were held outside Dublin for the first time, with meetings in Cork, Galway and Belfast.

Outside Government, there is a growing number of civil society organisations that work to maintain and develop the links between Ireland and its extensive Diaspora. Many of these organisations and local groups were highly active in attracting emigrants to return to Ireland for last year's highly successful Gathering, which served to reinforce ties between the Irish at home and abroad.

Policy areas for consideration

Among the issues that will be considered in the review are:

- Identifying the trends in the ongoing development of the Diaspora
- Understanding the needs of different emigrant and Diaspora communities overseas and how to respond to these. These include new emigrants, the undocumented in the US and ageing emigrant communities.
- The role of the Diaspora in economic in social and economic development in Ireland.
- The continued importance and role of the Diaspora for peace on this island.
- The status, rights and entitlements of emigrants and returning emigrants.
- How the Government can best connect with the Irish abroad.

This is not an exhaustive list and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is open to receiving views on all aspects of the Government's engagement and relationship with the Diaspora.

This review is complementary to the wider Review of Foreign Policy and External Relations being conducted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It will allow Diaspora issues to be considered in greater depth and in more operational terms. Submissions made under the Foreign Policy Review which reference Diaspora and emigration-related issues will be made available to the Diaspora policy review team as a matter of course and will be taken fully into account.

How to make a submission:

Submissions should be made in writing. They should be sent to the Irish Abroad Unit at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade by email to Diasporareview@dfa.ie, or by post marked 'Review of Diaspora Strategy' to the Irish Abroad Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, 79-80 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, by 23 April 2014. If you have any queries concerning the review, please contact Jane Ann Duffy at the same email address or, for telephone queries, at + 353 1 408 2230.

The review team may release all or part of a submission, subject to data protection requirements. Please indicate if you are willing to authorise this release (indicate YES/NO) when making a submission. Please also indicate (YES/NO) if you are willing for your submission to be published on the website of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts will apply to submissions received, which may therefore be released in total or in part. When making a submission, please indicate if there are aspects of your submission that you seek to have withheld, and the reasons for same (more information here: www.foi.gov.ie).

18 March 2014