



1. combined work, mutual assistance
2. cooperation, partnership

Comhar policy bulletin – December 2020

This bulletin focuses on the recent publication of the Irish government’s Diaspora Strategy, queries we have received about the European Health Insurance Card, and updates on some issues covered in the last edition.

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Diaspora Strategy 2020-2025

On 18 November, the Irish government published its new [Diaspora Strategy for 2020–2025](#). Irish in Britain welcomes the new Diaspora Strategy, which evidences meaningful engagement with stakeholder groups globally, including many of our own recommendations, informed by our experience of working with over 120 member organisations.

We are glad to see proposals to evolve the Emigrant Support Programme and a distinct emphasis on celebrating a diverse diaspora. While more concise than the 2015 strategy, it outlines several new and important initiatives on which we look forward to collaborating with the Department of Foreign Affairs.

This includes outreach with groups that have been underrepresented, such as Travellers, LGBTQI groups and those from a mixed heritage. It includes promotion of “inclusive events for Irish diaspora communities that are welcoming of and respectful towards non–Irish family members or members of local communities that may wish to participate”. A referendum on voting rights for the Irish abroad in presidential elections will also still be held.

We are pleased to see a number of points raised in our submission included, such as recognising the diversity of today’s diaspora, the importance of rebuilding relationships with the survivors of institutional abuse and other underrepresented groups, expanding multi–annual funding and evolving the ESP, and intergenerational engagement.

We are confident that this strategy contains the necessary scope to support the diaspora in Britain in facing the challenges of providing welfare support during and after the pandemic, of Brexit and of planning for the future.

You can read more of our analysis of the strategy on our [website](#).

European Health Insurance Card

We have received several queries about the validity of UK issued European Health Insurance Cards (EHIC) after the transition period ends on 1 January 2021. The EHIC is based on country of residence not origin. For most UK residents, as things stand, their EHIC cards will cease to be valid in the EU/EEA after the end of the transition period. This is subject to the ongoing negotiations and may change if the UK agrees to participate in the scheme.

There is further guidance on the NHS [website](#). The page states that EU nationals living in the UK before 31 December 2020 will be able to apply for “a new UK EHIC in due course”. However, the application process has not yet opened and it is unclear what this will mean for dual Irish-UK citizens. There will hopefully be clarity if an agreement is reached before the transition period ends.

Irish citizens will still be able to access healthcare in the UK on the same basis as British citizens without any change in their status due to the agreements surrounding the [Common Travel Area](#) (even in the case of 'no deal'). This also applies to UK citizens in Ireland.

Spending review

The UK government's [spending review](#) in November made several announcements in terms of funds for health and care services with Chancellor Rishi Sunak saying people "will not see austerity", despite the pandemic and an economic downturn. He confirmed there will be an additional £500 million for mental health services. The mental health charity Mind has [welcomed](#) the spending pledges, but noted that: services will need £1 billion every year for three years; they would like to see a cross-government plan for mental health; and increases to Universal Credit payments.

Other announcements include the launch of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which will replace EU structural funding. £220 million will be available next year for local areas for investment in people, skills and communities.

Margaret Keane gravestone

We have been covering the efforts of the Keane family to appeal a Church of England ecclesiastical court decision not to allow an untranslated Irish inscription on Margaret's gravestone for several months now and remain in contact with them. Since our last update in September, the Church of England has agreed to cover the family's court costs, including reimbursing costs already paid. The next appeal at the Court of Arches will be heard on 24 February 2021. The Keane family's legal team are working free of charge on the case.

Conor McGinn, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Ireland and the Irish in Britain, raised the case in the House of Commons in November, calling for a review into the appeals court of Church of England as even successful appellants can be liable to court costs. You can view this [here](#).

Census 2021

The census in England and Wales is set to go ahead on 21 March 2021, though the Scottish census has been delayed for a year. This will be the first majority online census, with a 75% online completion target. A major challenge will be contacting people in hard-to-reach areas and those without or limited digital access, who can fill in a physical form.

Irish in Britain has a long record of engagement with the Office of National Statistics and we continue to liaise with them as part of its census Diversity Advisory Group. In the new year, we will share resources and update our members about the upcoming census.

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