



Emigrant Support Service



ADVICE &
INFORMATION



OUTREACH
VISITS



HOUSING
ASSISTANCE



CONNECT

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From the Chairman's Desk

Greetings,

A group from the Safe Home Programme visited Áras an Uachtaráin last week at the invitation of our Patron Michael D Higgins, Uachtaráin Na hÉireann. We joined the other groups who were invited also who came from a broad spectrum of Irish society. We were delighted to meet His Excellency and his charming wife Sabina in such splendid surroundings with our Safe Home team. I was privileged to be accompanied by representatives of our clients, volunteers, staff and board.



I had the pleasure of being next door neighbours to the Higgins family when I lived in Galway with my parents many years ago. Áras an Uachtaráin is both a family home and a venue for formal state occasions. We were in good company as previous visitors included Pope John Paul 11, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, President Bill Clinton, President Barack Obama, President John F Kennedy, Senator Hillary Clinton, President Charles de Gaulle, H.M Queen Elizabeth 11 and many more.

The Áras is set amid 130 acres of parkland and gardens dating back to the construction of the house in 1751. The original house was a modest brick house for the Phoenix Park Chief Ranger. It was subsequently acquired as an "occasional residence" for the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to become his summer residence and gradually evolved to a large mansion. His official residence was in Dublin Castle. After Ireland gained independence, it was occupied by three Governors General between 1922 and 1937, prior to the first president Dr. Douglas Hyde taking up residence.

I wonder will Hillary Clinton revisit the Áras having successfully trumped Donald for USA President or will it be Donald Trump who will trump Hillary? Only time will tell I suppose!

All the best for now, **Dr Jerry Cowley, Chairman**

Police Checks/Garda Clearance requirement by social housing providers in Ireland

For Safe Home housing applicants; We are once again highlighting the fact that most Local Authorities and social housing providers in Ireland will require prospective tenants to have Police/Garda clearance (or the equivalent, depending on the country you are currently living in).

These checks can often take some time to be carried out. For example; In the UK, the relevant clearance is known as a Subject Access Request (S.A.R), it costs £10 and can take up to 40 days for the results to come through.

When you submit a S.A.R application you will need to include copies (not originals) of at least two different documents which confirm your identity, current address and signature. These could be:

- A passport or driving licence which shows your date of birth and signature
- A utility bill, bank, mortgage or credit card statement which is dated within the last six months and which shows your current address

More information on UK Subject Access Requests, including the application form can be obtained via: **www.acro.police.uk**

To request an application form; Tel: 02380 47 9920

Email: customer.services@acro.pnn.police.uk

Applications can be made online or by post

Some people, those who may have worked /volunteered in roles where they were involved with children or vulnerable adults may already have the required clearance. If you do, it is important that you send a copy to us here at Safe Home to include with your housing file.

Important Note! In our experience of dealing with Housing Associations throughout the country, particularly in most recent times, only applicants who have ALL of the required paperwork in order will be considered for vacancies that arise.

We understand that some applicants may have difficulty in applying for the required checks so please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries whatsoever. If you live close to an Irish Welfare & Advice Centre abroad, they too will be happy to offer assistance.

Feedback from clients: Driving in Ireland and huge insurance costs

"My wife and I returned to Ireland from U.S.A. after being away for thirty five years. We have U.S driving licences'. We both have clean driving records. We have been told we have to go through the full process to get our Irish licence. In the meantime, we are paying huge premiums to an International company for car insurance.

We would have no problem taking the theory and practical tests, but we feel the rest of the process of learning to drive should not apply to experienced drivers. Having to stay off the motorways during the 'learning period' would also present problems (we live in Arklow, our daughter lives in Bray) not to mention the safety factor of using side roads. Driving lessons would not be much benefit to people who have been driving so long.

We have been in touch with various agencies, including the Road Safety Authority and various Government departments to see if there may be simpler and easier way around all of this. So far, we have not had any positive responses.
It's very disheartening.....so much for welcome home!"

Budget 2017

Budget 2017 was announced on Oct 11th 2016. Some of the changes announced in the Budget came into effect immediately. Others will not 'kick in' until the beginning of January or March 2017. Most of those will be where there are increases in social welfare payments. We will report in more detail on these and other up-coming changes in the New Year. For now, here is a brief outline of some of the main changes.

Income Tax :

Farmers: Currently, farmers' income is taxed on an average basis over five years. But Budget Day, changes were announced that will allow farmers, during years when profits are down, to pay tax based on their actual income for that year.

Self Employed – Earned Income Tax Credit increased to €950

Also Invalidity Pension eligibility will be extended to the self-employed from December 2017 and for Treatment Benefits, such as Dental, Optical and Hearing, from March 2017

Landlords: Deduction allowed on mortgage interest payments Increased from 75% to 80% with further reductions promised in future years until it is back to 100%.

Help to Buy Scheme (or First Time Buyers Grant) Up to €30,000 tax rebate available for FTB buying new homes under €600,000. Important Note! This scheme is receiving further review at present.

VRT exemption for electric vehicles extended for 5 years, hybrid vehicles relief is extended to the end of 2018.

Rent a Room Scheme – tax free upper limit rises from €12k to €14k a year.

Tobacco: Pack of 20 cigarettes to rise by **50 cent** - this increase brings the average price for a pack of 20 cigarettes up to €11.30

Universal Social Charge: Three bands reduced by 0.5% and the 18,668 band raised to 18,772

Capital Acquisitions Tax: (Inheritance Tax)

The threshold on Band A (applying to gifts and inheritances from parents to children) is to be raised from €280k to €310,000. The thresholds in other Bands are due to increase by 8%

DIRT (Deposit Interest Retention Tax): Reduced from 41% to 39%

Mortgage interest relief was due to be abolished entirely after 31 December 2017. It will now be retained beyond this date, on a tapered basis.

Minimum Wage: Increase to €9.25 from €9.15 an hour

Childcare Subsidy: New Single Affordable Childcare Scheme with a universal subsidy for children aged 6 months to 3 years for all families who avail of approved registered childcare. Due to commence September 2017

Changes in welfare payments:

From March 2017, weekly social welfare payments will increase by €5 per week. However, there will only be proportional increases for qualified adults (e.g. spouse/partner) and those on reduced rates of payment (e.g. people aged 25 yrs and younger who are in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance).

Welfare Christmas Bonus: For those in receipt of a long term social welfare payment (minimum of €20 weekly), the Christmas bonus this year has been increased to 85% of their weekly payment.

Note! There was no increase in Fuel Allowance or Living Alone Allowance

Rent Allowance: / Personal rent contribution to be reduced from €30 to €10 per week for people aged 18-24 who are receiving Jobseeker's Allowance of €100 per week and reduced from €30 to €20 for those who are receiving €144 and €160 per week – From **January 2017**

Q. A close family member has become very ill abroad. My Irish passport is out of date, **is there any way to get an emergency passport so that I can arrange to travel as soon as possible?**

A. In the case of an emergency situation (the death or serious illness of a family member, or for emergency medical treatment of the applicant), the passport office can issue your passport on the same day. **Contact;** Passport Office (Dublin): 01 671 1633 OR Passport Office (Cork) 021 494 4700

Additionally a Pilot Rapid Renewal service has been introduced in the Passport Office in Knockmaun House, 42-47, Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2. This will facilitate where possible and by appointment only, the renewal of a passport for an Adult or Child Travelling in less than 3 working days. This service is available only through the Dublin office. A first time Adult or Child applicant cannot avail of this service.

If you wish to make an appointment for the Rapid Renewal Passport Service visit:

www.passportappointments.ie.

In all other circumstances, it will take a **minimum of 3 working days** to issue a passport.

Q. Were any changes in relation to Medical Cards or Health care announced in the latest budget?

A. Prescription charges for medical card holders: The maximum anyone over 70 yrs has to pay each month will fall from €25 to €20 (commencing March 2017)

Medical cards – entitlement to a medical card will be extended to all children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance.

Changes to the Treatment Benefit Scheme:

This scheme is available to insured workers and retired people who have the required number of PRSI contributions. Under the Treatment Benefit Scheme, you may qualify for: Dental benefit, Optical benefit, Hearing aids

From October 2017, the proposed Budget changes include plans to expand the Dental benefit to include a free annual scale and polish. A change in the optical benefit is due to include the option of either free glasses or a contribution of €42 towards the cost of glasses.

Note! Treatment Benefit Scheme and EU Regulations: If you were previously insurably employed in a country covered by EU Regulations and you do not qualify on your Irish PRSI record, your social insurance record in the other EU country may be used to help you qualify for Treatment Benefit. You must have paid at least one reckonable PRSI contribution (Classes A, E, H and P) since your return to Ireland.

For more information on this Scheme, contact:
Treatment Benefit Section (DSP)
St. Oliver Plunkett Road, Letterkenny
Donegal, Ireland

Tel: 074 916 4480 (IRE) or 00353 74 916 4480

Safe Home Ireland is supported by the Emigrant Support Programme via:



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