

NEWS

Housing crisis and cost of living spur a mass of key workers to pack their bags, finds *Julianne Corr*

A record number of Irish people emigrated to Australia at the end of last year.

Figures provided to The Sunday Times by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that 2,310 Irish migrants arrived in Australia between September 1 and December 31, compared with 1,430 during the same period in 2019, an increase of 38 per cent.

In the last four months of 2020 and 2021 the number migrating to Australia fell to only 170 and 400 respectively, owing to pandemic restrictions. A total of 1,930 arrived there in that period in 2013, and 1,160 at the end of 2014.

Audrey O'Connor, a director at Kelly & O'Connor Migration, a visa consultancy in Co Kerry, said many young families were emigrating to Australia because of the housing crisis and the increased cost of living. "There's a huge fear at the minute with young families who, due to the housing crisis and cost of living, they simply can't afford to live in Ireland, which is really sad," she said.

"I would hear this a lot from nurses and teachers. They're in really good [professional] positions and they're very well educated, but it's just not happening for them. For the nurses, they would be very overwhelmed with patients in Ireland, whereas in Australia they're saying it's like working in a five-star hotel."

O'Connor said another factor was the increasing number of Irish companies expanding into Australia.

"The corporate side has really taken off for us, with a lot of companies from Dublin, Cork and Kerry expanding into Australian markets," she said. "There's a lot of projects opening up and they need a workforce from Ireland."

Jacob Mahon, 31, a systems reliability engineer from Carlow, emigrated to Melbourne with his partner, Cliona O'Grady, 27, last year. "I moved to Melbourne as it had a good range of IT opportunities and also where my partner's sister had settled. The move to Australia was a long time on the cards, but like a lot of people our plans were in flux after Covid-19," Mahon said.

"It has been fantastic. I heard a lot of people talk about the lifestyle out here but it is not until being here that I can finally understand what that actually means. People here have a very active lifestyle, so any sport you can imagine you will be able to participate in. The food culture is also amazing out here as it's a melting pot of multiple cultures."

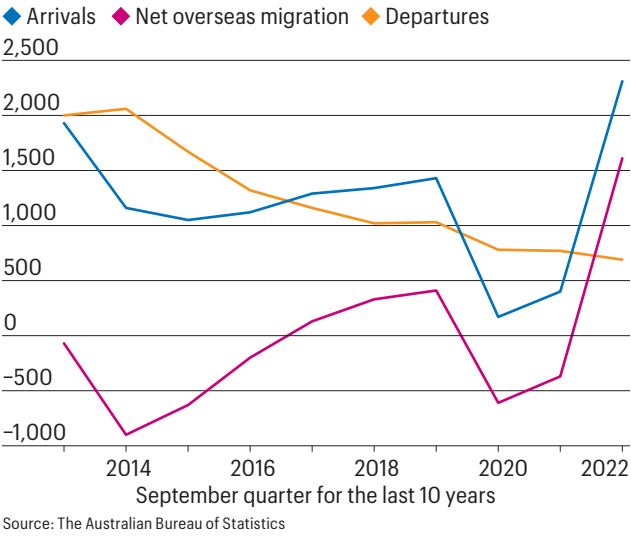
Huw Rees, a 28-year-old research fellow from Dublin, also emigrated to Australia last year. "I had always intended to move to Melbourne to be with my



A move to Melbourne was "a long time on the cards" for Jacob Mahon, an IT engineer from Carlow, and his partner, Cliona O'Grady

Teachers and nurses in exodus to Australia

IRISH-BORN MIGRANT ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES



Source: The Australian Bureau of Statistics

fiancée, who had been living here for a few years," he said. "However, as it got closer to the time of moving I came to realise that living in Ireland, particularly Dublin, had become unrealistic."

"I am on a far better salary here than I would be in Ireland and we pay a significant amount less in rent, utilities, fuel and other general day-to-day expenses."

Last year the South Australian Tourism Commission launched a new scheme that allowed Irish and UK working holiday visa holders to travel to Adelaide for only €10. The commission received about 16,000 applications but only 160 from the UK and 40 from Ireland were chosen, with the majority flying last September.

Mary Gilmartin, a professor of geography at Maynooth University and an expert on contemporary migration, said emigration was also being driven by an increasing number of targeted Australian

recruitment drives for Irish workers. "There's a definite push in the health sector. They were advertising jobs on billboards near hospitals in Dublin recently, so there's definitely a targeted recruitment drive here," she said. "There are specific regions in Australia that are looking to get more migrants on working holiday visas that can be extended."

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, only 690 Irish migrants departed Australia between September and December last year, the lowest number recorded for that period in a decade.

O'Connor said some migrants were afraid of returning to Ireland. "They just want to stay," she said. "Any candidate that I have over there right now that might have gone on a working holiday visa, they're actively looking for sponsors to stay on. People are just afraid of Ireland at the moment unfortunately, so they will stay for as long as they can."

Universities being targeted by sex website

Julianne Corr

Three Irish universities have been the latest target of an illegal sex services website which claims that student escorts are available for hire on their campuses.

Escort Ireland, the country's largest sexual services website, provides virtual and in-person sessions with women in towns across Ireland. The site also contains explicit reviews of women with whom men have had sex and allows clients to rate them out of five stars.

The site was launched in 1990 by Peter McCormick, a convicted pimp and former RUC officer. He moved his operations to Spain when legislation was passed in 2017 making it illegal to advertise sex in Ireland.

The site claims that escorts are available at University College Cork (UCC) and that customers should "check out" the university's Boole Library, which is located on its campus on College Road.

It says: "In an area that was built for the 'advancement of learning in Ireland', get to know more with a study buddy when you book the smart and sexy company of gorgeous escorts!"

UCC declined to comment when contacted.

The site also suggests that escorts are available for hire at Ulster University in Coleraine. It says: "You can find the beautiful University of Ulster escorts who are eagerly waiting to fulfil the deepest dream of all lonely people." And adds: "Ask one of the hot University of Ulster escorts to join you for a few drinks."

Ulster University said it was unaware of the website. "[We] will now take all available action to have our name removed," it said. "Ulster University has zero tolerance for sexual and gender-based exploitation."

Queen's University Belfast has also been targeted. The site says: "If you don't want to go to bed early, you should

continue with a couple of drinks at the Parlour, one of the local people's favourite bars. This is the best place for you to meet one of the interesting escorts in Queen's University."

Queen's did not respond when contacted.

Ruth Breslin, a lead researcher at the Sexual Exploitation Research Programme at UCD, said the website aimed to "normalise" the sale of sex by referencing popular locations and landmarks. "Everything they do on this side of the sex trade is to make it sound normal, sanitised or even



Escort Ireland advises clients to check out UCC

glamorous for the buyers to entice them in," she said.

"But potentially, they also want to make it sound glamorous and nice and like a date for the young women who may be in very desperate financial circumstances."

A survey of the site by The Sunday Times on Friday night found 647 female escorts available for hire and nine men. Only 13 of the women were Irish. Twenty-two per cent were under the age of 25, including some aged just 18.

Barbara Condon, chief executive of Ruhama, a charity offering support to women affected by prostitution, said: "It is inappropriate to advertise any university campus or library as places to seek out escorts, when they are meant to be safe places for students."

Hotels cash in on Biden boost

Julianne Corr

The number of American tourists booking hotel stays in Ireland has almost doubled since last year, while spending has increased by about 16 per cent, according to an artificial intelligence (AI) booking platform.

Tourism Ireland anticipates a further boost following the four-day visit of Joe Biden, the US president, to mark the anniversary of the Good Friday agreement.

Siobhan McManamy, interim chief executive of Tourism Ireland, said: "This visit by President Biden is a wonderful opportunity to showcase the island of Ireland to a huge audience of potential holidaymakers across the United States, and indeed around the world, and has the potential to deliver a major boost to Irish tourism in 2023 and beyond."

"A large media contingent travelled to Ireland to cover the visit, bringing the story to millions of people in the United States and elsewhere around the world and providing a truly unique opportunity to highlight

Ireland as a wonderful holiday destination."

Data provided to The Sunday Times by Allora, the world's first AI-powered booking engine, operated by the Limerick-based company Avvio, shows that the number of American visitors booking overnight stays at Irish hotels has increased by 93 per cent so far this year.

Frank Reeves, chief evangelist for Allora, which provides booking technology to more than 2,000 hotels around the world, said the average booking value of an

GETTY



Dromoland Castle says that visitors are staying longer

American hotel guest was 61 per cent higher than that of a domestic one.

"They purchase more expensive packages and make far more use of the hotel's facilities, such as the restaurant," he said. "US visitors represent 52 per cent of all international bookings at Irish hotels, up from 42 per cent in 2022. This year more are coming and they're spending 16 per cent more than usual, providing a much-needed boost to the hospitality industry."

Marie Chawke, director of

business development at the five-star Dromoland Castle hotel, said the average length of stay for US tourists at the resort had also increased.

"We would have been a two-night stay for the average US visitor, but we're now up to three-night stays for North Americans. We're seeing a lot of multigenerational families coming for the grandparents, bringing the kids and the grandkids. So a lot of family reunion holidays are happening in Ireland, which is lovely to see," she said.

Reeves said a constant concern for Irish hotels was the threat of last-minute cancellations, which could run as high as 40 per cent through some booking channels. "The reality is that a booking isn't guaranteed until the guest actually arrives at the hotel," he said.

"There's been a growing trend of guests from the US and elsewhere to book rooms at multiple hotels, cancelling all but one at the last minute. If a guest cancels just before they're due to stay, it's highly probable their room won't be filled and the hotel will lose that revenue."

Publishers defend sensitivity reader trend

Patrick O'Donoghue

Leading Irish publishers of fiction and children's books have begun to use sensitivity readers to help eliminate language and subject matter that might "jar" with minority groups.

Ivan O'Brien, managing director of the O'Brien Press, said that the publisher of children's books and works of adult non-fiction first used sensitivity readers prior to the 2021 publication of *What Love Looks Like* by Jarlath Gregory, a coming-of-age novel about gay romance. The O'Brien Press, founded in 1974, externally hires sensitivity readers for an agreed fee to examine specific texts.

"We have used sensitivity readers in the past, and will continue to do so. It's additional research, with books being read by people with direct experience or knowledge that the author might not have. This could be in relation to anything from correct use of regional slang to race, sexuality and religion. Suggested changes are discussed by the author and editor," O'Brien said.

Puffin Books' recent decision to hire sensitivity readers and publish rewritten versions of classic children's books by Roald Dahl such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *James and the Giant Peach*, in which words deemed to be offensive to the modern reader were purged,

led to backlash from esteemed literary figures such as the novelist Salman Rushdie, who described the revisions as "absurd censorship".

Alterations have also been made to works by Ian Fleming, the author of the James Bond novels, whose references to race were removed from many texts; Agatha Christie; and Enid Blyton, the children's writer.

However, O'Brien said: "Recent controversies over sensitivity readers are an attempt to create an issue where none exists. It's the same thing as having any expert – for example, a historian – read a book to ensure it's accurate."

Separately, a spokesman

for Lilliput Press said that while the definition of a sensitivity reader was unclear, the publisher did "enlist the help of subject matter experts in order to make sure a text is authentic and of a high quality".

Lilliput publishes works by James Joyce, Brendan Behan and John Banville.

Publishing Ireland, an association of Irish book publishers, said policy in relation to sensitivity readers was a matter for each of its individual members.

The Liffey Press, Penguin Ireland, Hachette Books Ireland, Orpen Press and Harper Collins all failed to respond to requests for comment on whether they used sensitivity readers.

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