

## Dept of Foreign Affairs and Trade Global Irish Position Paper

### Submission by Special Advocate for Survivors of Institutional Abuse, Patricia Carey

*People still living in Ireland are seen and treated as more important than the people who were forced to leave. The government forgot about us. Out of sight, out of mind.*

*I couldn't stay. I wanted to, but the choice was taken away from me.*

*I've just been really depressed lately. Just memories coming up from my time in the institution.*

*I didn't just lose my baby, I lost my family, my heritage and myself.*

*There's really no one to talk to over here that understands*

*Beyond being abandoned by one's family, we were also abandoned by our heritage, our culture and our country. To date, my experiences with Irish authorities has largely reinforced this sense of abandonment*

- **Quotes from Survivors living overseas**

The role of the Special Advocate for Survivors of Institutional Abuse is to hear and promote the collective interests of Survivors and Affected Persons, as expressed by them, and to amplify their voices as a central, essential input to Government deliberations on matters which affect them.

Since her appointment in March 2024, the Special Advocate for Survivors of Institutional Abuse, Patricia Carey, has engaged with over 1400 people. This includes Survivors and Affected Persons, Survivor groups, as well as representatives from many support centres, service providers and community groups and other stakeholders in Ireland and abroad. The Special Advocate has welcomed engagement with people living overseas, including those who have contacted the office from **Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, France, Spain, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and from multiple states in the United States of America.**

Survivors of institutional abuse are an important part of the Irish Diaspora, who have frequently been neglected. The Department of Foreign Affairs, the network of Irish Embassies and Consulates across the world, and the many Irish centres and support groups operating abroad, have a key role to play in supporting Survivors and Affected Persons overseas.

The following issues related to Survivors living overseas have been raised and shared with the Special Advocate:

#### **1. Supporting Irish Survivors of Institutional Abuse and Forced Family Separation living overseas**

- The loss of identity experienced by some Survivors and Affected Persons overseas due to the consequences of institutional abuse and forced family separation.
- Experiences of intense loneliness, trauma, isolation and the lack of dedicated supports around these issues. A desire to meet and connect with other Survivors and Affected Persons. This can be further exacerbated by ongoing feelings of shame and secrecy which needs to be actively addressed by engagements and events that welcome, in particular, Survivors and their families
- A desire to contribute their unique history and experience to the development of the [National Centre for Research and Remembrance](#), as well as to visit local memorial sites of the institutions they spent time in and attend commemorative events in Ireland and access to funding to support this.
- Lack of awareness about redress schemes for Survivors of institutional abuse which are currently open; and issues in relation to applications to redress schemes in terms of paperwork required. This can be exacerbated by issues of digital literacy, lack of supports, unfamiliarity with Irish government structures and bodies, and a limited understanding of different official channels to seek information, particularly around accessing records

- Deep frustration has been expressed in relation to redress schemes which are now closed, from eligible Survivors overseas who did not apply due to a variety of issues.
- Serious concerns on the impact of receiving redress on overseas Survivors, in relation to other countries tax or social welfare systems also noted.
- There is also a serious lack of knowledge and awareness of various government initiatives such as Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022 and the National Centre for Research and Remembrance
- Barriers and administrative burdens when engaging with State officials and government bodies on matters relating to citizenship and passports

## **2. Supporting Irish support organisations which are providing vital services and community supports to Survivors overseas**

The Special Advocate acknowledges the vital and important work and important services that overseas Irish support organisations are providing on the ground to the Irish Diaspora. From her engagements with numerous Irish support organisations, particularly those in the UK and USA, the following key issues and challenges were brought to her attention

- Lack of engagement and information on supports and resources available to Survivors living overseas from Irish Government Departments and public bodies
- Extremely poor information sharing and a lack of training and upskilling opportunities or suitable resources provided by Irish Government to support service providers in these organisations. These organisations have strong relationships with Irish diaspora communities on the ground and consequently have key access to spread information and to support Survivors in applying to schemes they are eligible to.
- Lack of consideration given to the advertising and promotion of these schemes overseas in order to best reach Survivor audiences – i.e. through print advertising materials, suites of promotion resources, and the placement of materials in appropriate settings.
- Concerns about ongoing secrecy and shame, and situations where Survivors in their communities don't feel safe or supported to share their experiences. Some community organisations have expressed a desire to plan engagement programmes and events to support Survivors but require supports and resources in how to create these programmes.

The Special Advocate for Survivors calls for greater funding and supports for Irish support organisations overseas. This includes the development, funding and delivery of practical, dedicated resources, training and upskilling for support organisation staff on the Irish Government's redress schemes and other state schemes, projects and initiatives in order that support organisations can further amplify these measures within Irish communities overseas and support Survivors with information and signposting.

## **3. The vital role of the DFA and the network of Irish Embassies and Consultations in supporting Survivors living overseas**

The Government of Ireland's Global Ireland Ireland's Diaspora Strategy 2020–2025 <sup>1</sup> notes the need for Ireland to – *'Recognise the need to heal the relationship with our emigrants who left Ireland in crisis as a result of discrimination or as victims of institutional abuse'*

There are a number of redress schemes currently open to Survivors of institutional abuse and services available including: *the Magdalene ex-gratia scheme, the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme, the Supports for Survivors of industrial schools and other institutions covered by the recently passed Supports for Survivors Act 2025, services covered under the Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022.* It is incumbent on the Irish State to ensure that these redress measures are actively promoted to ensure that Survivors do not miss out on redress opportunities and supports which they are entitled to.

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<sup>1</sup> [Diaspora Strategy 2020-2025.pdf](#)



- The DFA and the Heads of Mission of Irish Embassies have a critical role in driving change and ensuring that Survivors overseas feel like a respected, valued and supported part of the Irish Diaspora community.
- Updates and circulation of information on supports and redress measures available to Survivors should be a regular feature on the agenda of DFA / Heads of Mission meetings to ensure that the active promotion of supports and services amongst diaspora and community groups is driven from the most senior levels.
- The Special Advocate for Survivors calls for a dedicated strand of the next Global Diaspora Strategy to include supports for and engagement with Survivors of institutional abuse and forced family separation as a priority.
- Supports for Survivors of Institutional Abuse must be a visible presence in Embassy and Consulate offices, on websites, on social media platforms, event calendars, and embedded in overall comms strategies. Visible information in Plain English on all Survivors supports and redress schemes in Embassy locations, and active and ongoing promotion of supports available is critically important.
- There needs to be a requirement that relevant staff in Embassy and Consulates are provided with training and upskilling so that they are equipped to support and advise Survivors and Affected Persons. This can be a sensitive matter and all communications and engagements should be planned and delivered with care and in a trauma-informed way.
- Relevant DFA Staff should be familiar with and actively embed the support of and engagement with Survivors as part of Embassy engagement and public diplomacy plans as a key deliverable.
- Embassies and Consulates can and should provide a vital, active role in strengthening links and connections between the Irish State, Irish community and support organisations, and Survivors and Affected Persons living overseas. This includes arranging training, webinars, and updates from Government Departments and State Agencies on redress measures with Irish support organisations and community leaders to ensure this important information reaches the people most affected, the circulation of relevant promotion materials related to redress schemes and supports, arrangements of inputs into key government projects such as the National Centre for Research and Remembrance.

**ENDS**

