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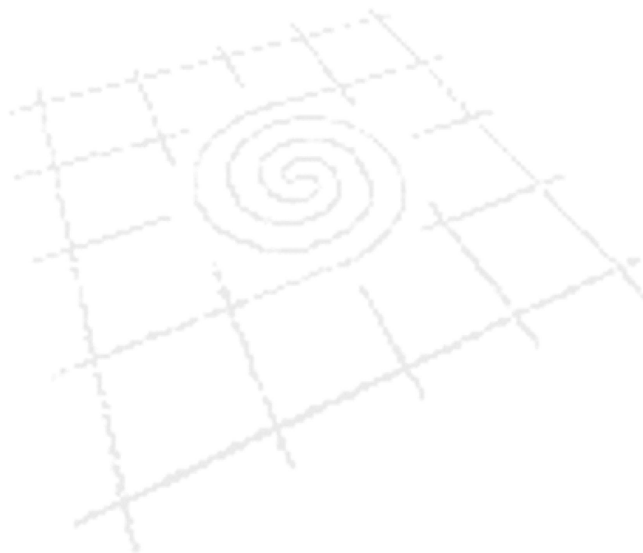
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## Towards an Irish Diaspora Strategy: A Position Paper

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**Towards an Irish Diaspora Strategy**

A Position Paper

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***As a working paper we welcome feedback that we can use to refine our arguments as we continue to prepare our final paper.***

*'The time is right to review our approach to our community across the globe and to develop a strategy for the years ahead. Maintaining and enhancing our links with our communities abroad has been a particular priority for the government. Just as the nature of our diaspora has never been fixed, our attitudes and our capacity to engage with the Irish abroad have changed with our nation's fortunes. We need to regularly reshape our policies in this key area.'*

April 2007, Dermot Ahern TD and Minister for Foreign Affairs

*'It is the entitlement and birthright of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish Nation. That is also the entitlement of all persons otherwise qualified in accordance with law to be citizens of Ireland. Furthermore, the Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage.'*

Article 2 of the Irish Constitution

## **Introduction**

For much of the past two centuries Ireland has been a net emigrant country. Between 1842 and 1920 the Irish population (whole island) fell from 8.2 million people to 4.2 million with an estimated three million people emigrating abroad. Throughout the twentieth century the population continued to decline, with waves of emigration in the 1950s and 1980s coinciding with economic recession. The result is that it is estimated that approximately 70 million people worldwide presently claim some level of Irish ancestry. Moreover, according to the Emigrant Advice Network (EAN), 3.1 million Irish citizens (passport holders) currently live overseas and of these 800,000 are Irish born (around 500,000 in the United Kingdom, 156,000 in the US, 50,000 in Australia, 22,800 in Canada, 16,000 in France, 16,000 in Germany, and 8,000 in Spain)

Many of these Irish citizens and the generations of former Irish citizens who established new lives overseas have successfully organised themselves into clubs, centres and networks centred on their national identity. These Diaspora endeavours have provided and continue to

provide important functions on behalf of the Diaspora and also the Irish state and its citizens including:

- Support networks – welfare, advice, information
- Conduits through which Irish identity can be sustained and performed beyond Ireland
- A means to promote Irish culture and maintain a collective memory
- Social events for the Diaspora community
- Economic networks and business help
- Political campaigning, particularly on the ‘Irish question’, anti-Irish racism, immigrant rights and undocumented migrants
- Remittances, philanthropy and the funding social and economic development/peace and reconciliation projects in Ireland
- Links to the Irish Diaspora in other parts of the world

The result is a vast array of Irish Diaspora organisations and networks around the world. These vary in size from small, local clubs (such as Irish dance schools) to branches of global networks (such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians). It is important to note however, that the nature of the Irish Diaspora has different intensities and different forms in locales due to the size of the community and as patriotism/interest/commitment to Ireland varies across time and space shaped by:

- lives lived in Ireland prior to departure
- Conditions in destination region and processes of integration/assimilation or conflict
- Political conditions in Ireland through time
- Wider cultural processes promoting an interest in heritage and memory.

What this means is that the Irish Diaspora is well organised in some places, but not in others. And even in locales where Diaspora identities and activities are considered to be strong many people are little if at all involved in the Diaspora groups or activities.

It should be noted that the Irish Diaspora has largely self-organised through organic processes, along with help from the Catholic Church. This is not to say that these organisations and networks have not received the support of the Irish state, they clearly have most notably

through the network of embassies and consulates, but rather that the Irish state has traditionally not sought to manage the Diaspora in an overly-determined way. More recently, the state has become more proactive through the creation of schemes designed to help Irish Diaspora organisations, notably through the Task Force on Policy Regarding Emigrants (2002), Enterprise Ireland, the Dion Advisory Committee, and the Irish Abroad Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs who provide funding and supports to individuals and organisations overseas providing for Irish citizens.

As well as the Irish Diaspora, Ireland is now developing significant relationships with other Diaspora. While there has long been immigration into Ireland, in the last decade this has developed apace. According to the 2006 census there were 419,733 people living in Ireland who were born outside the state drawn from across the world but including a large number of (East) Europeans (163,227), Asian (46,952) and Africans (35,326). This figure represents 9.93% of total population (4,172,013) and was almost certainly an undercount at the time and has continued to grow since, especially from the EU accession countries (particularly Poland and Lithuania). These so-called 'New Irish' have established their own Diaspora organizations in Ireland (see Appendix 1).

### **Rationale for a Diaspora Strategy**

A Diaspora strategy is an explicit policy initiative by a state with regard to developing its relationship with its Diaspora. As noted above, Ireland at present does have a small number of schemes designed to foster linkages and services to its Diaspora. By no means, however, are these schemes part of a larger strategy and it is now time to consider how they can be gathered together and extended under the umbrella of a larger, overall Irish Diaspora strategy.

Many might question why Ireland needs a fully developed Diaspora Strategy, especially so soon after the *Report of the Task Force on Policy Regarding Emigrants* (2002) that set in train the provision of support services to vulnerable Irish living abroad. It is certainly the case that existing clubs, organizations, networks and schemes do an excellent job in serving the Diaspora and continue to be of enormous benefit to Ireland. That said, membership of traditional Irish Diaspora groups (e.g. Ancient Order of Hibernians, County societies) seem to be in decline and have an increasingly aged population (as evidenced by dwindling society

memberships and the closure of Irish focused businesses such as Irish bars within Diaspora communities). This is related to three main trends.

First, the number of emigrants leaving Ireland and joining the Diaspora has shrunk remarkably in the last few years and some of those who left Ireland, particularly in the late 1980s, have returned. Second, the traditional imperatives to maintain an Irish Diaspora have weakened. Anti-Irish racism while still present to a certain extent has reduced significantly, the economic position of Ireland has been radically transformed and the need to provide monetary support has dissipated, and the need to mobilize in relation to the 'Irish question' in the North has lessened given the peace process. Third, while cultural identity remains important for the Diaspora more broadly, existing groups and activities do not appeal to as many emigrants as previously due to changes in lifestyle and worldviews and this has occasionally led to tensions between different members of the Diaspora, for example in relation to who can and cannot march in St Patrick Day's Parades.

In contrast, Irish culture – music, literature, theatre, film, comedy - has gained global cache and has cemented Ireland's reputation as a centre of cultural production. In addition, the influx of immigrants to Ireland has significantly changed the landscape of Irish society and challenged Irish citizens to develop a new cosmopolitanism and to reconsider what it means to be Irish. Moreover, as did her predecessor, Mary Robinson, President Mary McAleese, has placed strong focus on the global Irish family in her tenure as President - for instance, always including a major Diaspora element to the programme for her many visits overseas.

Despite these changes and challenges there is no overarching policy and associated practices that facilitate the on-going development of the relationship between Ireland and its Diaspora and there is no doubt that the full potential of such a relationship remains to be realised (as the recent establishment of Irish Network NYC for Irish professionals in New York and the Irish Technological Leadership Group in Silicon Valley testify). Nor is there policy to develop relationships with immigrants to Ireland beyond those directed at managing and supporting their new life in Ireland. In other words, there is significant scope for existing Diaspora initiatives to be supplemented and augmented in new ways to extend and realise new benefits for all parties. These mutual benefits will be social, cultural, political and economic in nature.

Ireland's relationship with its Diaspora, whilst until recently typically uni-directional (from the Diaspora to Ireland), has long been the envy of other countries. Extending its Diaspora strategy will maintain Ireland's position as ahead of the curve in terms of creating and realising new innovations and initiatives at a time when many other countries around the world have started to formulate their own strategies. Indeed, the various options we detail below are designed to cement Ireland's position as leading proponent of innovation and best practice with regards to maintaining and building Diaspora networks and to ensure that the millions of people constituting the Irish Diaspora are given the opportunity to thrive in a multitude of ways.

### **Ethos of an Irish Diaspora Strategy**

A number of countries, encouraged by organisations such as the World Bank, have prepared Diaspora strategies. In general, these strategies either seek to aid their Diaspora in their new places of residence (for example, providing supports or lobbying for political or welfare rights in the host country) or seek to exploit the Diaspora as means to economically help the homeland.

We believe that these narrowly defined strategies fail to fully envisage and realize the benefits of a more widely conceived and morally grounded strategy. The central ethos of an Irish Diaspora strategy should be that by helping each other – building networks of support, sharing advice, creating new ventures – Ireland, the Irish Diaspora and their new country of residence, the 'New Irish' and their home countries, **all** benefit and nobody is exploited. Here it is important to conceive of the Diaspora not as a primed resource waiting to be tapped, but rather as a precious resource to be cared for and tended, valued and re-engendered. As such, a strategy should not be conceived in terms of using the Diaspora but growing in partnership with it.

We believe that an Irish Diaspora strategy should facilitate the development of schemes that relate to the full spectrum of Diasporic life and identity, fostering *productive* social, cultural, political and economic activities. Within this framework, culture should not be seen as subordinate to support schemes and economic endeavours but be part and parcel of a progressive Diaspora strategy. Here culture extends beyond cultural products to include broad issues of cultural identity, memory and genealogy.

The strategy should be as inclusive as possible and include the development of an affinity Diaspora (the so-called 'New Irish' who would be encouraged to continue to play for 'Team Ireland' if they return to their home country or migrate to another country from Ireland). It should also include the Irish Diaspora in its broadest form embracing individuals and organisations from all parts of the island (North and South) and of different religions (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, etc.)

It should be a strategy that people buy into not one that individuals, organisations and networks are co-opted into. Indeed, a central conclusion to emerge from Diaspora strategies developed elsewhere is that the sustainability of the strategy rests on the motivations of volunteers and cannot be fulfilled through conscripts.

The role of the state within the strategy should not be to centrally manage and run the various schemes or to assume the work or mandate of existing or new Diaspora organisations or networks. Rather it should be to guide, facilitate, add-value, coordinate across and help fund schemes and to maximise the capacities and potentials of organisations. In other words, the state and its agencies should help existing networks and organisations and help establish and to 'lightly incubate' new schemes and networks. This 'light' approach should be taken for four principle reasons:

- 1) it will sustain and create more organic networks and schemes that are more likely to be sustainable into the future
- 2) it will enable flexibility and avoid overly formulaic and heavily structured schemes that constrain and co-opt rather than enable and encourage participation
- 3) it will enhance and produce relationships that are of mutual benefit as no one party is dominant
- 4) it will reduce the costs and administrative burden for all parties

The strategy and its ethos should be strongly embedded in the relevant government and state agencies, with the implementation of the strategy tasked to one unit that oversees its development and implementation and coordinates its work across agencies.



It is important to keep in mind that conceiving of and implementing the wrong strategy will potentially create long term damage to the relationship between Ireland and its Diaspora that will be difficult to redress.

## **A Diaspora Strategy for Ireland**

It is our belief that an Irish Diaspora strategy needs a diverse and wide range of schemes to reach as many people as possible in order to maximise and realise their potential. As argued in the previous section, the strategy needs to extend significantly beyond traditional thinking about how Ireland can support and foster cultural, social and economic links with the Irish Diaspora. While the *Report of the Task Force on Policy Regarding Emigrants (2002)* made significant strides in charting the experiences of the Irish Diaspora and setting out how the Irish state could support vulnerable Irish people living abroad it was largely limited to Box A in Table 1. This should be a central plank of any future strategy but it needs broadening in scope and ratcheting-up in scale.

Our suggestion is that an Irish Diaspora strategy should consist of fostering four types of Diaspora relationships and take two dominant forms as set out in Table 1. At present we would contend that the Irish state is taking an active role with respect to A, B, C and F but in each case the level of involvement is uneven and unsystematic so that mutually beneficial potential is not being realised.

While we would not expect equal focus and resources to be applied to each relationship set out in Table 1, as effort has to be rationed, we insist that nurturing and developing all these relationships has value and merit and is vital to developing a well-rounded and inclusive strategy. Further, regardless of whether this diverse approach is adopted, we are strongly of the view that any strategy vision has to extend well beyond the notion of using the Diaspora merely for economic gain as recently expressed by some commentators within the Irish media as a way to sustain the Celtic Tiger phenomenon.

It should be noted that this strategy needs to be sensitive to the geographical and historical differences across the Irish Diaspora. The situation, needs and aspirations of the Irish

Diaspora varies between location, and the kind of schemes prioritised with respect to the UK and US might well be different to those prioritised for Argentina, Spain, China, and so on.

A key resource will be an *overarching portal* that sets out the strategy's aims and objectives, provides links to useful information, and acts an overarching network linking together and connecting all elements of the Irish and New Irish Diaspora.

**Table 1: The structure of an Irish Diaspora strategy**

Relationship	Supporting	Facilitating, Developing
<b>Ireland – Irish Diaspora</b>	A	B
<b>Ireland – New Irish</b>	C	D
<b>Irish Diaspora – Irish Diaspora</b>	E	F
<b>Irish Diaspora – New Irish</b>	G	H

***Ireland – Irish Diaspora***

There are a number of ways in which the relationship between Ireland and its Diaspora is presently expressed.

- A Welfare, supports, advice, information, lobbying, legal aid (Irish Abroad Unit, Embassies/Consulates, EAN)  
Return migration services (EAN)  
Cultural events and identity  
Broadcast media (RTE)
  
- B Business networks and supports (Enterprise Ireland, BioLink USA-Ireland, TechLink UK-Ireland)  
Remittances and philanthropy back to Ireland (Ireland Funds, IFI, etc)  
Political support  
Business support, inward investment  
Market for Irish produce

These various activities and schemes have developed in an ad hoc fashion and could be supplemented by other schemes. For example:

Additional supports for vulnerable, young Irish abroad (to date programmes seem to have concentrated mainly on the elderly)

Programmes of cultural exchange; Expansion of overseas cultural programmes

Summer schools for higher education students (especially those in Irish studies programmes) with a scheme to maintain the relationship into the long term.

Develop school curriculum materials concerning Ireland and the Irish diaspora suitable for school projects abroad.

Exploring new social networking technologies as a means to engage children and young adults beyond traditional activities such as GAA and dancing clubs.

Irish 'Business Ambassador' programme where Irish business people mentor members of the Diaspora business community and vice versa.

Develop supports for entrepreneurial Irish citizens abroad who are interested in growing small businesses and potentially investing in Ireland in the long term.

Develop a programme of research that engages with the Diaspora and in particular finds and populates community archives, undertakes oral histories, and examines present-day life of the Diaspora as a means to stimulate interest in Irish identity and culture.

Invest in and develop genealogical supports for those researching their family tree as it is a significant practice of identity formation and production.

### ***Ireland – New Irish***

At present, the relationship between the Irish state and the so-called 'New Irish' has been characterised by the development of schemes to recruit 'talented' migrants to Ireland and then support them whilst resident in Ireland.

- C Schemes for recruiting 'talented' migrants such as FAS roadshows and DETE recruitment fares;  
Support structures and organisations in Ireland (Minister for Integration; Anti-racism; Immigrant NGOs; Support groups, etc)

These could be supplemented by schemes aimed at resolving 'under utilised talent' in Ireland (such as foreign trained teachers working as cleaners, etc). They could also be supplemented by schemes aimed at developing an *Affinity Diaspora*. Here the New Irish are encouraged to continue 'playing for Team Ireland' - continue to represent and work for Ireland - if they return to their home country or when they move onto other places.

- D Develop 'New Irish Ambassador' and Alumni programmes.  
Provide advice and supports for Irish businesses seeking to invest in their home country;  
Build business relationships and trade between Ireland and these locations  
Build programmes of cultural, social and educational exchange

Schemes in these cases could consist of 'New Irish Ambassador' and Alumni programmes. It is important, we believe, in developing these schemes to work with other countries to build mutually productive relationships so that both countries diaspora strategies dovetail as much as possible.

### ***Irish Diaspora – Irish Diaspora***

A third relationship that has generally been little explored, although some limited attempts have been made to realise its potential, are diaspora to diaspora strategies. In terms of supports these do/could consist of:

- E Philanthropy and welfare schemes;  
Support services such as Irish Pastoral centres, drop-in centres, community centres

Given the growth of the Irish economy and the ability of the Irish government to tackle problems in Ireland it seems a sensible strategy for organisations such as the Ireland Funds to shift a good proportion of its attention away from Ireland towards supporting the Diaspora itself.

In terms of facilitating and developing initiatives they do/could consist of:

F Business networks and services (IN NYC, ITLG) at local, regional, national and international scales. In terms of the latter, Diaspora groups in different countries help provide advice and introductions vis-a-vis operating in another country and open new markets.

The cultural and sporting interaction of Diaspora in different parts of the world through cultural exchange programmes, sponsoring of tours, and sports (GAA) competitions.

The development of transnational archives and heritage projects

We would argue that these peer-to-peer relationships would be a sound investment for the Irish state as they help globalise Irish business and cultural interests.

### ***Irish Diaspora – New Irish***

The final relationship we think it is worth exploring and developing would be between the Irish Diaspora and the New Irish. In terms of supports this could include:

G Philanthropy supporting the New Irish in Ireland  
Peer-to-peer supports where the Irish Diaspora and indeed return Irish impart their experiences of establishing themselves abroad to help Diaspora groups in Ireland.

In terms of a facilitating role, the Irish Diaspora could:

H - Build mutually productive business links with the 'New Irish' in Ireland (that could potentially open up new avenues into markets in their home countries in time).  
Provide pre-departure advice about Ireland to prepare them for life in Ireland.  
Perform a recruitment role for procuring talented migrants to Ireland.  
Give advice about community archive and heritage projects

Again, we would argue that it is in the interest of the Irish state to help establish schemes that could foster such relationships as it is to the long term benefit of Ireland (better preparing people for life in Ireland, developing business in Ireland, and expanding the economic potential of Irish citizens abroad).

## **Next Steps**

Leading institutions around the world are now prioritising Diaspora strategies as policy initiatives and a raft of countries are seeking to re-energise their Diaspora. In this short paper we have made the case for Ireland to develop a comprehensive Diaspora strategy, set out the ethos that we feel should underpin this strategy, and provided an outline of a possible Irish Diaspora strategy and various potential schemes. To repeat – by strategy we are envisaging the creation of a set of tools designed to encourage, promote, foster and nurture the diverse relationships between Ireland, its Diaspora and the ‘New Irish’ rather than the creation of a set of rigid, prescriptive management techniques.

We are firmly of the opinion that it is in the interest of the Irish state and its peoples, the Irish Diaspora, and the New Irish Diaspora in Ireland to work towards and realise an Irish Diaspora strategy over the next couple of years. If carefully formulated, all parties will gain significantly – socially, culturally, politically and economically – from such a strategy. Our focus has been on growing together in partnership, but it should be noted that the question concerning the voting rights of Irish citizens abroad needs to be part of the wider discussion and consultation process concerning a Diaspora strategy.

We are aware that there is already an Inter-Departmental Working Group examining the possibilities of developing a Diaspora strategy, with the support of President McAleese, and to complement and feed into the work of that Group, we suggest the following as the steps which are now needed:

1. Research and formulation of various scenarios (this document part of that process, but needs a wider process including an in-depth study of best practice by other countries and how Irish Diaspora presently organised)

2. Consultation with Irish and New Irish Diaspora organisations and individuals and Irish governmental units and agencies including the Department of Foreign Affairs (especially the Irish Abroad Unit), Embassies, Consulates, Enterprise Ireland, IDA, along with global agencies such as the World Bank and UNESCO who have aided a number of countries formulate their strategies.
3. The formulation of 'Green Paper' that sets out the proposed Irish Diaspora strategy including full details of suggested schemes, their remit and operation.
4. A full, open debate on the proposals set out in the Green Paper.
5. Revisions to the proposed strategy and the drafting of a 'White Paper' detailing the strategy to be adopted by the Irish state.
6. The implementation and roll-out phase

### **Acknowledgements**

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## Appendix 1

### Examples of 'New Irish' Diaspora groups in Ireland

- AFGHAN COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND
- ALGERIAN COMMUNITY IN IRELAND
- ASSOCIATION OF CHINESE PROFESSIONALS IN IRELAND
- BRASILFORALL
- CENTRO DE APOIO DE BRASILEIROS NA IRLANDA (CABI)
- CONGOLESE IRISH PARTNERSHIP
- INDONESIA IRISH ASSOCIATION
- IRELAND-INDIA COUNCIL
- IRISH COUNCIL OF CHINESE SOCIAL SERVICES
- IRISH SIKH COUNCIL
- IRISH SUDANESE SOLIDARITY GROUP
- KOREAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND
- KURDISH WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION
- LATVIAN SOCIETY IN IRELAND
- LEAGUE OF FILIPINO NURSES
- LITHUANIAN ASSOCIATION IN IRELAND
- LITHUANIAN BUSINESS ASSOCIATION
- NIGERIAN ASSOCIATION IRELAND
- NIGERIANS IN DIASPORA ORGANISATION (NIDO) IRELAND BRANCH
- POLISH INFORMATION AND CULTURE CENTRE IN DUBLIN
- ROMANIAN COMMUNITY OF IRELAND
- THE ROMANIAN SOCIETY OF IRELAND
- ASSOCIATION OF CAMEROONIANS LIVING IN LIMERICK AND COUNTRY