
Digital Excellence entry: The Irish Times Abroad Network

Background

Over the past six years, as Irish emigration levels soared and dropped back again in response to economic recession and recovery, irishtimes.com has maintained an active focus on stories for and about readers overseas, and our Generation Emigration blog became a forum for emigrants.

As the Irish economy has recovered, the needs and interests of the Irish overseas have changed. *The Irish Times* has reacted by creating Irish Times Abroad (irishtimes.com/abroad) in November 2016, a new section of our site aimed at the estimated 770,000 Irish-born and millions more Irish-connected people living outside the country.

There, readers can find first-person stories of life overseas, news, business, sports, opinion, culture and lifestyle content of special interest to the Irish diaspora, information on working abroad opportunities, and advice about moving back home.

Irish Times Abroad is led by journalist Ciara Kenny, with support from the technology and marketing departments, and editorial management. The project was selected by the Google Digital News Initiative, a Europe-wide innovation fund, for support in 2016.

The Irish Times is the only Irish media outlet with a dedicated section for readers outside the country.

How the Irish Times Abroad Network works

The new Irish Times Abroad Network (irishtimes.com/abroad/join-us) was launched in conjunction with the new site on November 1st, a collaborative project between editorial and technical staff.

The Network aims to keep readers around the world connected with The Irish Times by highlighting the most relevant content for them in a weekly email digest; make it easier for them to contribute to our journalism, and for us to contact them when we are looking for interviewees; and to foster a greater sense of community among our diaspora readership.

A simple Join Us form on the website was created where members must enter basic information about themselves, including name, email, and where they are currently living. They can also opt to give us more details, such as their occupation or year of birth, and tick a box if they wish to contribute to Irish Times news or feature stories.

The database of contributors – now numbering over 23,000 in 136 countries worldwide - is becoming an increasingly important editorial resource for Irish Times journalists:

- **In breaking news situations:** Journalists can use the database to find Irish people living in a particular place or with a particular expertise, who become our eyes and ears on the ground in areas we would not otherwise be able to cover.

E.g. When earthquakes hit Central Italy in January, we were able to contact members living in the affected region, resulting in an online article within hours featuring a number of eyewitness accounts (irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/earthquakes-in-italy-we-were-snowed-in-with-nowhere-to-run-1.2942991). Other breaking news events which have resulted in similar articles include the Christmas market attack on Berlin in December (irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/irish-in-berlin-we-have-all-been-expecting-an-attack-1.2912901), and Cyclone Debbie in north Queensland in March (irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/cyclone-debbie-we-hid-under-the-house-for-two-days-1.3030654).

- **For medium-term editorial projects:** The database can also be used to invite contributions from people working in a certain industry, for example, or to survey people living in a certain region.

E.g. members working overseas in construction were invited to contribute to a two-week series irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/working-abroad/working-abroad-in-construction, resulting in 11 first-person stories. They were also invited to participate in an online survey, resulting in 300 detailed responses, which gave a comprehensive insight into the reasons why Irish construction workers decided to leave, the projects they are working on around the world, how they feel about their prospects in Ireland now, and whether they plan to move home (irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/if-you-build-it-why-few-emigrant-builders-are-moving-home-1.3069944). We have also run similar series on Irish healthcare workers and teachers abroad.

- **For long-term editorial projects,** e.g. members were invited via email and an article on site (<http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/at-home-abroad-send-us-your-stories-about-where-you-live-1.3005377> promoted through the Abroad Facebook and Twitter accounts) to tell us about the home they live in abroad, whether it be a skyscraper in Singapore or a passivhaus in Dresden, which has resulted in ongoing articles in the print Home&Design supplement (also published online).

The Network database also allows us to distribute our journalism more effectively to our readers overseas. A weekly digest of the best stories of the week goes to all members, but the database can be segmented by country, for example, to send stories of particular interest to readers living in a particular place.

The Irish Times Abroad Network model is currently being applied to the Irish Times Student Hub, to allow us to learn more about our student readers, invite them to contribute to relevant stories, and distribute our journalism more effectively to them.

User Generated Content Tool

The editorial and tech teams are currently working on a UGC tool to facilitate the collection of text, photos, video and audio from readers through a simple widget embedded into articles, and to make the moderation process easier for journalists and editors. A pilot photo project **Picturing the Irish Diaspora**, whereby readers were invited to send us their photos and stories for St Patrick's Day, resulted in an online gallery of more than 170 images from around the world. irishtimes.com/life-

[and-style/abroad/picturing-the-irish-diaspora](#) The tool is due to be rolled out for wider use across the site in September.

Social media

With a combined following of 44,000, dedicated [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts are used extensively to promote Irish Times Abroad content, to extend our reach among the Irish overseas, to source stories, and to enhance that sense of a diaspora community where readers abroad can enter a conversation with each other about the content.

Future plans

The numbers leaving Ireland has begun to slow, and more Irish are now returning home. But many of those who left in recent years will remain abroad, as other adventurous Irish continue to join them. We hope to keep them as loyal Irish Times readers, by continuing to provide content of interest to them through Irish Times Abroad.