

Irish Examiner



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Monday, December 20, 2021

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No. 62,349

€2.30 (£1.60 in N. Ireland)

Rooms offered for sex in lieu of rent

Housing ministers blasts ads and tells tenants to contact gardai

Ann Murphy

Landlords are offering free or reduced-cost rooms in exchange for sex as the housing crisis bites and tenants struggle to meet rising costs.

An *Irish Examiner* investigation uncovered online ads offering properties in return for sexual favours in Limerick and Dublin.

Housing Minister Darragh O'Brien has condemned the ads and urged targeted tenants to tell gardai.

One ad was for a shared house in Newcastle West, Co Limerick, with the landlord advertising a room for a single lady "with a twist". The ad says: "Can do reduced rent for occasional fun." When contacted by a prospective tenant, the landlord made it clear that sexual activity was required on a weekly basis in return for rent of €200 for the first month and €250 per month thereafter.

When asked if the room was available without sexual favours, he said it was preferable to rent it out to someone willing to engage in sexual activity. He also promised the accommodation would be free if the prospective tenant became his partner in the future.

He said another woman and a couple were also interested in the room and he would give the room to whoever he liked and "had naked fun with".

The existence of the property and the veracity of the advertisement has been verified by the *Irish Examiner*. One of the Dublin properties is being offered for free in return for a "friends with benefits" arrangement.

The advertisement reads: "Hey currently have a room to rent in North county Dublin, not looking to rent for cash but instead a fwb situation. Strictly applies to females, no males will be considered."

Another ad promises a beautiful single room for a girl without rent. The advertiser wrote: "House located in Santry Dublin, so close to city, free car park and bus stop at home.. Let's chat soon. Note please only for sweet cute and charming girl only... Hahahahaha Ping me soon, NSA."

According to a report

published by the Residential Tenancies Board on Friday, rents increased at their highest rate since 2017 in the third quarter of this year. The average monthly rent at present is €1,397. Average rents in Dublin are €1,915.58 per month at present, while Limerick rates stand at €1,110.39.

A report from Daft, published last month, highlighted that on November 1, there were just 1,460 homes available to rent nationwide. The figure is down 65% on the same date in 2020.

Mr O'Brien said of the sex-for-rent advertisements: "I condemn in the strongest terms any instance where properties are offered for rent in return for sexual favours."

"Where advertisements such as this are placed we would strongly encourage people to report it to An Garda Síochána."

Social Democrats TD Holly Cairns said the ads highlight "the depraved depths of the housing crisis where grossly exploitative landlords expect sexual favours in return for putting a roof over people's heads".

"A chronic shortage of rental properties, and sky-high rents for the limited supply that does exist, mean that manipulative people are stepping in to take advantage of desperate people."

Last month, the issue of sex for rent was highlighted in the British House of Commons during a debate in the House of Lords on the Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Bill.

Amendments to the bill have been brought forward, seeking to make it a criminal offence for landlords arranging 'sex for rent' agreements with tenants.

Recent research by British housing and homeless charity Shelter suggested that 30,000 women in the UK were propositioned with sex-for-rent arrangements between March 2020 and January 2021. No such survey has carried out here.

In September 2019, then Solidarity TD Ruth Coppinger highlighted the issue in the Dáil, after being contacted by a tenant who had been propositioned by her landlord in lieu of rent.



One of the world's largest car carriers was the first commercial vessel to dock at the new deep-water quay at the Port of Cork in Ringaskiddy. The Morning Laura, with a capacity to transport 8,000 vehicles, docked in the port for over eight hours to discharge 682 vehicles.

Picture: Port of Cork

New Port of Cork facility welcomes huge carrier

Alan Healy

The Port of Cork welcomed one of the world's largest car carriers yesterday, the first commercial vessel to arrive at the port's new container facility in Ringaskiddy.

The Morning Laura, with a capacity to transport 8,000 vehicles, docked in the port for over eight hours to discharge 682 vehicles. It began its journey in Korea, stopping in Morocco, Italy, Spain, and the UK, before arriving in Cork.

The Port of Cork said that, due to congestion and the associated costs at other ports, it was feared the vessel would have to discharge the vehicles destined for dealerships in Ireland in Rotterdam, which would have incurred further cost in having to be shipped on to Ireland.

However, it said it partnered with shipping company Eukor, to ensure the supply chain and distribution of new cars for sale in the new year was not affected.

The 682 vehicles, of which nearly 40% are electric, were shipped by manufacturers such as Hyundai, Kia, and Ssangyong.

The Morning Laura was the first ship to dock at the port's new deep-water berth in Ringaskiddy. The facility will see the transfer of container shipping services from Tivoli, which in turn will free up land closer to Cork City for redevelopment.

"We were very pleased to be in a position to accommodate their vessel and to play our part in maintaining the supply chain, particularly at this pivotal time of year for car sales, dealerships, and indeed new car customers across Ireland," Port of Cork chief commercial officer Conor Mowlds said.

"This is further proof of the Port of Cork's ease of access as a trade route to Europe and beyond, and we look forward to maintaining and building on this new relationship with Eukor."

News: 4
Editorial: 10

Reports of impending lockdown 'speculative'

Aoife Moore
Political Correspondent

The chief medical officer has dismissed reports of an impending lockdown as speculative despite the highly transmissible Omicron being confirmed as the dominant Covid-19 strain here.

A senior cabinet source told the *Irish Examiner* that cabinet have been assured by members of Nphet that there is "no truth" in reports of a December 30 lockdown.

Tony Holohan and Taoiseach Micheál Martin spoke yesterday amid the reports that Ireland will be facing new lockdown measures. Sources have confirmed that Dr Holohan said though the

Covid situation will be monitored closely, the reports are "entirely speculative".

A spokesperson for Mr Martin said: "There are no plans for a December 30 meeting, no nuclear buttons. The leaders and health minister met public health on Tuesday and they discussed the areas where restrictions might apply."

"On Friday, members of Nphet briefed members of Cabinet and there was no reference to lockdown plans, and they said they'd meet again on January 6. As the Taoiseach said, there are no guarantees, and they will keep monitoring the situation, but they are heartened with booster progress."

Over 12,000 cases of Covid-19 were confirmed over the weekend as the highly transmissible Omicron strain took hold.

Dr Holohan said it has taken less than two weeks for Omicron to become the dominant strain of Covid-19 in Ireland. "We have slowed transmission of this disease in the past using our basic measures and responding immediately if symptomatic. It is extremely important we do everything we can to flatten the curve of this wave now to prevent unnecessary deaths, risk to the vulnerable, and to protect our health service," he said.

HSE chief clinical officer Colm Henry said of Omicron:

"Existing protection that people have from either natural infection or from primary vaccination regimes provides much more limited protection, if no protection at all. Hence the importance for people to embrace the booster vaccination."

"There is very good evidence that the booster vaccinations do restore protection from symptomatic infection and can slow down the pace of the spread of this variant and give us a chance to respond."

There were long queues at vaccination centres as those aged 40 and over became eligible for the booster. Around 290,000 vaccines have been carried out in the

last six days, according to HSE chief executive Paul Reid, with 1.5m boosters and third doses distributed in total.

Public Expenditure Minister Michael McGrath will announce changes to the supports for businesses affected by Covid today. He and the Cabinet will meet tomorrow and if a further meeting is required over Christmas that will be arranged. Mr McGrath said the Government has committed to the enhanced rates of the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme and is looking at changes to the Covid Restrictions Support Scheme.

Number of children left homeless expected to rise

Elaine Loughlin
Deputy Political Editor

Darragh O'Brien, the housing minister, has said he expects the number of homeless children to increase in the coming months, despite doing "everything in his power" to tackle the issue.

Mr O'Brien has promised significant improvements in the homeless figures by the middle of next year, but admitted this would be of "no consolation to someone who is going to be spending this Christmas without a home".

There were 8,830 people, including 2,513 children, in emergency accommodation at the end of October, up 4.2% on the previous month.

"I've met many of these families, I have met many mums who've ended up in emergency accommodation. I'm doing absolutely everything in my power to improve the situation for them, to be able to deliver permanent homes for them. We're going to build more social homes next year than have ever been built in any year in the history of the State."

"What we have got to make sure is that where emergency accommodation is needed and family hubs are needed, that they are of good quality."

"We've 75% less families, thankfully, using hotels as emergency accommodation. I've been in family hubs; they are not where anyone wants to be."

Mr O'Brien warned that the numbers of people in emergency accommodation will get worse, adding that "this is not something that is solvable overnight".

"We've seen increases in



Darragh O'Brien: Lack of supply in private market is an issue.

the last number of months, increases that we flagged would actually happen and we'll probably see increases in the next couple of months too."

Mr O'Brien told the *Irish Examiner* he was "confident" that "real strides" could be made next year. "The only way of fixing that is getting supply up," he said, adding that the State was building more and bringing more vacant units, particularly vacant social housing units, back into use.

He said last year 3,600 vacant units were brought back into use and a further 3,000 were brought back this year. Mr O'Brien said a lack of supply was a big issue, particularly when trying to help people out of emergency accommodation.

"The lack of supply in the private rental market is an issue and the reduction in the output of social housing. In 2020 we had about 5,000 social homes delivered because of Covid. This year will be a bit more," he said, but could not provide exact figures.

Analysis: 11

Warning over assisted dying

The College of Psychiatrists has warned against assisted dying legislation, saying it is not compatible with good medical care and its introduction here could place vulnerable patients at risk.

A special Oireachtas committee is due to examine the Dying with Dignity Bill 2020 in the new year.

News: 5

Truss takes over UK's Brexit brief

Britain's foreign secretary Liz Truss is to take over responsibility for the UK's future relationship with the EU. Downing St has said, following the resignation of Brexit minister David Frost.

Mr Frost resigned with "immediate effect" on Saturday night, having previously agreed to leave in January.

World: 8

Dublin attracts financial firms

Dublin is expected to attract more financial services firms relocating from the UK next year to Brexit.

An EY survey found Dublin and Luxembourg are the most popular post-Brexit EU destinations for establishing hubs or relocating offices.

Paris has seen the largest volume of people relocating.

Business: 16

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WE ARE NATIONWIDE

Inside

Terry Prone

I would sell my soul to get the chance to work with Kamala Harris. She needs a radical change to her communication if she is to survive the vice-presidency. **Page 10**

Bernard O'Shea

I'm a start Monday, New Year or next week person. I have massive aspirations to change, but that rarely becomes a reality without planning or motivation. **Page 12**

IRISH EXAMINER

20.12.21

Recommended retail price in Ireland €2.30



51

9 771393 956311

'People are telling us sex has turned into something transactional'

Online ads from landlords that are offering low-cost or free accommodation in return for sex is not a scenario of equal power, leaving tenants open to abuse, writes **Ann Murphy**



FAR from the high-rent pressure zones of Dublin lies Newcastle West, a thriving town that is a 40-minute drive from Limerick City.

A quick trawl online shows very little available on the rental market in the area — one three-bedroom property on the outskirts advertised with a monthly rent of €1,150.

However, a short distance away, a larger property is advertised on a different website at reduced rent in return for "occasional fun" in a house-share arrangement with the landlord. So what is the catch?

The advertisement is just one of a number placed by sleazy landlords on less popular websites, offering reduced or free rent in return for sex.

While one of the properties is in Newcastle West, the others are in different parts of Dublin.

One of them offers a "friends with benefits" arrangement in return for free accommodation.

Other advertisements that have expired in recent weeks were also offering rental arrangements in Dublin in return for sexual favours.

Concern has been raised about the existence of such arrangements by Dublin Rape Crisis Centre chief executive Noeline Blackwell. She said that tenants taking up such accommodation are not entering into a situation of equal power.

"It is a reality that someone is effectively selling sex for the amount of what the rent is," she said.

While tenants who ended up in such arrangements would rationalise it to themselves when they entered into the arrangement, the reality was that it equated to non-consensual sex because the tenant had no power in such a situation, Ms Blackwell said.

"In such a case, the landlord sets the rule, sets the agenda, and is essentially purchasing sexual services," she explained.

"It is consensual in so



Newcastle West, Co Limerick, where a property in the area was advertised at reduced rent in return for 'occasional fun' in a house-share arrangement with the landlord; below, reproductions of some of the ads that have appeared in recent times. Picture: Brian Arthur

Beautiful room FREE for sweet girl in City

Hi, I have beautiful single room which I can give for a girl free to stay. If interested send message let's discuss in detail. House located in Santry Dublin, so close to city, free car park and bus stop at home.. Let's chat soon. Note please only for sweet cute and charming girl only... Hahahaha. Ping me soon, NSA

Posted less than a month ago Location: Dublin, Ireland

Room for rent for single lady

Hi I'm looking to rent a room in co limrick to single lady with twist! Can do reduced rent for occasional fun I'm 45 slim thin build the house is near all amenities and is 25 mins from limrick 40 mins to tralee I'm 5 11 slim blonde trustworthy no b/s guy pls get in touch thanks

Posted less than a month ago Location: Limerick, Ireland

Room to rent in exchange for fwb

Hey currently have a room to rent in North county Dublin, not looking to rent for cash but instead a fwb situation. Strictly applies to females, no males will be considered. Thank you for reading my ad and looking forward to hearing from you

Posted less than a month ago Location: Dublin, Ireland

much that the tenant is entering into the arrangement, but they have no power."

She said many people enter into arrangements of "survival sex", either for money or, in some cases, for accommodation.

"The tenant has no security of tenure, no tenancy agreement. They always have to be pleasing to the person giving them shelter. It is a massive power imbalance between the two.

"The possibility of abuse is constant. The tenant must be available all the time. It is preying on people who have a need for accommodation."

Rape Crisis Network of Ireland (RCNI) executive director Cliona Saidléar said: "If sex is exchanged because you may be made homeless if you don't, that is not consent freely given."

She said the RCNI had seen a growth in the amount of "transactional pressure" being put on young girls by young boys and older men looking for sex in return for something else.

A sex-for-rent arrange-

ment is similar in nature. "What we see all the time is people telling us how sex has turned into something transactional," she said.

In September, Labour TD Ivana Bacik introduced the Residential Tenancies (Tenants' Rights) Bill 2021 in the Dáil. Among the provisions in the bill is the proposed strengthening of protections against eviction for those who are renting.

Ms Bacik said she was really concerned about the existence of advertisements offering low-cost or free accommodation in return for sex, saying they indicated just how difficult it was for renters to find affordable accommodation.

"It is yet another reason why we need to move urgently to pass stronger laws protecting renters and why we need a three-year rent freeze," Ms Bacik said.

Social Democrats TD Holly Cairns said the increased presence of such advertisements was deeply concerning.

"There should be a filter-

ing system on apps or websites to prevent these ads appearing and, at the very least, they should be immediately removed when reported," Ms Cairns said.

"I would appeal to tenants who have been sexually harassed or abused by their landlord to come forward and report these despicable people to the gardai."

The issue was raised in 2019 by then-Socialist Party TD Ruth Coppinger, who said sex for rent was becoming a reality for many tenants.

She told the Dáil of messages she had been shown by a female tenant, who was propositioned by her landlord when she told him she was leaving because the rent was too expensive.

Following that, the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre and the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) discussed the possibility of conducting research to establish how prevalent the practice was in Ireland. However, that research has not taken place.

The possibility of includ-

ing a question on the RTB's annual survey was examined, and a meeting was held between the RTB and rape crisis representatives.

"The consensus from the meeting was that there is a research gap on the issue of sex for rent and that it is important to gain a better insight into the occurrence of the issue. However, adding a question(s) to the current RTB annual tenant survey was not deemed to be the most appropriate method in which to research the issue, given the impact it could have on participants and interviewers and due to the influence the face-to-face survey method may have on the response rate and data quality because of the sensitive nature of the topic."

According to the RTB, it does not have a role to play in relation to ads seeking sex-for-rent arrangements as it only has jurisdiction once a tenancy begins.

However, a spokesman said: "The RTB believe that any form of sexual harassment, intimidation or inap-

propriate behaviour in a person's home is very serious."

He said if someone "feels threatened by a landlord or their authorised agent, either verbally or via emails/text messages and it is interfering with the peaceful enjoyment of their tenancy, a tenant can apply for dispute resolution with the RTB citing breach of landlord obligations".

Darragh O'Brien, the housing minister, has condemned the advertising of sex in return for free or low-rent accommodation, and urged people to contact gardai about such advertisements.

A spokesman for his department said the Government had taken steps in the past 18 months to increase protections for renters and pointed to the recently launched Threshold campaign, which is supported by the Department of Housing, called Own Your Rights.

The campaign aims to provide tenants with immediate and urgent assistance with issues affecting them.



Devastating typhoon

The death toll in the strongest typhoon to hit the Philippines this year has surpassed 140

World, Page: 9



For many, the festive period is fraught with conflict and pain

CMAT, Tolu Makay and David Balfe have emerged as stars in 2021

Special report, Pages: 6&7

Arts/Culture, Page: 15

sudoku

basic

2	5	8	7	4	1	6	9	3
3	6	4	5	2	9	1	7	8
7	1	9	8	6	3	5	2	4
4	7	1	9	8	6	2	3	5
9	2	6	1	3	5	4	8	7
8	3	5	2	7	4	9	1	6
5	4	7	3	9	2	8	6	1
6	8	2	4	1	7	3	5	9
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intermediate

5	9	4	6	1	8	7	2	3
1	8	6	2	3	7	4	9	5
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6	1	9	4	8	5	2	3	7
9	2	1	7	5	3	6	4	8
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3	4	5	8	9	6	1	7	2

advanced

7	3	4	5	6	8	9	2	1
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6	1	8	2	9	7	5	3	4
3	5	6	7	1	4	8	9	2
2	8	7	3	5	9	4	1	6
1	4	9	6	8	2	3	5	7
9	2	3	4	7	6	1	8	5
4	6	1	8	3	5	2	7	9
8	7	5	9	2	1	6	4	3

HOW TO PLAY
Fill in the grid, ensuring that each column and row, and every 3x3 box, contains the numbers 1-9

SOLUTIONS for SATURDAY

BASIC

3	1	4	5	9	2	
2	8	1	9	4		
9	8	2				
7	6	8	1			
9	1	3	6	4	9	
	8	5	1	4	9	
1		6	3	8	5	4

INTERMEDIATE

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		9		
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	1	5	7	
4		2	9	1
1	2			
8	9	3	2	
		9	1	5

ADVANCED

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2		8	6
3	1	5	7
	2	5	7
6		2	4
		3	6
5	1	3	9
	6	9	4
9		6	

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NOON

TONIGHT

TODAY

After a misty start for many, especially for Connacht, it will be a mostly dry day, with cloudy skies lasting the day for all parts of the country. There will be a chance of some drizzle for Munster and Leinster. Gentle south-easterly wind, stronger on the south coast. Max temp 6-10C (43-50F).

TONIGHT

The chance of drizzle will continue overnight, most likely towards the coastal regions of Munster and Connacht. However, it will remain a dry night for most. Skies will remain overcast for all going into tomorrow. Gentle south-easterly winds, stronger on the south coast. Min temp 4-9C (39-48F).

TOMORROW

There will be a chance of some early morning drizzle for Leinster but a dry start in other areas. It is set to be another dry but cloudy day. Skies will be dull and overcast for all parts of the country. A predominantly cloudy evening with a gentle south-easterly wind. Max temp 5-10C (41-50F).

EUROPE TODAY

There will be sunny spells in eastern Spain, southern France, Italy, Greece and Germany through the day. Northern France and the low countries will be mostly cloudy but dry. Western Spain and Portugal will be cloudy to start with a few showers then persistent heavy rain will arrive later in the day.

EUROPE OUTLOOK

Tomorrow there will be showers in Spain and Portugal. There will be sunny spells across France, Germany, Austria and Italy through the day. Eastern and Northeastern Europe will see snow showers or more persistent snow tomorrow. The low countries will be mostly cloudy. Greece will see light showers.

SUN AND MOON TODAY

rises	sets	rises	sets
Sun.....	08:37	16:07	
Moon.....		16:51	10:07

MOON PHASE
Last Quarter
27 December

EXTREMES

Warmest	Sherkin Island	10C (50F)
Coldest	Casement	-2C (28F)
Wettest	Killylane	0.02 inches

ATLANTIC SITUATION: High F will be stationary. Lows R and T will move east. Low U will move east and deepen.

HIGH TIDES TODAY

time	height	time	height	
Galway	05.42	4.9m	18.08	4.7m
Limerick	07.10	5.8m	19.38	5.5m
Cobh	05.58	4.0m	18.11	3.9m
Waterford	06.47	4.6m	18.59	4.5m
Dublin	-	-m	12.15	3.9m
Belfast	11.50	3.6m	-	-m

IRELAND YESTERDAY

readings at 12noon	condition	°C	°F
Belfast	cloudy	4	39
Birr	cloudy	5	41
Cork	cloudy	7	45
Dublin	cloudy	7	45
Kilkenny	cloudy	5	41
Rosslare	fair	8	46
Shannon	fair	6	43
Valentia	fair	9	48

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'Shock' as Cork N25 road upgrade shelved

Sean O'Riordan

A multi-million euro upgrade of a major Cork road has been shelved due to a lack of funding.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) has confirmed work on the upgrade of the Carrigtwohill to Middleton road, the N25, cannot proceed as it has not got funding from the Government.

TII's confirmation follows fears expressed last week by Cork county councillors that the project was in danger of being shelved.

The rumours were first raised at a meeting of the Cobh municipal district council and were discussed again at a full meeting of the county council yesterday, prior to TII spokesman Sean O'Neill providing confirmation to the *Irish Examiner*. Councillors are seeking

support from Taoiseach Micheál Martin and Cork-based ministers Simon Coveney and Michael McGrath to get the project reinstated amid fears that, without this vital piece of infrastructure, further development will be stalled in the region.

Carrigtwohill-based Fine Gael councillor Anthony Barry said that the road was built in 1968 and carries more traffic than a number

of motorways.

He said it is currently operating at 120% of its capacity and an upgrade is needed to provide for the proposed development of a 5,000-house town adjacent to the N25 at Water Rock, near Middleton. Mr Barry added that an upgraded road is also vital for IDA plans for further industrial development in the Carrigtwohill area.

"It's a slap in the face for

Cork," said Mr Barry. "It's an appalling decision for the future development of the region."

Fine Gael councillor Michael Paul Murtagh, a member of the local fire brigade, said the road is unsafe and that he had attended a number of fatal accidents on it.

Council chief executive Tim Lucey said that the local authority had spent the last

four years progressing its design to the route selection stage.

He said the council's director of roads, Padraig Barrett, is to meet a senior TII official today to discuss the situation.

"We are keen to get a deeper understanding on this," said Mr Lucey.

"It is strategic to develop. It's quite a shock to us."



In his waters

Eoin Warner presents a nature series showing off the wildlife around Ireland and Wales

Arts, Page 12



Family split up while fleeing Afghanistan reunited by kind stranger

A 24-hour swim, run, and cycle during a major storm no bother for Mark

World, Page 8

County, Page 15

Council to consider accessible housing

■ Calls to design homes for people with disabilities and the elderly

Sean O'Riordan

Cork County Council is to look at providing more universally accessible homes for people with disabilities and to cope with an increasingly elderly population in the years ahead.

This could include a proviso that private developers selling housing units to the council, known as 'turnkey' properties, ensure a certain percentage of them are specifically designed to accommodate such people.

The council's special purpose committee (SPC) on housing will discuss drawing up new guidelines to address the issues after Fine Gael councillor Kevin Murphy sought a report on the number of people with disabilities on the council's housing waiting list.

Mr Murphy was informed by the council's director of housing, Maurice Manning, that 625 people with disabilities are currently on the waiting list. The majority have physical disabilities, while others have mental or sensory disabilities.

The council rehuses around 100 per year and it currently has 570 specially adapted units in its stock.

"I'm concerned we're not paying enough attention to them," said Mr Murphy. "They deteriorate big time if not housed in proper housing developments. We need to up the numbers big time. Disabled people feel they're not getting a fair crack of the whip."

He said that, in his home town of Kinsale, the council recently opened a 40-house development, but just two were designed for people with disabilities.

"I don't think that's enough really," he said. "We have to make an effort to purchase houses in towns

and adapt them for the disabled. We need to take the bull by the horns and invest in these. We need to make it a policy that developers make a certain percentage of houses available for the disabled."

Fianna Fáil councillor Gearóid Murphy said: "It's a good idea to allocate a certain percentage of houses to people with disabilities, but I think in this day and age we should be looking at universal design principles, so all houses are built to be suitable to house disabled people and also particularly with our ageing population in mind as well."

Fianna Fáil councillor Patrick Gerard Murphy, who is a wheelchair user, said that housing adaptations cost a huge amount and it would be more cost-effective if they were designed at build stage. "We need to future-proof our housing going forward," said Independent councillor Paul Hayes.

Fianna Fáil councillor and housing SPC chairman Seamus McGrath said his committee would bring recommendations to the council.

Council chief executive Tim Lucey said while the council does its best to accommodate people with disabilities, it is "an important debate" and further discussion is needed.

Fine Gael councillor Gerard Murphy said it is vital the council moves quickly to address the fact that people will live longer. He said it is costing the taxpayer huge money to move people into nursing homes because they cannot live independently in homes which are not adapted for their needs.

It was agreed the housing SPC members will liaise with senior planning officials to come up with new policies to address the situation.

Golden memory



The mild winter has produced early flowering daffodils at the jaunting cart stand in Killarney town centre, where Moss Shannon, aged two, and his dad Liam from Killarney took a closer look while out for a stroll. Picture: Don MacMonagle

AG advice sought on sex-for-rent ads

Ann Murphy

Housing Minister Darragh O'Brien has asked the Attorney General for advice on whether sex-for-rent advertisements are covered by existing legislation.

The move follows an investigation by the *Irish Examiner* last month which highlighted that properties on the rental market are being offered at reduced rent or rent-free in exchange for sex.

A spokesman for the Department of Housing said Mr O'Brien had written to the Attorney General, Paul Gallagher, seeking advice on whether the practice is covered by the Sexual Offences Act 2017. The spokesman said the minister is also in contact with Justice Minister Helen McEntee on the issue.

He said the Attorney General's office had acknowledged Mr O'Brien's correspondence and that advice is now being awaited from Mr Gallagher.

One of the properties unearthed by the *Irish Examiner* is a house in Newcastlewest, Co Limerick, which would be shared with the landlord. He advertised a room in his house for a single



Darragh O'Brien: Awaiting advice on whether sex-for-rent ads are covered by existing legislation. Picture: PA

woman "with a twist". The ad said: "Can do reduced rent for occasional fun."

When contacted by a prospective tenant, the landlord made it clear that sexual activity was required on a weekly basis in return for rent of €200 for the first month and €250 per month thereafter.

When asked if the room was available without sexual favours, the landlord said it was preferable to rent it out to someone willing to engage in sexual activity. He also

"My strong view is that both the person offering accommodation on this basis and the platform advertising the accommodation offer should both be prohibited from doing this," said Mr O'Brien. "I am asking that you both ask the relevant personnel in your departments to examine this issue early in the new year with a view to bringing forward the necessary legislation to outlaw such activity."

"If you were to do this I believe you would have the broad support of the opposition." The issue was highlighted in Britain during a debate in the House of Lords on the police, crime, sentencing, and courts bill in November.

Amendments to the bill have been brought forward, seeking to make it a criminal offence for landlords arranging sex for rent agreements with tenants. Recent research by British housing and homeless charity Shelter suggested that 30,000 women in the UK were propositioned with sex-for-rent deals between March 2020 and January 2021.

There has been no survey of the issue carried out in Ireland.

sudoku

basic

3	8	6	9	4	2	1	7	5
2	5	1	7	6	3	9	8	4
7	9	4	8	1	5	2	3	6
8	2	3	6	7	9	4	5	1
6	4	9	3	5	1	7	2	8
5	1	7	4	2	8	6	9	3
9	6	2	5	3	4	8	1	7
4	3	8	1	9	7	5	6	2
1	7	5	2	8	6	3	4	9

How to Play
Fill in the grid, ensuring that each column and row, and every 3x3 box, contains the numbers 1-9

intermediate

9	6	7	5	1	4	3	2	8
8	4	5	2	7	3	6	1	9
3	2	1	6	8	9	5	7	4
4	7	9	3	6	8	1	5	2
1	5	3	4	9	2	7	8	6
2	8	6	1	5	7	9	4	3
5	9	4	8	3	1	2	6	7
7	1	2	9	4	6	8	3	5
6	3	8	7	2	5	4	9	1

advanced

5	9	3	6	1	2	7	8	4
2	8	7	9	3	4	1	6	5
1	6	4	8	5	7	3	2	9
4	2	5	7	9	6	8	1	3
7	1	9	5	8	3	2	4	6
8	3	6	4	2	1	5	9	7
9	7	2	3	4	8	6	5	1
6	4	1	2	7	5	9	3	8
3	5	8	1	6	9	4	7	2

SOLUTIONS for MONDAY

BASIC

2	4	8	5	3				
7	9	6	5	2				
	8	1	9	6				
		9	3	8	6			
8	4	3	6	1	7			
1	3	6	5					
6	2	7	8					
9	6	3	1	4				
7	3	4	8	5				

INTERMEDIATE

6			5					
7	5		2	8				3
3		6	4					
			8		5	2		
9	5	1		7	8			
8	2		6					
			9	4		6		
2		8	3			9	4	
			2				7	

ADVANCED

			6					7
9		2	8					4
7	8		4					5
3				6	1	7		
1	4	5						6
8			3		6	9		
6			1	2		5		
7			5					

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NOON

TONIGHT

SUN AND MOON TODAY

rises sets rises sets
Sun..... 08:35 16:30 Moon..... 12:22 02:21

MOON PHASE
Full Moon
17 January

EXTREMES

Warmest Valentia 12C (54F)
Coldest Killylane 4C (39F)
Wettest Lough Fea 0.17 inches

EUROPE TODAY

EUROPE OUTLOOK

HIGH TIDES TODAY

time	height	time	height
Galway	-	12.05	4.0m
Limerick	01.20	4.8m	13.45 4.8m
Cobh	-	12.10	3.4m
Waterford	00.03	3.9m	12.46 4.0m
Dublin	06.40	3.4m	18.51 3.5m
Belfast	05.53	2.9m	18.07 3.1m

IRELAND YESTERDAY

readings at 12noon	condition	°C	°F
Belfast	drizzle	11	52
Birr	cloudy	12	54
Cork	cloudy	11	52
Dublin	cloudy	12	54
Kilkenny	cloudy	11	52
Rosslare	cloudy	11	52
Shannon	drizzle	11	52
Valentia	cloudy	12	54

ATLANTIC SITUATION: Low pressure system U moves to the North Sea, followed by a high pressure system C.

Irish Examiner HOLIDAY GIVEAWAY

TO ENTER

Simply collect three tokens from the Irish Examiner. Tokens will be printed daily in the Irish Examiner from Saturday, January 1 to Saturday, January 22. The entry form will appear in paper on Saturday January 1, Saturday January 8, Saturday January 15 and Saturday January 22. The closing date for entries is Wednesday, January 26. See www.irishexaminer.com/competitions for more details.

Irish Examiner TOKEN
IRISH EXAMINER HOLIDAY GIVEAWAY

Irish Examiner



Pulling together
Not everything is the Government's fault

Fergus Finlay Page 10

Red hot Ronaldo
United striker primed for Atletico clash

Tuesday Sport Pages 2-3



Cheltenham 2022
Your winning festival team

Tuesday Sport Pages 15-24



Tuesday, March 15, 2022

www.irishexaminer.com

No. 62,421

€2.40 (£1.70 in N. Ireland)

31,000 Covid cases in past three days

Over 1,000 virus patients and 544 on trolleys 'a recipe for disaster'

Niamh Griffin
Health Correspondent

A resurgence in Covid-19 infections has seen over 30,000 cases diagnosed in just three days and hospitals having to deal with more than 1,000 patients with the virus for the first time since mid-January.

"The fact that we have 544 patients on trolleys today and over 1,042 patients in hospitals with Covid-19 almost two years to the day that the virus first reached our shores is a recipe for disaster," said Phil Ni Sheaghdha, general secretary of the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO).

Over 31,000 cases were confirmed here between Friday and yesterday, consisting of 11,975 positive PCR test results and 19,915 positive antigen test results.

The number of Covid patients in hospital ICUs is also rising, although at a much slower rate than admissions, and now stands at 42, up from 37 on Friday.

While roughly half of the Covid patients currently in hospital were admitted for other illnesses and found to also have the virus, health officials pointed out they still need to be given special treatment.

The INMO, which warned against the lifting of mask-wearing earlier this year, called for emergency measures applied in January to be considered again.

"If our past experience of Covid and high numbers of patients on trolleys has taught us anything, we will be seeing the impacts of this on our health system for many weeks to come," said Ms Ni Sheaghdha.

She said the week around St Patrick's Day is traditionally one of the busiest for emergency departments.

"If non-emergency services need to be curtailed in order to allow the HSE and hospital groups to get a handle on out-of-control trolley figures and Covid cases within the hospital system then that must be done," she said.

Even if elective surgeries are not officially postponed, rising levels of infection could still affect patients as people who catch the virus must wait at least six weeks before having surgery, said Dr Catherine Motherway, head of the ICU at University Hospital Limerick.

She encouraged people aged over 70 or with compro-

mised immune systems to continue to wear masks on public transport and in busy settings.

Nonetheless, she told RTE she does not think mask-wearing should become mandatory again even though the number of new cases has risen steadily since compulsory mask-wearing was lifted at the end of February.

University Hospital Limerick had the highest number of patients on trolleys, at 91, yesterday and the fourth-highest number of Covid-19 patients, at 67, up to Sunday.

Three wards in the hospital remain closed to visitors due to Covid-19, with scheduled slots for one visitor per patient available in other wards.

University Hospital Kerry had 54 Covid patients, up from just 10 at the start of the month.

Cork University Hospital had 31 patients on trolleys yesterday, according to the INMO, and 42 Covid patients up to Sunday evening.

Visiting was suspended yesterday, except for compassionate visits, at Bantry hospital due to a Covid-19 outbreak.

Covid cases are also rising worldwide. China put a second region under lockdown yesterday, with 24m people in the province of Jilin joining the city of Shenzhen in Guangdong province under strict lockdown. Hong Kong reported 190 new deaths despite tight travel restrictions.

Meanwhile, a HSE spokeswoman confirmed 301 Covid patients have so far been given monoclonal antibody treatment Sotrovimab across 25 hospitals here.

Pfizer's antiviral tablets, Paxlovid, are now not expected to arrive until April although patients in the UK are already receiving this anti-Covid treatment.

On a more positive note, a new study suggests a single dose of the Pfizer vaccine can reduce infections among children.

If a child gets Covid-19 after being vaccinated they are "likely to have a milder disease", researchers from King's College London said. While the Covid-19 vaccines have been shown to ward off serious disease and death, questions had arisen over their ability to reduce the spread of infections.



An anti-war protestor interrupted a news broadcast on a Russian state-run news channel last night, holding a sign and shouting 'No to war'. Maria Ovsianikova, an editor at the channel, appeared in the background of one of Channel 1's national news bulletins. She held a sign reading: 'Do not believe the propaganda. They're lying to you here.'

Civilians finally leave besieged Ukrainian city

Pavel Polityuk and Yuras Karmanau

Russian forces finally allowed the first convoy of cars to escape Ukraine's besieged port of Mariupol after 10 days of failed attempts to relieve civilians dying under relentless bombardment.

The southeastern port has been surrounded by Russian troops since the first week of the invasion and has suffered the worst humanitarian impact of the war.

Hundreds of thousands of people have had to shelter in basements without food, water, or shelter. Local Ukrainian authorities claim as many as 2,500 civilians have died so far in the city.

Russia denies targeting civilians. Drone footage released by Ukrainian forces in Mariupol showed a desolate wasteland of bombed-out buildings, many in flames.

"At one o'clock, the Russians opened a checkpoint and those who have cars and fuel began to leave Mariupol in the direction of Zaporizhzhia," Andrei Rempel, a representative of Mariupol City Council who is now in Zaporizhzhia, a Ukrainian-held city further north, told Reuters.

"In the first two hours, 160 cars left. There are probably already many more now. The city continues to be bombed, but this road is not being shelled. We don't know

when the first cars can get to Zaporizhzhia as there are still many Russian checkpoints that need to be passed."

By yesterday evening, the city council said the convoy had already passed Berdyansk, a Russian-held city about 85km from Mariupol.

"There is also confirmation that a ceasefire is currently holding along the humanitarian corridor that has been established," it said.

Obtaining safe passage for aid to reach Mariupol and civilians to get out has been Kyiv's main demand at several rounds of talks. All previous attempts at a local ceasefire in the area have failed.

Yesterday it emerged that a pregnant woman whose image was seen around the world after she was injured when Russia bombed the maternity hospital in Mariupol had died along with her baby.

She had been rushed to another hospital after the bombing, where medics delivered the baby via caesarean section, but it was already dead. The mother passed away 30 minutes later.

Today, talks will resume between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators after talks broke up yesterday without a breakthrough.

An aide to Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the negotiators

took "a technical pause" and planned to meet again today.

The two sides had expressed some optimism in the past few days.

Mykhailo Podolyak, the aide to Mr Zelenskyy, said over the weekend that Russia was "listening carefully to our proposals".

He tweeted yesterday that the negotiators would discuss "peace, ceasefire, immediate withdrawal of troops & security guarantees".

Previous discussions, held in person in Belarus, produced no lasting humanitarian routes or agreements to end the fighting.

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Editorial: 10

News: 7

'Escort' used imitation gun to steal €300 and bicycle

Gordon Deegan

A woman posed as an escort and used an imitation semi-automatic revolver to rob a "terrified" man of €300 and his bicycle after the two arranged to meet for paid sex.

Judge Eoin Garavan described the robbery by Clara Chapman as a "ruthlessly planned and a ruthlessly and efficiently executed" set up and trap.

Chapman, aged 27, of Church View, Miltown Malbay, Co Clare, was jailed at Ennis Circuit Court for four years with the last 18 months suspended.

"An armed robbery is what this was. This man must have been terrified," the judge said, adding the offence involved the "humiliation of the victim".

The 38-year-old man replied to an advert Chapman placed on classified website Locanto advertising for paid sex saying that she was a "young Irish escort".

He arrived by bicycle at 2pm on November 22, 2019, to a location near Castlewood Park in Ennis.

The man handed over two €50 notes for the paid sex as agreed.

When the two got to a nearby alleyway, Chapman produced the imitation firearm and told him: "I'm not an escort. I am a garda and you are on tape."

The man handed over another €200 and Ms Chapman also took his bicycle.

Lorcan Connolly, prosecuting, said Chapman "never intended having sex

with the man. Her intention was to take the money".

The judge said that after Chapman produced the fake gun, "it must have been a pretty horrific experience for a young man who was expecting something rather different for his exchange of €100".

He said Chapman "would have got away with this but for the good work of the eagle-eyed gardai". Judge Garavan noted that the victim opted not to come to court to provide a victim impact statement "and there must have been an element of humiliation for falling for this in those circumstances".

Garda Niamh O'Malley told the court gardai were able to get camera footage from a passing bus en route to Dublin that captured the injured party and Chapman. Further footage was obtained from a nearby Apple-green service station.

She said a search of Chapman's home recovered an imitation firearm, an air gun that resembled a Colt 7 automatic pistol.

Chapman has 46 previous convictions and is serving a jail term for a drugs related offence.



Clara Chapman: Advertised as an escort but then told the victim that she was a garda.

Russia facing MH17 case

The Dutch and Australian governments have launched a legal case against Russia seeking to hold Moscow accountable for its alleged role in the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17.

The case is the latest bid to hold Russia responsible for the missile strike that hit the passenger jet when it was over Ukraine on July 17, 2014, killing all 298 people on board.

Survey on drink-driving

More than a quarter of drivers admit they may have been over the limit when driving the morning after a night out.

Research released by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) shows that, although 74% of motorists agree that one alcoholic drink can impair driving, one in four believe it is acceptable to drive short distances in their local area after one drink.

'Abhorrent' sex-for-rent offer to refugees

Ann Murphy

The Department of Housing has slammed as "abhorrent" an attempt by a landlord to entice women fleeing the war in Ukraine into a sex-for-rent arrangement.

It comes after the *Irish Examiner* discovered a property in Clare being offered for free to a "slim Ukrainian" woman, with an expectation of sex. The landlord has demanded a photo from a prospective renter before he will reveal the exact location of the property.

"Any attempt to target a vulnerable person with an offer of accommodation in return for sexual acts, including anyone fleeing the devastating war in the Ukraine, is abhorrent and to be condemned in the strongest possible terms," said the Department of Housing in a statement last night.

"Abusive behaviour by an accommodation provider or landlord should be reported to An Garda Síochána who will deal with any issue raised in a sensitive, timely and professional manner."

Sex-for-rent arrangements have been under investigation by the *Irish Examiner* since December.

Foreign women have told the *Irish Examiner* in recent weeks about being offered reduced or no rent in return for sex or bed-sharing with landlords.

Justice Minister Helen McEntee recently told the Dáil there is no legislation in place to deal with the practice of landlords offering sex-for-rent arrangements.

However, last night's statement said that laws surrounding sexual offences have been significantly strengthened in recent years, including with the introduction of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017. "The legislation now makes it abundantly clear that consent must be freely and voluntarily given," it said.

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Analysis
Those with a disability or an illness, those born into poverty or homelessness, those who witness domestic abuse or violence will have to fight much harder in life. **Page 11**

Life/Style
Too much or too little humidity can result in serious health consequences, particularly during colder months when indoor air is drier. **Page 13**

Irish Examiner

Bacik to the future

Labour's newest TD can reverse fortunes

Fergus Finlay Page 10



Break the bias

Women demand change on IWD

LifeStyle Page 13



Farewell Frank

United and Hammers lead tributes to O'Farrell

Tuesday Sport Page 10



Tuesday, March 8, 2022

www.irishexaminer.com

No. 62,415

€2.40 (£1.70 in N. Ireland)

Thousands vow to house refugees

■ 2,500 pledge to take in fleeing Ukrainians
■ EU vow to end use of Russian gas, oil, and coal

Paul Hosford and Elaine Loughlin

Around 2,500 Irish people have pledged to take in Ukrainian refugees as the numbers fleeing the country topped 1.7m in what has been described as "the biggest humanitarian response in Irish history".

Around 2,000 people fleeing the war in Ukraine, many with family links here, have landed in Ireland so far with thousands more expected in the coming days.

The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Roderic O'Gorman, whose brief includes refugee accommodation, was speaking on the issue yesterday as he launched the Irish Red Cross's online portal allowing people to register accommodation and other offers of voluntary assistance for Ukrainians.

Volunteers from Three and Web Summit have begun verifying pledges and Red Cross staff will visit homes and put a matching system in place in the coming days. It is understood the system will take around three weeks to match refugees with homes.

As part of the plan to welcome Ukrainian refugees, Social Protection Minister Heather Humphreys will bring forward a raft of entitlements at Cabinet tomorrow, including providing a PPS number to Ukrainians to allow them to access government services and income supports such as supplementary allowance and child benefit.

Department of Social Protection officials will have a presence at airports, along



Residents of Irpin cross a destroyed bridge as they flee the frontline town.

Picture: Roman Pilipey/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

with the Department of Justice.

Ukrainians seek access to third-level education in Ireland will be treated as EU students, allowing them to access grants and avoid international student fees, Minister for Further and Higher Education Simon Harris said yesterday.

Mr O'Gorman told the *Irish Examiner* around 500 Ukrainians are in hotel accommodation in Ireland but said that, even combined with pledges of accommo-

modation from homeowners across the country, this will not be enough, and that all Government departments are working on solutions.

"It's early in the process but all factors indicate the biggest humanitarian response the State has ever had," Mr O'Gorman said.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees yesterday put the number of people who have arrived in other countries since the Russian invasion started on February 24 at some 1.735m. That is

up from more than 1.53m on Sunday.

Nearly three-fifths of the total — over a million — arrived in Poland, according to the agency. More than 180,000 went to Hungary and 128,000 to Slovakia.

Speaking ahead of a meeting of EU development ministers, the bloc's EU foreign affairs policy chief, Josep Borrell, called for a mobilisation "all the resources" of the bloc of 27 nations to help countries welcoming refugees from Ukraine, including

neighbouring Poland and Romania.

Meanwhile, at this week's leaders' summit, EU leaders look set to agree to phase out the EU's dependency on imports of Russian gas, oil and coal, a draft statement showed, marking a turning point in its policy towards Moscow prompted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Leaders including Taoiseach Micheál Martin will meet in Versailles on Thursday and Friday to discuss boosting their joint defence

capability and Ukraine's bid to become a member of the 27-nation bloc.

"We agreed to phase out our dependency on Russian gas, oil and coal imports," said a draft statement of the leaders, seen by the Reuters news agency.

The task will be tough, however, because the EU currently buys from Russia 45% of its imported gas, around a third of its oil and nearly half of its coal. This makes the bloc vulnerable should Russia decide to re-

taliate for EU policies by curbing exports.

Meanwhile the continuing evacuation of millions of Ukrainians came as its foreign ministry said that Russian shelling is preventing the evacuation of civilians from the cities of Kyiv, Mariupol, Sumy, Kharkiv, Volnovakha, and Mykolayiv.

Additional reporting by PA and Reuters

News: 6&7
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News: 2

Russian embassy to get barriers after ramming

Cormac O'Keeffe

Security Correspondent

Barriers are being positioned in and around the Russian embassy in Dublin in response to the truck-ramming incident yesterday.

The security breach sparked an unprecedented diplomatic attack from the embassy, alleging that gardai "stood idle" as the truck reversed through the gates and "demanding" that the State take steps to ensure the safety of embassy

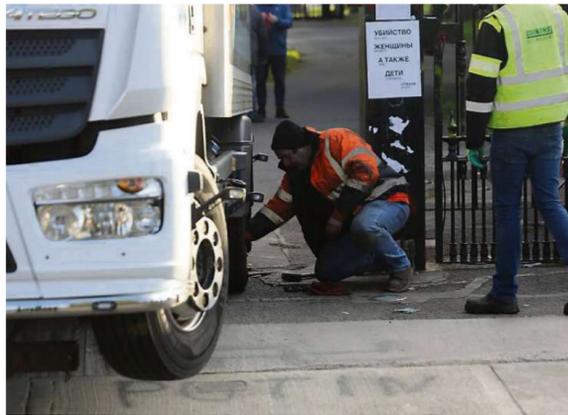
staff and their families.

Security chiefs said the ramming marked an "escalation" in the threat against the Russian embassy.

"The fact the embassy was breached has to be taken very seriously," said a senior source.

The current risk assessment is being reviewed, which determines the scale and nature of Garda security.

The *Irish Examiner* understands the barriers are being placed in and around the embassy to stop



The truck is removed from the entrance of the Russian embassy yesterday afternoon. A man was arrested at the scene, and gardai said they are investigating an incident of criminal damage at the property. Picture: Gareth Chaney

any incident like this from happening again.

A sole garda was present at the time, parked nearby. "We don't comment on

remarks by third parties," said Garda HQ in response to the embassy's statement. The Department of Foreign Affairs said contact

was ongoing with An Garda Síochána in relation to the "security of foreign embassies" in Dublin.

News: 6

Gardaí trawl files of HSE cyberattack gang

Cormac O'Keeffe

Security Correspondent

Garda cyber experts are trawling through thousands of digital records belonging to a notorious cyber gang behind the HSE cyberattack that were leaked online after it backed Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

It is estimated some 60,000 messages belonging to the Conti gang were made public by a Ukrainian security researcher in response to the outfit siding with Vladimir Putin.

The Conti ransomware attack on the HSE crippled the

health and wider social services computer systems for many months after it was launched in May 2021.

Last October, the EU cyber agency Enisa cited the HSE attack as one of the "major ransomware incidents" of 2020 and 2021.

It said the Conti group, which is based in Russia, was considered to be the second most dominant player in what it said was a booming ransomware market.

It said that, based on crowdsourced ransomware payment data, Conti made the "most financial gains" in 2021, with payments in the

order of \$12.7m (€10.95m).

It said the group accounted for 10% of market share of ransomware incidents in the first three months of last year, putting it in second place.

The group has now been severely damaged after an internal row following a declaration by the gang that it was firmly siding with Russia in the war on Ukraine.

Experts believe that, as a result, a Ukrainian security researcher decided to dump over 60,000 internal messages of the group.

These conversations, contained in 400 files, are said to contain information about the gang's activities, including previously unreported victims, bitcoin addresses, and discussions about its operations.

There are said to be Eng-



Hacker group is sympathetic to Vladimir Putin.

lish translations of the files.

The *Irish Examiner* understands that a team of detectives in the Garda National Cyber Bureau (GNCCB) are trawling through the files and are hopeful of gaining further knowledge and evidence.

Officers are said to be only interested in anything that can tie Conti directly to the HSE attack.

The process is expected to take several weeks as detectives also have to verify the information that they uncover.

External cyber experts have said there is a "goldmine of data" in the files for law enforcement officers.

While the GNCCB is ultimately aiming for prosecutions of those involved, some sources suspect that might not be achievable, particularly given current relations between Ireland and the EU and Russia.

The former head of Britain's National Cyber Security Centre, Ciaran Martin, said that Conti's initial statement provided "an unusually obvious glimpse into the strange but largely symbiotic relationship between the Russian state and organised cyber criminality".

New bill aims to criminalise sex for rent

Ann Murphy

A new bill will come before the Dáil today introducing an offence around sex-for-rent, following the *Irish Examiner's* investigation into the practice.

The Ban on Sex for Rent Bill 2022, which is being introduced by Social Democrats TD Cian O'Callaghan, aims to criminalise the practice of offering free or discounted accommodation in return for sexual acts.

In February, Justice Minister Helen McEntee said the "appalling" behaviour was "unfortunately" not illegal, and was the "worst type of preying on victims".

The bill proposes imprisonment for up to seven years for engaging in a sex-for-rent arrangement.

It also proposes an offence of arranging or facilitating the requirement or acceptance of sex as a condition of accommodation, with a penalty of €50,000. This section includes publishers of advertisements.

Last month, this newspaper spoke with six women in different parts of Ireland who were offered accommodation at reduced or no rent, with the expectation that sex or bed-sharing with the landlord would be part of the arrangement. Five of the women were from outside this country and had moved here for study or work.

One woman said she was offered such an arrangement in Waterford City after she moved in, believing she would be paying €55 rent a week. However, after moving in, she was told the money was for bills and sex was expected to cover rent.

In December, the *Irish Examiner* revealed a number of accommodation advertisements seeking sex for rent on several websites.

Another advert was for a room in a house for a single lady "with a twist". The ad stated: "Can do reduced rent for occasional fun."

IRISH EXAMINER

08.03.22

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At least 24 sexual harassment allegations in third-level

Noel Baker
Social Affairs Correspondent

There have been at least 24 allegations of sexual harassment reported to third-level education authorities in the past two years.

Data received under Freedom of Information from almost all third-level institutions shows that sexual harassment cases form a proportion of a far larger number of

cases alleging bullying, harassment, and intimidation, and in a handful of cases, racism.

University College Dublin said it has received seven complaints alleging sexual harassment since the start of 2020, while in the same period, Trinity College Dublin said it received seven complaints of sexual harassment from students, and one other in which a staff member was

allegedly sexually harassed by someone external to the college.

Monster Technical University has said that it is still investigating two incidents reported to it this year involving "sexual assault/sexual harassment".

University College Cork said it had received two complaints of sexual harassment in the first few months of 2020.

At Technological University Dublin, an allegation of a sexual nature made by one student against another resulted in a formal reprimand, while at the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest, Athlone, a case of alleged sexual harassment was one of four cases of alleged bullying or harassment made to authorities.

At the Institute of Technol-

ogy Dundalk, information supplied by the student services officer shows that a student was suspended for a year following a case of sexual harassment in February of last year.

They had the chance to resume studies at the start of the 2021/22 academic year.

NUI Galway confirmed one case of sexual harassment, but said another 13 cases involved "online bully-

ing/harassment/sexual harassment".

Professor Louise Crowley, who leads the Bystander Project in UCC, said an increased rate of reporting of alleged incidents is to be welcomed, adding the level of engagement in third-level shows a greater awareness of the problem and better supports and training for those who need it.

Analysis: 11

Ban on sex for rent 'is the best gift'

Italian woman was offered housing in exchange for 'fun'

Ann Murphy

An Italian woman who was offered accommodation in return for "fun" says the introduction of legislation banning sex for rent practices is the best present she received for International Women's Day.

The young professional moved to Ireland last October for a better life and had to move into new accommodation in recent weeks. She previously told the *Irish Examiner* that trying to find a room in Dublin early this year was "like falling in a dangerous hell" after her experience.

Another advertiser told her he wanted someone who would share a bed with him in a property he was hoping to secure, because he wanted to half the rent for the room. When she refused the offer, he texted her to ask if she would like to be his girlfriend.

The third advertiser replied to her query telling her that a room and himself "came together" for €200 per month.

She told the *Irish Examiner* that she had come to Ireland from southern Italy for a better future.

On Tuesday, in introducing the bill in the Dáil, Mr O'Callaghan said it was an abhorrent practice which nobody should be subjected to when seeking somewhere to live.

He added: "It is particularly worrying that migrants who have less access to support networks and to information and advice have been targeted in particular."

One of the properties unearthed by the *Irish Examiner* was a house in Newcastlewest, Limerick, which would be shared with the landlord. He advertised a room in his house for a single lady "with a twist".

The ad said: "Can do reduced rent for occasional fun." When contacted by a prospective tenant, the landlord made it clear that sexual activity was required on a weekly basis in return for rent of €200 for the first month and €250 per month thereafter.

One of the Dublin properties was offered for free in return for a "friends with benefits" arrangement. The advertisement read: "Hey currently have a room to rent in North county Dublin, not looking to rent for cash but instead a fwb situation. Strictly applies to females, no males will be considered."

Blazing a trail



At the launch of Darkness Into Light 2022 were musician Tolu Makay, broadcaster Grainne Seoige and former Dublin GAA player Philly McMahon. The annual fundraising event organised by Pieta, which provides life-saving support services for those in suicidal distress and who have been bereaved through suicide, is back as the sun rises on Saturday, May 7. www.darknessintolight.ie Picture: INPHO/Dan Sheridan

Roma women lose discrimination case against Dunnes Stores

Neil Michael

Two Roma women have had their discrimination claim against Dunnes Stores rejected by the Workplace Relations Commission.

The women claimed they were refused service at a Dublin city centre store because of their Roma ethnicity.

In a statement against Dunnes Stores, one of the women — who had been barred from the shop for allegedly begging from customers coming into the store — pointed out that Irish beggars were not barred.

The WRC was told: "The first complainant has previously observed persons of Irish ethnicity begging outside the shop and subsequently being allowed into the store unhindered."

Dunnes Stores denied the claims against it and said the older of the two women was

satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the two complainants were "not discriminated against on grounds of their Roma ethnicity".

The first complainant, who was in the shop to buy groceries with her niece, picked up some fresh food and was making her way to the self-service cashier to pay for the goods when she says she was blocked by a security guard who took the food off her, blocked her entrance to the tills, grabbed her arm, and brought her to the entrance of the shop.

She claims her niece was also blocked by the security guard from purchasing groceries, and then the two women were told they were barred from the store.

The complainants said that when they asked why they were barred, the security guard gave no reason.

However, the WRC adjudication officer said the WRC

was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the two complainants were "not discriminated against on grounds of their Roma ethnicity".

The WRC official said: "Based on the evidence heard, I find that [the first complainant] was not served as she had been barred a number of months earlier for begging customers in the store to buy food for her."

The adjudication officer also noted: "I am cognizant that when testimony was taken at the hearing, there were inconsistencies in the complainant's evidence."

The WRC also pointed out that while the niece had said her aunt was given no reason for refusal of service, she said later in her testimony that the Dunnes Stores security guard advised her at the time that she was barred due to begging from customers.



Turner's prize

Landmark church in Cork city centre next to city development site

Commercial Property, Page: 14



Lessons can be learned from master plan for Dublin's Moore St

Opinion, Page: 10

'Multi-million' fodder support package ready by end of the month

Farming, Page: 1

sudoku

basic

4	2	9	3	7	8	5	1	6
6	7	8	1	2	5	3	4	9
1	3	5	6	4	9	7	2	8
8	5	4	2	9	7	1	6	3
2	1	7	4	6	3	9	8	5
3	9	6	5	8	1	2	7	4
5	6	3	7	1	4	8	9	2
7	8	2	9	5	6	4	3	1
9	4	1	8	3	2	6	5	7

intermediate

9	8	7	3	6	4	1	5	2
6	1	5	8	2	7	9	3	4
3	4	2	1	9	5	8	6	7
2	5	9	7	4	6	3	1	8
8	6	4	9	1	3	7	2	5
7	3	1	5	8	2	6	4	9
5	9	8	4	3	1	2	7	6
1	7	6	2	5	9	4	8	3
4	2	3	6	7	8	5	9	1

advanced

8	6	1	3	5	4	9	2	7
4	3	2	9	8	7	5	6	1
7	5	9	6	1	2	3	8	4
3	8	4	2	9	5	1	7	6
9	1	7	4	3	6	2	5	8
6	2	5	1	7	8	4	3	9
2	9	3	7	6	1	8	4	5
5	4	6	8	2	9	7	1	3
1	7	8	5	4	3	6	9	2

How to Play
Fill in the grid, ensuring that each column and row, and every 3x3 box, contains the numbers 1-9

SOLUTIONS for WEDNESDAY

BASIC

6		3	2	1	
4	9		6	5	3
1	2		4	8	6
		4	6		7
			5	7	1
7				9	2
3	5	9		1	4
			8	5	
4			6	7	9
					8
					5

INTERMEDIATE

6			1		6	7
	9	2	6	4		
		5	6			4
		4	2		9	
	3		7		2	
7			8	4	1	9
					6	8
8	2		5			

ADVANCED

9			5	6		
	8		7			
		2	3		4	9
			6	3		4
		3	2		1	
5			9	4		
4	7	8		1	9	
			6	9		7
						3

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WEATHERWATCH

NOON

Irish Sea Rough

TONIGHT

Irish Sea Moderate

TODAY

An unsettled start with widespread outbreaks of rain which will be locally heavy. Rain will gradually clear eastwards during the day to reveal some brighter spells across western areas during the afternoon. Light to gentle south-westerly winds will be locally moderate. Max temp 7-10C (45-50F).

TONIGHT

Daytime rain will clear eastern areas during the evening to reveal clear spells. Overnight will then be dry with clear spells and variable amounts of cloud cover around. Patches of mist and fog will form, mostly across eastern areas. Mostly light to gentle winds. Min temp -3-0C (27-32F).

TOMORROW

Early patches of mist and fog will soon lift and clear. It will then be dry and bright with spells of sunshine and variable amounts of patchy cloud cover. Thick cloud will build in from the west during the afternoon and evening. Gentle to brisk southerly winds. Max temp 8-11C (46-52F).

SUN AND MOON TODAY

rises sets rises sets
Sun..... 06:53 18:17 Moon..... 09:22 01:30

MOON PHASE
10 March

EXTREMES

Warmest Armagh 22C (72F)
Coldest Derrylin, Cornahoule 0C (32F)
Wettest Valencia 0.26 inches

ATLANTIC SITUATION: Low B and Low C to move north-east. Low D will move east. High U will remain to the east.

EUROPE TODAY

Thick cloud and rain will push in from the west across north-west Spain and will edge into western France during the afternoon. Scattered showers across Greece which may be wintry in the north. Mainly dry elsewhere with sunny spells however there is a risk of wintry showers across eastern areas.

EUROPE OUTLOOK

Tomorrow will be mainly dry across Europe, however there is a chance of a few showers across Spain and southern France and there will be scattered showers across south-east Europe and Greece which may be wintry in nature. Heavy rain will spread across Portugal, Spain and western France on Friday.

HIGH TIDES TODAY

location	time	height	time	height
Galway	09:27	4.2m	21:49	4.1m
Limerick	11:04	5.1m	23:27	4.9m
Cobh	09:30	3.5m	21:45	3.4m
Waterford	10:07	4.1m	22:21	4.0m
Dublin	03:36	3.4m	16:03	3.4m
Belfast	03:23	3.1m	15:43	3.1m

IRELAND YESTERDAY

location	readings at 12noon	condition	°C	°F
Belfast	drizzle	6	43
Birr	showers	8	46
Cork	showers	8	46
Dublin	rain	7	45
Kilkenny	showers	8	46
Rosslare	rain	8	46
Shannon	showers	11	52
Valentia	showers	7	45

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People fleeing Ukraine are taking up offers of accommodation via Facebook groups, but there are fears of sex-for-rent situations and exploitation, writes **Ann Murphy**



Concern at Ireland's status of 'safe haven'

AS THE flow of refugees from Ukraine makes its way across Europe, homeowners are opening their doors to take in thousands of women and children in.

While the UK is offering homeowners a £350 payment a month through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, no such payments are being made to Irish people.

But still, more than 20,000 people are willing to register with the Irish Red Cross to welcome Ukrainians into their homes or into their holiday homes.

Many more are housing refugees from the war-torn region through unofficial channels such as relatives and acquaintances. People fleeing the terror are taking up offers of accommodation they have found through the many Facebook groups set up to help the Ukrainian refugees.

Some people here in Ireland are making offers available through classified advertisement websites which are commonly used on the continent — including one person who has offered accommodation to a “slim Ukrainian” woman with the expectation of sex “after a while”.

After that advertisement was revealed in the *Irish Examiner* on Tuesday, Taoiseach Micheál Martin described it as “morally reprehensible”. He said that people offering homes to Ukrainian refugees will be vetted.

Vetting, however, will not ensure beyond all doubt that Ukrainians taking up accommodation offers will be safe from exploitation — either sexually or through labour.

It will only cover those offering accommodation through official channels such as the Irish Red Cross. It will not cover those on Facebook groups or classified advertisement websites, for example.

The vetting procedure will also only determine if people offering the accommodation have a criminal record.

Social Democrats housing spokesman Cian O’Callaghan said: “Vetting is the most basic level of checking. It establishes if someone has a conviction. While somebody could be vetted, they could still pose a threat to someone’s safety.”

The advertisement for the accommodation in Clare for a “slim Ukrainian” woman was still online as of yesterday — a week before the Ban on Sex for Rent Bill 2022 goes to second stage in the Dáil on March 23.

The bill was brought by Deputy O’Callaghan on March 8.

A quick scan of sites hosting such ads yesterday showed a number of them, despite the progress of the legislation seeking to ban both the practice and the advertising of such arrangements.

One of the online advertisements states: “Room to rent, would suit fit, submissive woman who would like to trade in return for lodgings. References required.”

The room, in Naas, Co Kildare, is offered for €1 per month.

Another on the same site reads: “Room available. Please contact for more details. Female only.”

A property in Mallow, Co Cork, is available for “adult fun”, according to the advertiser when contacted for information about the property, but he says rent would also be considered.

It is ironic that the Ban on Sex for



Two women with their children rest in a subway hall after fleeing from Ukraine at the main train station in Berlin.

Picture: Markus Schreiber/AP

Rent legislation was brought on International Women’s Day, given that the majority of people targeted in sex-for-rent propositions are women.

One Italian woman, Chantal, who told her story to the *Irish Examiner*, was propositioned by three different landlords when responding to rental advertisements on Facebook rental groups for accommodation in Dublin since the start of the year. She described the legislation as the best gift she could have received on International Women’s Day.

The legislation, which seeks a seven-year maximum prison sentence and a €50,000 fine as penalties, is unlikely to be enough to stamp out sex-for-rent offers, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, such arrangements are not always offered in an advert regarding a rental opportunity. The Mallow proper-

ty advertised in recent days is offered to females only and does not ask for a specific rent. It is only when contacted by a prospective tenant that the offer of “adult fun” is introduced — and only after several attempts by the prospective tenant to establish what rent is required.

Initially, the advertiser said he was “open to offers” when asked how much rent was required, but eventually, after constant requests from the prospective tenant, he said that “some arrangement between us could be done, depending what u look like. Or else cash offer.” He went on to suggest “adult fun”, but did acknowledge that he may consider cash offers instead.

Secondly, advertisers either use a pseudonym or a first name only, and do not advertise the exact location of a property. This would make it difficult to

prosecute if an exact location and identity are not identifiable. Some prospective landlords do make the location available but others demand photos or commitment to engaging in barter-type arrangements before even sharing photos of the properties.

Thirdly, people targeted with such propositions will not always be willing to go to gardai. One Irish student, who responded to an advertisement on a website offering a property for rent in Waterford, left the house last October on her very first night in the property after it emerged her landlord wanted her to engage in sexual acts with him.

That woman told the *Irish Examiner* she had not gone to the gardai, even though the man went to her workplace the following day to look for her. She said: “I wanted to report him to the police but like, I really don’t know what I

would’ve said to the police because everything happened so fast.”

Chantal, the Italian woman, didn’t go to the gardai because she wanted to forget about the experience once she found a suitable place to stay.

Mr O’Callaghan knows that legislation is not enough to tackle the sex-for-rent issue and says action needs to be made on tackling the housing crisis.

According to the most recent Daft.ie report, published over a month ago, the national average rent per month was €1,524.

Mr O’Callaghan said: “Legislation is only a part of this but it is sending a signal from the legislature and from society that this absolutely is not on, making it abundantly clear that will be a criminal offence.

“And it also sends out a strong message to anyone who has been at the re-

ceiving end of these demands that they can report it.”

Chantal said: “People need to know what kind of hell is for us, expats from all over the world, often young professionals that want to work and start a better life, when we come here in Ireland.”

She added: “I am from Italy and we know Ireland as an advanced country that can hold several opportunities.”

For the many Ukrainian women and children coming to Ireland to escape the war in their home country, Ireland is also being seen as a safe haven.

But with concerns raised about trafficking gangs targeting them, and advertisements aimed at Ukrainian women with sex-for-rent offers, could some be facing into a new type of hell?

Being honest about harm of means-tested disability support

IT’S been a year since regulations were signed to allow disabled students accept PhD scholarships and retain their disability allowance. This week it was announced the legislation will extend to include blind and visually impaired people in receipt of the blind pension.

These amendments to the legislation were dubbed “Catherine’s Law” after my public ordeal last March. It does not belong to me, however; it is for all of us in the community. It was a long-standing issue before my time. I am always conscious of the hundreds, if not thousands, of disabled people in Ireland who could not apply for scholarships or had to drop out of PhD programmes due to financial constraints prior to the amendments. The “academy”, as it is often referred, and indeed wider society have lost out on a great deal of rich research because of this.

Before my issue went public, trying to find the information to understand the social welfare constraints was incredibly difficult. I needed to know the reasons why pre-existing policies could not apply to me in order to firm up my case. I got a huge amount of conflicting and incorrect information from several organisations. It took about two weeks of work, from morning through to evening, to understand exactly the lay of the land.

It was a triple-pronged debacle in the end: That I was disabled, a student, and embarking on a Level 10 qualification.

At the time, the State was preparing its first report to the UN regarding Ireland’s performance in accordance with the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The 62-page draft report was available online. Under Article 24 for Education, there were no policies or initiatives to

With the expansion of ‘Catherine’s Law’, knowing others have and will benefit from my gruelling work gives me a lot of solace, writes **Catherine Gallagher**



include disabled people in higher education at PhD level. I did a word-search of this document, and I found no match to the words “PhD”, “postgraduate”, and “research”.

In my subsequent letter to local representatives and relevant ministers, on this point I said: “This specific barrier says two things to me. First, the government does not expect disabled people to study to a PhD level or be in receipt of a scholarship they have worked hard for. “Second, if a disabled person progresses their study with a PhD scholarship to a) try to better themselves and b) carve out a career that suits their abilities, we do not have the instruments or awareness to make this a smooth and enjoyable process.”

Once I circulated my letter, it soon caught legs in regional and national



‘The government does not expect disabled people to study to a PhD level or be in receipt of a scholarship they have worked hard for,’ Catherine Gallagher wrote in a letter to local representatives and ministers.

media. Over these couple of weeks, I was running on little sleep and I found it hard to carve out enough time to eat. It was not just in the media — I was constantly working in the background talking to and following up with anyone who could help pass the issue up the chain. It was then I realised that I was benefiting from my study to date. I had a BA in journalism, and I recently com-

pleted my master’s in political communication. My degrees gave me the flair and confidence to communicate.

To be fair, I came up against little resistance from the public and politicians. From a journalistic point of view, I understand the appeal of human-interest framing. From an academic perspective, I understand why they work. From a personal stance, it took its toll on me

in the weeks after. I have always been open about my impairments but talking about my private financial affairs was a new and uncomfortable level. Knowing that others have and will benefit from those gruelling weeks gives me a lot of solace. I have received many messages from people who are now in a position to even consider PhD study.

The news this week is a welcome

further development. Announcements like these call on us as disabled people to think of the ‘bigger picture’. According to the latest figures from Ahead Ireland, only 2.4% of postgraduate students are registered with disability services in their institutions. By contrast, the undergraduate-level equivalent is 7.1%. Overall, disabled people make up approximately 13.5% of our population. We have a trajectory of not expecting, not including, and not facilitating disabled people to progress academically.

Catherine’s Law goes some way to alleviating it. In the immediate future, part-time PhD students need to be included in the regulations. On the other hand, part-time scholarships are harder to come by, which needs to be looked at. This continues to cut out potential talent in the academic pool.

In the long-term picture, we need to hold space for honest dialogue on the harms of means-tested disability supports. I cannot even live with an unmarried partner without the risk of losing everything. We face hidden costs annually, as stated in the Cost of Disability Report published in December 2021.

I am essentially trying to work towards having a career that suits my skills but that also can cope with the cost of being disabled. I know many academics will advise me just to enjoy my research for now. I am lucky that I do, but it is hard not to think of the bigger picture when it has such control over how you live your life.

■ Catherine Gallagher is a PhD student in the School of Communications at DCU. She is researching the media and political communication response to Covid-19 in Ireland. She is also involved in the wider disability movement and often addresses public events on the framing of disability.

While there were disagreements in the Dáil over the Ban on Sex for Rent Bill 2022, all sides acknowledged the need to address the issue, writes **Ann Murphy**



Scale of sex-for-rent crisis finally creeps up

WORDS such as creep, predator, and scumbag were thrown around the Dáil like confetti at a wedding in recent days. So too were: power imbalance, exploitation, vulnerable women, war, and refugees.

Blended together, they were key ingredients in the debate on the Ban on Sex for Rent Bill 2022, which is making its way through the Dáil.

While the Government side welcomed the bill, concerns were raised that it was a half-baked piece of legislation. However, those on the opposition benches were equally as strong in their view that the document before them was almost fully cooked.

The missing ingredients for them include a lack of commitment from the Government to a timeline for the passage of the bill through the Oireachtas, and a mixture of elements to address the simmering housing crisis.

A number of TDs also raised concerns that legislation on the area of sex for rent was not brought to the Dáil by the Government instead of the Social Democrats.

Sinn Féin spokesman on housing Eoin Ó Broin said his initial thoughts when the *Irish Examiner* first highlighted sex-for-rent advertisements in December was: "What if this was my sister? What if it was my mother or my daughter?"

"When these kinds of stories arise, that is a question we should all ask ourselves," he said.

"I think when you ask yourself that question, you realise the kind of urgency in the response that is required from all of us as legislators."

He said condemnation of such practices was not enough.

"While I appreciate these are complex legal matters and it is not possible to produce legislation overnight, I do have one disappointment with today's debate," Mr Ó Broin said, adding that the introduction of Government legislation would have been a much quicker way of tackling the issue.

He criticised the lack of a "cast iron" commitment that the Government would bring forward its own legislation.

He said Helen McEntee, the justice minister, should contact the Social Democrats and organise a meeting of opposition spokespeople on housing and justice to ensure, "at the earliest possible opportunity, legislation is brought forward by Government to address the issue because that is the quickest way to resolve the matter".

He pointed out that this Dáil had been in existence for more than two years and, in that time, the housing committee "has yet to get an opposition bill through our committee".

Eight of the 14-member housing committee are drawn from the three Government parties. That has raised concerns in the opposition parties that the legislation may not be treated with the urgency they feel it requires at committee stage.

Mr Ó Broin said his fear was that the urgently needed legislation would "gather dust and more women will be affected by this appalling practice".

Just a day before she became the new Labour Party leader, Ivana Bacik also raised concerns about how long new legislation would take to implement.

She demanded a clear timeline on its



The Government side welcomed the bill but raised concerns that it was a half-baked piece of legislation, while those on the opposition benches were equally as strong in their view that the document was almost fully cooked.

introduction into law, but none was given.

James Brown, the junior justice minister, told the Dáil the Government had some issues about the legislation that must be ironed out.

For example, he said it did not consider how the new offences would interact with existing sexual offences legislation.

He also said it was unclear what the scope of the bill would be in terms of personal relationships — in particular where parties were not married and there was friction between them.

More clarity would be needed on what was meant by requiring sex as a condition of access to accommodation and who falls within the term of provider of accommodation, he said, ad-

ding that "accommodation" and "sex" should also be defined in the legislation.

Ms Bacik pointed out there was always a power imbalance between landlords and tenants but especially in a housing crisis.

"We know it is compounded by class and immigration status and that women from migrant backgrounds are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation in Ireland today, where we see large numbers of migrant women exploited through the sex trade on a daily basis," Ms Bacik said.

"It is very important that we recognise that power imbalance and the coercive context in which practices such as that identified in this legislation are carried out."

Sinn Féin's Louise O'Reilly agreed

that it would have been better if the Government had brought the legislation. She also raised concerns about other areas of the housing sector.

She highlighted a message from a woman whose brother was looking for accommodation for several months in north Dublin.

Ms O'Reilly said the woman and her brother had a viewing for property on St Patrick's Day that shocked them both. The rent was €1,200 per month and the one-bed property was snapped up by another renter even though it had mould on the walls and in the bathroom, had no shower, and was dirty and smelly.

Sinn Féin justice spokesman Martin Kenny raised concerns that sex for rent was being used as a gateway into prosti-

tution for vulnerable women.

"I fear that what is being attempted here by some of these people who are offering a place for a person to stay, I feel it is a first step, that they will then begin to bring them into this very horrible and very despicable trade of prostitution," Mr Kenny said.

Fear was expressed for refugees arriving into Ireland — particularly given the *Irish Examiner*'s report last week that one advertisement had been uncovered that offered a sex-for-rent arrangement in Clare for a "slim Ukrainian" woman.

However, the house was united on two fronts — the need to address the issue of sex for rent and recognition that the extent of the problem is unknown because there has been no con-

crete work carried out to establish its prevalence.

Social Democrats' Cian O'Callaghan said this newspaper's investigation into the area "really shows the huge importance of independent investigative journalism and how important it is to our democracy".

Malcolm Noonan, the junior housing minister, said they "are very grateful for the light shed on the practice by the *Irish Examiner* but acknowledged that data was important and "that is something we need to get conclusive information on".

It is clear from the many elements thrown into the mixing bowl that the elimination of sex for rent in Ireland is now on the radar — but it has a way to go before being fully baked.

Ardnacrusha was a defining moment in history of Ireland

THE LAST few weeks have seen the war in Ukraine and the supply of Russian fossil fuels added to the ongoing climate crisis. We have seen temperatures in the Arctic and Antarctic spike by 30C to 40C and Irish household energy bills following, as the burning of non-renewable resources continues to send temperatures and bills skyrocketing.

The issue of where we get our energy from has never been so pressing, and requires dramatic changes to ensure that we move to renewable resources that don't make matters worse.

If you take the back road from Limerick City out to O'Briensbridge, you will be rewarded by glimpses of Ireland's greatest engineering achievement of the 20th century. The Ardnacrusha powerstation was constructed during the first 10 years of the Free State, when it provided 80% of the power required by the nation. Still in operation today, it was recognised in 2002 by the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) as an engineering milestone of the 20th century and remains the pride of the ESB and Siemens, the company that constructed it.

Apart from the fact that our first foray into electrical generation was in the renewable area of water power, what does this power station have to do with our current predicament? The genesis of the Ardnacrusha power station is important, not just because it created the basis for our national grid and the ESB which has run it for nearly a century, but because of the scale and ambition of creating clean energy infrastructure in uncertain times.

In the early 1920s, a young Irish engineer, Thomas McLaughlin, was working for the German company Siemens on the electrification of

The war in Ukraine and the ongoing climate crisis have focused minds on how we can safely source the energy needed to power the country, writes **Sorcha O'Brien**

Pomerania, which now spans the German-Polish border. McLaughlin was intrigued to see if his home country could benefit from electricity in a similar manner. He convinced Siemens to let him work up the calculations for the Shannon, and persuaded the Minister for Trade and Industry, Patrick McGilligan, that a powerstation generating electricity on the lower Shannon would make all the difference to the new nation.

This was particularly important because the majority of coal used in Ireland at that time was imported from Britain. While "energy security" wasn't a term used at the time, the idea of



The Ardnacrusha power station was constructed during the first ten years of the Irish Free State, when it provided 80% of the power required by the nation. Picture: Liam Burke, Press 22

generating power locally was so attractive to McGilligan that he had few issues selling the project to the rest of the Government.

The Shannon Scheme began in 1925, after the government had commissioned a report from a panel of European experts on hydroelectrical power and appointed Siemens for its engineering expertise. For a country that was

only a few years out of a punishing civil war, where rural and urban poverty was an enormous issue and electricity unfamiliar, the Shannon Scheme must have seemed like a moonshot to many people. Indeed, thousands of visitors took guided tours of the construction site, taking photographs and buying postcards to record the occasion. Even a film crew from Fox Film

Company departed in despair in 1929, because they thought that the size and scale of the project made it unfilmable.

Regardless, the employment situation in the country was dire enough that when the call went out for labourers to dig canals, men walked from as far away as Connemara to work on the project, with a few hundred skilled German workers joined by thousands of

unskilled Irish workers. Limerick and Clare benefitted from this influx. Siemens built housing for a number of their more senior staff, but the majority of workers rented accommodation in the surrounding areas.

It wasn't an easy or straightforward project, as poor health and safety procedures killed many of the 37 workers who died on the scheme, and the initial proposal to pay the canal diggers as agricultural labourers sparked a strike. However, the government could see the long-term benefits of this energy infrastructure and committed the enormous amount of 20% of the entire national budget to the project, and set up the ESB in 1927 to manage the station and the development of the national grid.

This week Environment Minister Eamon Ryan compared the new Maritime Area Regulatory Authority wind farm initiative to 'Ardnacrusha to the power of 100', mentioning the investment needed to develop the required infrastructure in ports such as Shannon Foynes and Cork Harbour.

The aim is to have the first turbines at sea by 2026, but the question remains whether this will be ambitious enough to steer Ireland out of its energy dependency on imported fuel? The latest IPCC report says that we need "immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions" if we are to limit global warming to even 2C. Rather than responding to the energy crisis by stripping our irreplaceable bogs, we have an excellent example of a large-scale renewable energy project on our doorstep, if only we can copy the ambition and vision of the Shannon Scheme.

■ Sorcha O'Brien is a design historian

Sex assault victim: Check if someone is all right before taking out phone to video

Ann Murphy



Her first college night out with friends in Cork City should have held special memories for Rachel McElroy. Instead, it is a night that she barely remembers, even though it is one that has changed her life forever.

On Wednesday, Georgian native Bagrat Kudzievi was jailed for seven years, with the final year suspended, for sexually assaulting her that night.

After his release, he must return to his home country — which Ms McElroy said was one piece of comfort to her.

The Waterford woman was just 18 years old when she was attacked, just as she was hoping to begin living her life as a young woman starting in college.

"It is a relief that he has to return home," she said.

"It is a relief the case is over too, because I do not have to go back to court and I don't have to worry about the case."

In October, Kudzievi, a martial arts champion, was convicted of two assaults on Ms McElroy at locations in Cork city centre on the night of October 19, 2019. He denied the charges. His sentence has been backdated to October 2019, when he was first taken into custody.

Ms McElroy said she and her friends had a few drinks before heading out in Cork City on the night of the attack. The court heard she had not had a lot to drink, but she has no memory of the attack on her or of the immediate aftermath.

She remembers going to the bar for a drink, but her next memory is of being in a Garda station after the attack, when she was being swabbed.

In a way, she is grateful that she cannot remember the attack itself — although she did see some CCTV footage of the incident during the recent trial.

She is very thankful to four bouncers at the nightclub where she had been with her friends, who found her being attacked by Kud-



Rachel McElroy, who was attacked on a night out with friends in Cork City. The assault was filmed and shared on social media by bystanders, who recorded it rather than seeking help for Ms McElroy. She urged people to be more aware if they see something that might not look right.

zievi. They pulled him off her and held him until gardai came.

Kudzievi met Ms McElroy a short time before attacking her, and she can be seen in an emotional state on CCTV in the club.

The Georgian managed to leave the nightclub with her. He attacked her in an alcove nearby, before moving her across a bridge and on to a pavement, where he assaulted her again before being discovered by the bouncers.

He attended the sentencing on Wednesday by video link from prison and told the court, via an interpreter, that he would take his own life if he was in prison for seven years.

One of the most difficult aspects of the attack is the fact that the assault was filmed and shared on social media by bystanders, who recorded it rather than seeking help for Ms McElroy.

She said she was shocked when she discovered there was footage of the incident

and cannot understand why someone's first instinct would be to record such a happening.

"People do not normally have sexual contact outside a nightclub," she said. "My advice to someone is to see if a person is OK and see what is going on."

She told the *Irish Examiner*: "It was a violation of privacy."

She urged people to be more aware if they see something that might not look right.

"Check if the person is all right before taking out a phone to video," she said.

During the sentencing on Wednesday, Judge Tara Burns said the case portrayed every young woman's worst nightmare.

"It started with a group of young women going out with friends on a night out," said Judge Burns. "This was an innocent night out — a bunch of young women out enjoying themselves and having a relatively small amount of alcohol. For what-

ever reason, it had a very significant effect on her."

"CCTV shows her in a very incapable state within the nightclub. Within 10 minutes they were outside, engaged in the most intimate acts, with people walking by filming them."

"The accused — having been interrupted by women shouting at them — carried her across the bridge. He put her on the footpath — her genital area exposed, his penis out, and he was on top of her in a grinding motion,

“It is a relief that he has to return home. It is a relief that the case is over too, because I do not have to go back to court

with cars passing.”

Ms McElroy said she waived her right to anonymity to help others to come forward after such attacks.

"It was a big decision to waive my anonymity, but I wanted to help people as well. It could help people to come forward," she said.

She found the trial process stressful, but was glad that her attacker was brought to court and that she had the strength to waive her anonymity.

"I did not want to hide behind silence," she said.

She believes it was important to speak out, and praised the detectives who worked on her case from the protective services unit in Anglesea Street Garda Station, adding: "The detectives and my family have been brilliant."

"The detectives put such hard work for it to get to court. They were just brilliant in everything they did. They kept checking in with me. They were fantastic."

After the attack, she left college, but later returned to complete a one-year course in makeup and special effects makeup.

She attends counselling to help her cope following the attack, but feels she is a lot stronger and better now.

"I am OK now about going out again, but I would mostly go out to places near to home."

She is looking forward to the future and is proud that she has been able to complete her college course, despite the trauma of the attack.

"If, by speaking out, I can help one person, it will have been worth it," she said.

Cork pair to star in new Disney+ series

Nicole Glennon

Derry Girls' Siobhán McSweeney is to star alongside fellow Cork actress Máiréad Tyers in a new show for Disney+.

Extraordinary, an eight-part superhero comedy series, will follow Jen (Tyers), a young woman who is struggling to find her feet in a world where everyone has a superpower... except her.

McSweeney, who is best known for her portrayal of acid-tongued nun Sister Micheal in *Derry Girls*, will star as Jen's mother in the show, which says it is all about embracing your "general okay-ness".

The actress was recently in Cork filming the television adaption of Graham Norton's novel *Holding* when she broke her leg and landed herself in Cork University Hospital.

Tyers, who is now based in London but who hails from Ballinhassig, recently starred alongside Judi Dench, *Fifty Shades of Grey* star Jamie Dornan, *Outlander*'s Caitriona Balfe, and Tony winner Brid Brennan in Kenneth Branagh's *Belfast*.

Written by Northern Irish actor, writer, and comedian Emma Moran, the new Disney+ programme is one of the first UK-produced originals unveiled for the streaming service and will also feature *Poldark*'s Sofia Oxenham as Jen's best friend Carrie. Rising stars Bilal Hasna and Luke Rollason will also star.

The synopsis describes the show as a "fresh, innovative comedy about being young and finding your feet in a confusing world, when all you'll ever be is ordinary."

The show began filming in London this week. A release date has not yet been announced.



Máiréad Tyers: Cork actress will star in 'Extraordinary'.

Virtual escape room teaches young people consumer rights

Pádraig Hoare

EU leaders are hoping to tap into gaming in order to teach young people about their consumer rights, after a proliferation of spending online and over apps in the past two years.

The European Commission's directorate general for consumers has put together what is described as an educational escape room game aimed at 16- to 24-year-olds.

The game — found at europa.eu/yourright/game/ — is intended to raise awareness of consumer rights among the younger segment of internet users and online shoppers, according to the European Consumer Centre (ECC) of Ireland.

Key elements contained within the game include the 14-day return cooling-off period of the consumer, as

well as facts around safety of products.

There is also advice on how to deal with unfair consumer contracts, and the right to repair or replacement under the EU's two-year product guarantee.

ECC Ireland, part of an EU-wide network providing advice to the public, said: "When you shop online, you have the right to a cooling-off period of 14 calendar days, where you can withdraw from the contract and return your purchases."

It said it is an EU consumer right to have a defective product fixed or replaced: "A seller must repair, replace, give you a discount, or give you a refund if the product is faulty or doesn't work as advertised within the first two years."

Issues around safety should be reported, it said:

"If you discover something is unsafe, immediately alert the seller and the authorities in your country. You should also ask to be compensated because a product should be safe during its predicted lifespan."

ECC Ireland said some consumer contracts have hidden terms, by which they can limit a seller's liability.

"This violates your EU consumer rights," it said.

Almost two-thirds of European adults shopped online last year, with Munster and Leinster among the highest in the EU for internet-based purchases.

As expected, younger people are far more likely to shop online than older people, according to findings from the European Commission's data analysis wing last month.

Eurostat said people aged

25-34 were 2.5 times more likely to have made use of the internet to shop (83%) than people aged 65-74 (33%).

When it comes to the habits of Irish shoppers, people in Leinster are among the highest in Europe, with Munster not far behind.

Growth in shopping online coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, data shows.

Dublin and the midlands went from 68% of people buying online in 2019 to 84% last year, while Munster went from 69% to 77% in the same period. The West and North decreased their shopping online from 2019, going from 57% to 53% in 2020.

Almost two-thirds of online purchases across the EU involved clothes, shoes, or accessories, followed by furniture, home accessories, or gardening products, and food deliveries.

Work to begin on fire-hit Briery Gap

Ann Murphy

Work will begin within weeks on rebuilding a mid-Cork theatre and library which were damaged by a fire five years ago.

The Briery Gap complex in Macroom was extensively damaged when a fire broke out at the back of the building in May 2016. It has remained closed since.

Work is scheduled to get under way in January by Cunnor Construction, with the completion of the project scheduled for May 2023. Preliminary work will start this month at the site.

The project will include the insertion of new steel, concrete, and timber-framed structures into the existing masonry shell of the building.

Local Fine Gael TD Michael Creed said the project has been "dragging on" for a long time because there were many hurdles to cross, which have now been cleared.

He said the planned completion of the project is close



An artist's impression of the restored Briery Gap theatre, Macroom, Co Cork.

Picture: Cork County Council

to the timeline for the conclusion of the town's bypass, which is due to be finished in the second half of 2023.

Mr Creed believes the Briery Gap will play a central role in the economic life of Macroom after the bypass removes traffic from the busy town centre.

He said the bypass will reclaim the streets of the town

from traffic for its people, allowing the town centre to flourish, particularly with the redevelopment of the Briery Gap.

"In a post-bypass scenario, the town centre will have to stand on its own two feet," said Mr Creed. "The Briery Gap is going to be a jewel in the crown for Macroom. It has the potential to anchor

economic activity. It is important that this project drives on. It makes me confident about the post-bypass era for the town."

Mr Creed believes the combined projects of the bypass and the Briery Gap will help attract people from neighbouring hinterlands who have been shopping in Ballincollig, Killarney, and Dunmanway.

Labour councillor Martin Coughlan said the town has been waiting for the Briery Gap redevelopment to go ahead for the past five years.

In welcoming the new timescale of the project, he said: "We were getting worried that it would never happen. It was a huge loss to the town."

The Briery Gap was opened in 2000 and incorporated a 200-seat theatre and library, as well as a cinema. It was refurbished three years before the fire.

The library relocated to Railway View in the town after the fire but will return to the Briery Gap when the project is completed.

Exporters, further changes are coming on January 1st 2022 due to Brexit

The UK is introducing new checks on all EU goods.

If your business exports goods to, or through, the UK, excluding Northern Ireland, you should be aware of new requirements, especially regarding pre-notification and ferry boarding formalities.

These new changes may substantially increase your Brexit exposure, so you must examine your supply chains and speak to your customers in the UK.

A range of Government supports are available.

Visit gov.ie/brexit for more information

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FRESH LOOKS FOR SPRING

Weekend: Fashion trends, Dermot Bannon, and much more ...



'I've put a kit sauna into the shed'

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The final gamble

The 33-year pension fraud that led to jail



Roving goalies

The changing face of life in the No. 1 jersey



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Ukraine crisis 'biggest modern danger'

Civilians in breakaway regions evacuate to Russia as troops gather

Daniel McConnell and Cormac O'Keeffe

The Russia-Ukraine crisis is "the most dangerous moment" for the order of European security in our lifetime, the British ambassador to Ireland has said.

Tensions in eastern Ukraine have heightened fears of a Russian invasion prompting a new war on the edge of Europe, with a humanitarian convoy hit by shelling yesterday and pro-Russian rebels ordering the evacuation of civilians from the breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk.

US president Joe Biden yesterday told a White House press conference that "significant intelligence" has "convinced" him that Russian president Vladimir Putin has "made the decision" to invade Ukraine.

However, he added: "Russia can still choose diplomacy. It is not too late to de-escalate and return the negotiation table."

Hours after the evacuation began, a jeep exploded outside the rebel government building in Donetsk. The Ukrainian government denied allegations by rebel leaders that it was planning an offensive, and said it was not targeting civilians in any way.

The Kremlin declared nuclear drills to flex its military muscle, and president Vladimir Putin pledged to protect Russia's national interests against what it sees as an encroaching Western threat.

Taoiseach Micheál Martin said the EU is unified in responding "very strongly" to any Russian invasion of Ukraine. He said it is Europe's view that the huge build-up of troops by Russia on Ukraine's border is "not justifiable".

"We believe the current massing of troops to the scale that has occurred is not justifiable under any circumstances," he said. "And we call for a de-escalation. Europe wants a de-escalation. And the diplomacy will continue towards that end."

Speaking to Irish journalists, British ambassador Paul Johnston said Britain, the EU, and the US will this weekend continue diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"I would say that the British government thinks that this is probably the most

dangerous moment for the European security order, in our lifetimes," he said.

Mr Johnston said Britain and the EU have sought to avoid the prospect of an invasion, but that it stands on the brink of that eventuality.

"So we've tried to use as many levers as we can to forestall this," he said. "But we do think that we are potentially on the brink of a very major and serious European security crisis."

"And the choice ultimately is in Russia's hands, what we're trying to do is create the right, the right context in terms of both, you know, threats and pressure, and also incentives and opportunities that might lead them to take what we hope would be the wiser course."

US and European leaders are grasping for ways to keep the peace and Europe's post-Cold War security order, including economic sanctions.

Mr Putin, whose nation has been under sanctions since 2014, said Western countries would probably find a reason to impose more whatever Russia does.

While Mr Putin held out the possibility of diplomacy, developments this week have further exacerbated East-West tensions.

US and European officials, focused on an estimated 150,000 Russian troops posted near Ukraine's borders, warn the long-simmering separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine could provide the spark for a broader attack.

Meanwhile, Ireland's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) said that while the risk to Irish agencies and companies from a targeted "nation-state" attack in Ukraine was "low", there was the potential for knock-on impacts. It added that "increased cyber-criminal activity" should be expected, as criminal gangs seek to exploit a worsening security situation.

The NCSC urged Irish companies with operations in Ukraine and Russia to be vigilant and to test their security systems. Without specifically naming hostile Russian state acts, it said previous "state-backed cyber operations" in the region had caused "significant disruption" to some Irish-based organisations in the past.

Additional reporting: Reuters
News: 6, 7
World: 10

'Why is it easier to buy Viagra?'

A Kinsale-based mother of two who vomited up to 50 times a day during her first pregnancy has queried why it is easier to buy Viagra than hyperemesis drug Cariban.

As Health Minister Stephen Donnelly confirmed the Government is moving to reduce the cost of this medication, Tina Hemlock Coyne said it should be the right of every pregnant person to be able to afford the potentially life-saving drug.

News: 4



Jacqui O'Regan, Cobh, Co Cork, beside the 100-year-old beech tree that fell against her house yesterday morning during Storm Eunice.

Picture: Larry Cummins

Tributes as council worker dies in storm

Ann Murphy

The council worker killed by a tree during Storm Eunice has been named.

Billy Kinsella, aged 59, died just 5km from where he lived in Ballythomas, Co Wexford.

Tributes were paid to Mr Kinsella last night as the post-storm repair operation continued. More than 12,000 customers remained without power overnight, with outages in West Cork, Kerry, and Ennisecorthy.

A yellow snow and ice warning was in place until 10am today.

Fianna Fáil councillor Donal Kenny said he had known Mr Kinsella for more than three decades and described him as a hard worker and a quiet person.

"We take for granted the work people do, whether they be paramedics, gardai, or council staff," said Co Wexford mayor Barbara-Anne Murphy.

News: 3

Warning as man loses €1m in crypto fraud

Ann Murphy

A man in the West of Ireland has been duped out of more than €1m in a cryptocurrency investment fraud.

The Central Bank has issued a fresh warning about investing in cryptocurrency as officers in the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau investigate the case.

The man was one of 234 people who made reports about investment fraud to gardai in 2021 — up from 50 reports in 2019. He lost the money in seven transactions over a five-month period in mid- to late 2021.

The €1m he lost is among €12.4m reported stolen last year, according to Det Supt Michael Cryan of the Garda National Economic Bureau.

"In 2019 there was about €4m reported stolen, €8m in 2020, and about €12m in 2021. That is a colossal jump," he said, adding that people wishing to invest in cryptocurrency may come across websites that appear legitimate but some of them are "completely bogus", while others are cloned copies of legitimate websites.

"If you go onto one of the fake sites and put in your details, very quickly you will get phonecalls with very



People are being scammed without looking up from their screens
The Big Read, Page 11

good salesmen who will be pushy, offering you a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity which you need to jump at now or you will lose out," said Det Supt Cryan.

In its securities markets risk outlook report, pub-

lished this month, the Central Bank said that while the nature and characteristics of crypto-assets vary considerably, "crypto-assets are likely to be highly risky and speculative".

In a statement to the *Irish Examiner*, the Central Bank warned: "Consumers who are considering investing in a product should carefully consider their investment objectives, level of experience, and appetite for risk. It is important that consumers take time to review all material information about the investment, the way it operates, and associated risks."

"The value of an investment may go down as well as up and consumers should take care not to invest money that they cannot afford to lose. The Central Bank notes the pace at which the crypto ecosystem is growing and the Central Bank continues to identify and closely monitor risks associated with crypto assets."

The bank also points out that cryptocurrencies are currently unregulated.

Meanwhile, the Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland (ASAI) is investigating four complaints received about advertising relating to cryptocurrency investment.

Four such complaints have been received by the body since December 2019.

A spokeswoman said the ASAI is aware of concerns "about consumer knowledge of cryptocurrencies".

The statement added that in addition to "truthfulness, honesty and substantiation", the ASAI's code contains a number of rules relating to financial advertising.

Section 13 of the code outlines that "marketing communications should make it clear in a prominent manner that the value of investments is variable and, unless guaranteed, can go down as well as up".

Fine Gael Dublin Mid West TD Emer Higgins raised the lack of regulation for crypto-

currency with Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe recently.

She described trading in cryptocurrencies as a higher risk activity.

"That's why I believe that at the very least we need to have warnings on cryptocurrencies," she said.

"Government absolutely supports the development of new financial technologies, to spur innovation and digitalisation."

"However, the warnings from the Central Bank are clear regarding the risks of buying or investing in virtual currencies."

Ms Higgins said that, as cryptocurrencies are not guaranteed by the Central Bank, investors have no

guarantees or safeguards, unlike with regulated financial services.

According to a survey of 1,529 Irish people published last month by personal finance site Finder.com, Bitcoin is Ireland's most popular cryptocurrency, with 44.3% of those investing in cryptocurrency having opted for it. The second-most popular coin is Ethereum at 26.7%, with Dogecoin in third place at 23.9%.

The Finder survey also found that men in Ireland are roughly 1.6 times more likely than women to own cryptocurrency.

Among crypto owners, 62% are men and 38% are women.

Editorial: 14

Irish sprinter allowed flat to be used for drug production

Cathal Dennehy

Irish Olympian Leon Reid has been given a suspended sentence at Bristol Crown Court after being found guilty of allowing his flat to be used in the production of crack cocaine.

The 27-year-old sprinter, who competed for Ireland in the 200m at the Tokyo Olympics, was one of 18 men charged last year in relation to drugs and firearms offences, all of which he denied.

Reid, who is based in Bath, was sentenced to 21 months, suspended for 18 months, and 220 hours of unpaid work for allowing his flat to be used by a friend and fellow athlete, Romaine Hyman, aged 30, previously of Portland Place, Bath, to produce cocaine and for receiving payment, which text messages showed amounted to £500 (€441) a month.

"Leon is pleased that it was acknowledged that he was found not guilty of any charge related to the supply of drugs, possession of a gun and associated paraphernalia and of concealing criminal property," said



Leon Reid: Given a suspended sentence at Bristol Crown Court.

Derry McVeigh, Reid's agent.

"The jury did find him guilty of permitting his premises to be used. It was accepted that he rented a house out in good faith but the Crown argued that in the week following his return from South Africa and being prevented from returning to South Africa because of Covid, that he would have become aware his house was being used for criminal activity. What that criminal activity was, he didn't know."

"The way the judge summed that up was: He landed, he got stranded, and he acquiesced."

Reid was found not guilty

of concealing criminal property and of three firearms offences, which all related to items seized from his flat in Bath.

Hyman was found guilty of 18 offences and has been jailed for 26 years, while two other men were given three-year sentences.

Hyman operated at the centre of a cocaine and heroin supply network and a money laundering operation using the handle "Locksmith-rome".

He was arrested on May 29, 2020, after receiving a delivery of 7kg blocks of cocaine from London and taking them to Reid's Bath flat. He sent a photo of the Fendi blocks with the words "Landed safe thank you" to his London supplier. He was arrested leaving the flat.

When officers searched Reid's flat, they not only found the Fendi cocaine, but also a padlocked suitcase containing a handgun, 25 rounds of ammunition, a silencer, a kit to adapt the weapon to function as a sub-machine gun, £23,000 in a drawer, a money counter, and equipment Hyman used to cook his crack cocaine.

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FORUM

More and more people are being swindled out of their money without lifting their head from the same screen on which they watch popular Netflix series 'The Tinder Swindler'. However, they are not alone; investment fraud has risen dramatically during the pandemic, writes **Ann Murphy**

Bitconned: Hook, line, and sinker



AS *The Tinder Swindler* continues to rank high in the top 10 of most popular shows on Netflix, the reality is that many people will never meet the fraudster who rips off or financial ruins them.

The perfect storm of Covid and the explosion in online investment products and offers means it has never easier to try and make money.

On the flip side, those same investors could be as easily swindled out of their own money without lifting their head from the same screen on which they watched *The Tinder Swindler*.

While some make massively successful investments in products such as bitcoin and dogecoin, others are being duped by websites and contacts who initially seem plausible but who end up escaping with vast amounts of money from unsuspecting investors.

Investment research published in September by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, resulting from a survey of 1,002 adults across the country, showed that 36% of respondents have an investment product. Of those, 11% holds some kind of cryptocurrency.

The research revealed that investors under the age of 35 years are more likely to hold cryptocurrencies or other forms of crypto-assets, with 18% of those surveyed in the 24 to 35 years age category having invested in cryptocurrency. Just 6% of those aged between 45 and 54 have invested in it, with the figure decreasing to just 1% of investors over the age of 55.

Now, gardai are training officers to investigate blockchain technology and purchase the IT systems required to trace and examine and analyse blockchains.

Blockchain technology is a secure and decentralised record of transactions, and is most commonly used in the area of cryptocurrency.

Gardai say that investment fraud has risen dramatically during the pandemic, with fraudsters zoning in on the growing obsession with cryptocurrency. In the 12 months between January 1 and December 31, 2021, there were 234 reports of investment fraud made to gardai — up from 50 in 2019.

Det Supt Michael Cryan of the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau said: "It rose dramatically last year — it rose 180% in 2020 and a further 67% in 2021. The amount of money stolen doubled in 2020. The amount of money does not always equate with the amount of reports. In 2019 there was about €4m reported stolen, €8m in 2020 and about €12m in 2021. That is a colossal jump."

He said people can easily get caught online when it comes to investment fraud.

He explained: "One way you can get caught is when you see a pop up ad on social media and you click on it." Describing this method as subtle, Det Supt Cryan said that such ads use images of well-known people, with the message that they are investing in cryptocurrency — which some people believe.

Influenced by the advertisement, they end up investing in the belief that the well-known successful person used on the advertisement would not have invested if it was not worth doing so. As a result, they end up losing money in the scam.

People also get duped after a friend suggests they invest in crypto-



Det Supt Michael Cryan heads up the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau says investment fraud has risen dramatically during the pandemic, with fraudsters zoning in on the growing obsession with cryptocurrency.

currency — "be it a real friend or be it a romance fraud, social media type friend," said Det Supt Cryan.

For example, one investigation gardai carried out centred on a romance fraud in which a man from North Cork was duped into sending thousands of euro by bitcoin to a person he met on a dating site.

The man met a person online who convinced him that she needed money sent to her because of a personal emergency.

The money was initially to be wired through Western Union but the man could not do so because he was not close to a Western Union outlet.

However, the scammer advised the man that he could instead send the money through a bitcoin ATM, and managed to advise him of the location of one of Cork's few such ATMs.

It is not known if the scammers had local knowledge or found the details of the bitcoin facility online. In

many cases, such scams are operated outside of Ireland, making it very difficult to get money back or bring scammers to justice.

The money was not recovered.

In another case reported to gardai, a 38-year-old male reported being scammed. He told officers that he began engaging online with a woman who told him that she needed money to return home from Mexico. The male sent €3,800 via bitcoin in one transaction, before realising he had been conned.

According to Det Supt Cryan, even people who believe they are investment-savvy can be duped by advertisements they find when looking online for investment opportunities in cryptocurrency.

Gardai advise people to seek independent legal and financial advice before investing in anything to do with cryptocurrency, because it is not regulated by the Central Bank in Ireland.

As a result, people who invest in it have no consumer protection and no comeback — even if the company they are investing with is legitimate.

Det Supt Cryan says most people have very little knowledge about cryptocurrency, making it more difficult for them to know the difference between legitimate opportunities and scams.

He said: "They think bitcoin is the only one but there are thousands of them. There are certainly people who have made a lot of money on cryptocurrency earlier on."

He stressed that there are legitimate companies operating in the cryptocurrency sphere. But he said some individuals who have accounts with legitimate companies are using

the systems to defraud unsuspecting investors out of large sums of money.

While An Garda Síochána is training officers about the technology behind investment fraud, and educating the public about it, Det Supt Cryan says that legislation is not yet up to speed with online investment scams.

He said: "Even the law probably needs to be updated because the law we have in relation to seizing, for example, talks about bank accounts." He points out that legislation dealing with fraud was drawn up decades before the arrival of cryptocurrencies.

"The law in relation to sharing and gathering evidence abroad needs updating. It is not designed for online fraud. It is not a criticism — just fact. The world changes faster than legislation."

As a result, people who invest in it have no consumer protection and no comeback — even if the company they are investing with is legitimate.

In an answer to a parliamentary question recently regarding regulation of cryptocurrency, put down by Fine Gael Dublin Mid West TD Emer Higgins, Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe, said that the Government has been monitoring developments in the sphere of virtual currencies in Ireland and internationally over the past five years.

He added: "It has always been my intention that any regulation in this space would be adequate, proportionate and comprehensive without discouraging innovation."

FORUM

FORUM

‘This is America, and skin colour is what we can go by’

“As a kid, I used to pray to come to America. I had always said that it is here that my life will be better, away from all troubles of clan wars and aimless shootings in Mogadishu.”

Since moving to the US in 2014, Abdi Nor Iftin has indeed made an extraordinary life for himself. I met Abdi in 2018 at a writing event that featured immigrant writers. We were on a panel billed as ‘New Americans’ with the Mexican-American writer Julissa Arce, and we have been internet friends since then. Most often, I see Abdi’s portrayal of his life on Instagram. He’s usually grinning at the camera and doing something athletic and outdoorsy, riding a horse through the woods, trail running through freshly fallen snow, or sitting around a glowing fire pit with his family and friends eating dinner. There are plenty of images of the beautiful Maine wilderness around where he lives and hikes regularly. I suppose he sounds like some kind of lifestyle influencer, and maybe he is just that; he certainly makes a rugged Northern American life look peaceful, healthy, and fun.

We spoke this week, and I asked how his life was — had his childhood dreams of American life come true? It looks perfect on Instagram, among the skys and the deer and the smiles. But he is clear that his life here is not without friction and fear — even compared to the dangers he faced back in Somalia.

“In fact, it is a different form of injustice here,” he says. “It was my knocking at my door like it happened in Mogadishu, but it was the US police driving around with the mindset that a black man could be trouble in the neighbourhood.”

He points out that he ended up in Maine, which is the whitest state in the country according to the 2020 census. As a black man, he says simply, “I became very visible.”

I think about him going for a run on the quiet roads of his adopted home, and my mind goes to a murder trial that took place last month in Georgia. Three white men were sentenced to

“The words black immigrant, or African man, were not anything I had ever been called before coming here

as the Black Lives Matter movement was growing, with the need for a response to police brutality against black people more urgent than ever. Abdi’s most potent memories of his first weeks in the country are of watching the protests in Ferguson, Missouri, that raged following the police killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager with his arms raised, who was shot to death by a police officer. Like the rest of the US, Abdi did not know that the Ferguson uprising was a signifier of times to come.

“What was extremely shocking about the incident of the killing of Brown was the fact that it was the beginning of these long stressful months and years that led us into Trump’s America and into the police murder of and subsequent protests about George Floyd.”

In his memoir, *Call Me American*, Abdi’s recounts a life fraught with danger — born in Mogadishu to nomadic parents in 1985, he survived famine, war, and the threat of child soldiering. As the Islamist al-Shabab rebel group took control of much of Somalia, a bomb hit the family’s home in 2009. Then Abdi followed his brother Hassan and fled into exile in Nairobi, Kenya.

There followed years of precarity in the US from countries that do not send many people here and grants them a coveted green card. As a refugee in Kenya and a newly arrived immigrant here, he has shared his story through Western media, including *This American Life*, the BBC, and *The Atlantic*.

As a teenager in Mogadishu, Abdi taught himself English by watching action movies such as *Rambo* and *Conan*. He would translate these Hollywood blockbusters for his friends and state with such clarity the danger and discrimination he faces today as a black person in America. However, it should not be a surprise, particularly considering he arrived just

life in prison for the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, a young black man who was running through their primarily white neighbourhood in February 2020 when they chased him down and killed him. Back then, it took more than two months for the men to be arrested despite lawyers for Mr. Arbery’s family calling his death a “modern-day lynching.”

Next month, the killers face a second trial on federal hate crime charges, where prosecutors will argue that the men targeted Arbery because he was black. It is striking to hear Abdi Nor Iftin speak with such clarity the danger and discrimination he faces today as a black person in America. However, it should not be a surprise, particularly considering he arrived just

met in the mid-1990s in Maine, as well as writing. Abdi works as a translator for other Somali immigrants.

I work as a Somali newsreader. I fight to counter the dominant narrative out there, even from the Democrat-backed



MAEVE HIGGINS

<< THE BITCOIN CON

“Due to the global (or borderless) nature of virtual currencies, the potential threat to monetary sovereignty by virtual currencies like stablecoins, the speed of change and complexity in the technology, and its potential use for illicit transactions, the regulatory response must be a coordinated global effort. Regulatory gaps in the treatment of virtual assets must be identified and addressed across jurisdictions.”

Ms Higgins told the *Irish Examiner*: “We all know about the prevalence of phishing scams and fraudulent phone calls and malicious texts, innovations like online trading and cryptocurrency sales aren’t immune from fraud either.” She has seen a rise in interest among young people, particularly young men, about buying and investing in virtual currencies.

While she believes in a person’s freedom to invest in whatever financial avenue they wish, she said: “It is important that they fully understand the risks involved.”

Virtual currencies have no legal tender status in Ireland for payment, and they’re not guaranteed or regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland, and unfortunately this can lead to losing your investment or being the victim of fraud.”

She said that since April 23 last year, the providers of certain services in relation to virtual assets have to meet anti-money laundering and countering of financing of terrorism obligations.

Virtual currency providers established in Ireland are also required to register with the Central Bank.

She added: “Steps are being taken to make people aware of the risks associated with cryptocurrencies but I would welcome a sustained information campaign and visible warnings on all advertisements for



Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe says the regulatory response to cryptocurrency fraud must be a coordinated global effort.

virtual currencies.”

In recent weeks, the Central Bank published its Securities Markets Risk Outlook Report, which examines key risks to security markets, and the actions to be taken to address such risks.

Among the products highlighted in the report were crypto assets, which, it said, are “likely to be highly risky and speculative”.

It pointed to a warning from the European Supervisory Authorities in February 2018 that



Abdi Nor Iftin was born in Somalia and won the green card lottery, allowing him to move to the US. Picture: Getty

radio or papers. It is important to tell our stories through our own voices in any language we feel comfortable with.”

There is more to his work than simply translating the language.

“The goal of my work is to make sure we can also have our own voices in this country. Nothing makes a human story more real than themselves telling it or hearing it from someone who knows that story in their native tongues. I translate news from English; I shape that story in the way we would tell it

and then air it.”

Like every immigrant, myself included, Abdi was racialised when he moved here. Racialisation is something that many of us don’t expect or fully understand until we live here. When I first moved here, I began to realise that I was white and what that meant. And when he moved here, Abdi quickly understood that he was black.

“The words black immigrant, or African man, were not anything I had ever been called before coming here. At first, I did not know how to accept that. It was

not an identity I signed up for. But sign up or not, this is America, and skin colour is what we can go by.”

Famously, James Baldwin said: “I love America more than any other country in the world and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.”

I’m reminded of this when I hear both the push and pull of America in Abdi’s experience of moving here and becoming an American. He became a naturalised citizen in 2018.

“I am glad to be here; at least here,

there are still opportunities. I finished school here, I found a loving community, and made friends across the country. I found my voice within the biggest and dominant voices.”

He is keen to give back to America and contribute to the culture here. Ultimately, he hopes to be part of Somalia’s future too.

“I want to return to where it started, the place where I was born, my country of origin, and help rebuild that country with the knowledge, experiences, and skills I have earned here.”

“Virtual currencies have no legal tender status in Ireland for payment, and they’re not guaranteed or regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland



‘All we know about the prevalence of phishing scams and fraudulent phone calls and malicious texts, innovations like online trading and cryptocurrency sales aren’t immune from fraud either’, Fine Gael TD Emer Higgins said. Picture: Moya Nolan

NPHET TO CHANGE...

National Public Health Emergency Team

National Public Health Emergency Team

National Public Housing Emergency Team

... IF ONLY.

Sense of dysfunction around health service is bonkers

DANIEL MCCONNELL on politics



Last weekend’s *Business Post* newspaper ran a most extraordinary lead story from reporters Aaron Rogan and Daniel Murray.

The story was based on a secret recording of top health officials which laid bare a startling picture of just how shambolic our health service is.

Rogan and Murray’s report set out in forensic detail the unfettered discussion among the officials about significant failures and weaknesses in the controls over the annual health budget of €22bn.

The recording of an internal Department of Health meeting on January 27 contained references to “fake targets”, concerns about the HSE’s financial “slippages”, and the credibility of the health budget.

Two officials at the meeting on January 27 said in no uncertain terms that 10,000 WTEs (whole-time equivalent employees) would not be recruited, giving the updated figure as just 5,500.

“They’re not going to fill 10,000. So forget about that. That’s out of date. Forget it. It’s not going to happen.” one official said at the meeting.

Most significantly, the story exposed a “fundamental error” in the HSE’s 2020 accounts, potentially relating to hundreds of millions of euro, and incredulity that the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) had signed off on the accounts.

At one stage in the meeting, one official said that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform was “a little bit incredulous” that, on January 27, the Department of Health still did not know the end-of-year financial position of the HSE.

The official then revealed that during a call with HSE financial staff, he had been informed that the health agency was “talking about doing prior year adjustments” for 2020, which he described as an “interesting development”.

A prior-year adjustment is usually a correction of errors in the reporting on a company’s prior period financial statement.

In the official’s view, they are “kind of a no-no in the accounting world” and he said this was evident by the facial expressions of some health officials reacting to the news.

“Effectively, if any PLC company does a prior year adjustment, it’s a huge red flag that there is something amiss in their original estimates for that year, and that’s equally applicable here,” the official said.

There were repeated mentions about unachievable political targets, meaning that money was being spent on the HSE which could not be used for the budgeted purpose, such as in this year’s record mental health allocation. Officials discussed the “dysfunction” and lack of trust at the heart of the country’s health service, particularly between

the department and the HSE.

It was powerful stuff, and the potency of the story was that this was a group of officials, not minding their ‘Ps and Qs’ before an Oireachtas committee, but instead speaking candidly as to how much of an omnishambles the situation is.

The play/book was shocking in its level of detail and what that detail alluded to, what was not shocking was the nature of the “nothing to see here” type response from the HSE, which has been a hallmark of its communications in years gone by.

Allege the story was wrong or “misleading” in some way, throw as much mud at it as you can, and hope to discredit it in order to nullify its impact.

I know it, as I have been on the receiving end of it several times during my career, even when the HSE rebuttal to us turned out to be utterly incorrect, and senior bosses had to apologise to an Oireachtas committee over it.

Paul Reid, the HSE chief executive, took to the airwaves on Monday to refute the story, saying the issues in relation to recruitment and financial management were “factually incorrect”.

However, as Mr Reid and other officials continued speaking throughout the week, they actually confirmed the primary elements of the story. Reid confirmed that 5,500, and not the 10,000 staff numbers, would be recruited. At a committee, Robert Watt, the top official in the Department of Health, admitted hitting a target of 10,000 new hires will be

told committee members.

Despite criticising the *Business Post*, the Taoiseach, under pressure in the Dáil, confirmed that the recruitment of new staff to the HSE is likely to be half of what the funded target is this year.

In the recorded meeting, officials speculated the budget adjustment could be in the hundreds of millions of euro, but Reid on Monday it would be “under €100m,” thereby confirming the most significant aspect of the story.

This means large volumes of money were accounted for as spent by the HSE in its 2020 statements and signed off on as legitimately spent by the Comptroller and Auditor General, when in fact that money was not spent.

When pressed as to why public officials in that meeting suggested it could be “hundreds of millions” all Reid could say was that such comments were “unfortunate”.

Reid also accepted the fundamental point that the HSE — our health service — does not have a proper financial management system 17 years after its creation.

Much of the mud slung at the *Business Post* by the Taoiseach and others was that the Zoom meeting was recorded and it was a breach of confidentiality. That is true, it was. However, what is also true is that the defence for publishing in the

public interest is overwhelming.

In a normal functioning world, minutes of meetings such as these would be made public. And no, not the meaningless versions of minutes that departments put out which give no substantive insight as to the discussions undertaken.

Real minutes. But in Ireland, that never happens.

Such a deficit in transparency forces whistleblowers to take extraordinary risks in terms of their own futures to speak out when they see wrong.

Such a deficit in openness is not an argument against the lines of all, they were so casually throwing around. The experience of many whistleblowers in this country is far from pleasant.

Just ask Maurice McCabe, Claire Looney, and Noel Wardick.

Reading between the lines of the meeting were the levels of distrust that still exist between the HSE and its mother department of Health.

Added to this is the near-toxic mistrust that exists in the Departments of Public Expenditure and the Taoiseach toward both the Department of Health and the HSE.

These hostilities are not new.

One thinks back to when then money ministers Brendan Howlin and Michael Noonan rejected a target from then Health Minister James Reilly to introduce universal health care, saying it would “threaten the financial viability of the State”.

Howlin has been on record that, during Reilly’s time in office, the budget numbers being offered up were not reliable.

Just last year, Public Expenditure Minister Michael McGrath and his officials cast grave doubt over the reliability of the spending numbers coming from Health, with a gap of €700m emerging.

Indeed, as we reported on Friday, the Department of Health was told that budget estimates it submitted were “not in line with the fiscal parameters” that had been agreed that they could not even be considered for ministerial endorsement.

In the run-up to last year’s budget, McGrath’s officials said the figures submitted were “not in line with the fiscal parameters” that had been set out in correspondence to them or preliminary discussions.

When you step back and consider how wide and deep the sense of dysfunction around our health service actually is, it is simply bonkers.

The upshot to all of this is a health system which has almost 1m people on waiting lists and hundreds of people on trolleys in emergency departments, as well as huge gaps in services for children, the disabled, and the elderly.

That is the reality, that was the reality set out in that recorded meeting, and that is why the public deserved to hear it, warts and all.



HSE chief executive has confirmed that 5,500 and not the 10,000 target of staff numbers would be recruited this year.



Scenes from ‘The Tinder Swindler’ on Netflix. The reality is that many people will never physically meet the fraudster who leads them into financial ruin. Picture: Netflix

