



Major crackdown on cross border welfare scammers

“Welfare tourism” is no holiday for Irish taxpayer - Hanafin

A major crackdown on cross border social welfare abuse has been launched by Special Investigators attached to the Department of Social and Family Affairs. At two recent multi-agency checkpoints in Co. Louth, the drivers and occupants of 53 cars were questioned by Social Welfare Inspectors and intensive follow up actions are being taken in 22 of these cases. More frequent checkpoints are planned in the coming weeks along the border counties.

Minister Mary Hanafin T.D., today said that those people **“who try to rip-off the Irish taxpayer by claiming to be entitled to social welfare payment, when in fact they are seeking to defraud the State, will be stopped and dealt with appropriately by the relevant agencies and authorities.**

This issue was recently raised at the North South Ministerial Council meeting, and welfare fraud is something that we take very seriously. It is also something that my Oireachtas colleagues have been highlighting in the past couple of months, as they are seeing and hearing from their constituents that individuals are travelling from Northern Ireland into social welfare offices in the border counties and claiming to be resident on this side of the border, when in fact this is not the case.

Our agencies are co-operating with the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland and there is regular contact between the two areas on tackling fraud.

The multi agency checkpoints have been a feature of investigations over the past number of months, but now the priority that we are concentrating on is claims for Jobseekers Benefit and Jobseekers Allowance. Over the coming weeks and months more checkpoints will be in place in counties right along the border.”



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Live Register figures show that in recent months social welfare offices along the border have seen an unprecedented increase in claims. In addition to these highly visible checkpoints, Minister Hanafin said “ **more rigorous checks on residency and other qualifying conditions are being applied for those who were in employment in Northern Ireland and are now claiming to be living and seeking work in the Republic. Locally based Social Welfare Inspectors review all claims of residency and engage in unannounced home visits to claimants. If it is found that they are not living at the address they have provided, their claims are not allowed or if they are in payment it is stopped.**”

Minister Hanafin said that so called “welfare tourism” can seem attractive when there is a differential between the rates paid in NI and in the Republic and when the euro/sterling differential has narrowed. “**We cannot allow our system to be abused when people right across the country, who have paid social insurance, are now losing their jobs and are seeing their incomes drop significantly as they claim their entitlements. The recent Exchequer figures and Live Register figures show just what demands there are on our resources. My main priority is to ensure that we can continue to support those have a right to claim a payment.**”

The Minister praised the close co-operation that was forthcoming from all the agencies involved in the checkpoints, the most recent of which took place this week in Co Louth. “**This type of investigative work is very intensive, but the highly skilled Investigators working on tackling fraud are playing a vital part in countering social welfare abuse and protecting the States’ finances.**”

Background information

Multi-Agency Checkpoints

These multi-agency vehicle check points are set up by An Garda Síochana and planned in consultation with other participating agencies. The recent checkpoints included the Gardaí, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Revenue Commissioners Customs & Excise officials. From time to time other agencies such as the Health and Safety Authority, Road Safety Authority or Local Authority can participate.

At the checkpoints, Gardaí stop the vehicles and refer certain vehicles to individual agencies where the occupants are interviewed.



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Staff participating in the checkpoints from the Department of Social and Family Affairs are drawn from the Special Investigations Unit, whose main duty is the detection and prevention of fraud and abuse of the Social Welfare system. The legal basis for the involvement of the Social Welfare Inspectors at the checkpoints is provided for under section 250(16) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005.

During the checkpoints highlighted above a number of vehicles were seized by the Customs and the Gardaí dealt with a number of road traffic offences.

Rates of Payment

Comparative rates of payment of Jobseekers Allowance :

	Single <25 years	Single>25years	Married Couple
Northern Ireland	£47.95 (€53.90)	£60.50 (€68.00)	£94.95 (€106.70)
Republic of Ireland	€204.30	€204.30	€339.90

Table showing rate of Live Register increase in border counties

	Jan 2008	Jan 2009	Difference	% Difference
Co. Cavan	2,806	5,802	2,996	107%
Ballyconnell BO*	496	1,044	548	111%
Cavan LO*	2,310	4,758	2,448	106%
Co. Donegal	9,651	16,772	7,121	74%
Ballybofey BO*	942	2,101	1,159	123%
Ballyshannon BO*	642	1,152	510	79%
Buncrana LO*	1,928	3,951	2,023	105%
Donegal LO	632	1,155	523	83%



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Dunfanaghy LO	842	1,304	462	55%
Dungloe LO	1,232	1,744	512	42%
Killybegs BO	812	1,096	284	35%
Letterkenny LO	2,621	4,269	1,648	63%
Co. Leitrim	1,514	2,836	1,322	87%
Carrick-on-Shannon LO	1,133	2,099	966	85%
Manorhamilton LO*	381	737	356	93%
Co. Louth	7,390	13,263	5,873	79%
Ardee BO	879	1,804	925	105%
Drogheda LO	3,468	6,288	2,820	81%
Dundalk LO*	3,043	5,171	2,128	70%
Co. Monaghan	2,408	5,011	2,603	108%
Carrickmacross BO*	635	1,333	698	110%
Castleblayney BO*	677	1,286	609	90%
Clones BO*	277	587	310	112%
Monaghan BO*	819	1,805	986	120%

Prosecutions by DSFA for fraudulent Jobseekers claims

A total of 39 cases of fraud for claiming Jobseekers payments while in employment were finalised in the courts in February 2009.

The majority of cases received fines, with the highest fine imposed being €4,200. Two people convicted of fraud for working while claiming Jobseekers payments were given suspended jail sentences and a further three were given the probation act.



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Reporting possible fraud

The Central Control Section of the Department of Social and Family Affairs accepts reports of possible fraud offered by members of the public in relation to the Department's schemes.

Reports are accepted by email, phone or in writing. All reports are dealt with in confidence. A member of the public may give details anonymously.

Contact Details:

By email: central.control@welfare.ie

By phone: (01) 704 3000, ask for Central Control Section,

By Post: Central Control Division, Shannon Lodge, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co Leitrim.

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