



**Minister Says Further Reforms And Initiatives Needed If Ireland  
Is To Meet Future Jobs Demands**

***“Over 110,000 Have Returned To Employment Under Back To  
Work Incentive Schemes” - Seamus Brennan***

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., said today that one of the biggest challenges now facing Ireland is to complete the putting in place of a range of reforms and initiatives targeted at ensuring that people currently on the periphery of employment in this country are given every support and opportunity in having their talents and contributions fully utilised.

Minister Brennan said that if Ireland is to adequately meet the scale of emerging employment requirements to sustain our levels of economic growth - assessed by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) at up to 50,000 immigrant workers a year, in addition to home produced workers, for at least the next decade - then sensible reforms and visionary initiatives were needed.

Minister Brennan said: “The reality is that over 200,000 people have come from the 10 new EU countries in the past two years and have found employment here. The latest statistics show that less than 1% of these people have ended up on welfare payments. On the other hand, there are currently just under 160,000 people signing on the Live Register at present. While the majority of those, up to 85%, will leave the Register within one year, the reality is that too many others are falling into long-term unemployment.



## Department of Social and Family Affairs

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“Many of the 80,000 lone parents on welfare supports need support and encouragement if they are to find a route to rewarding employment. In addition, there are some 200,000 people in receipt of illness and disability payments, ranging from short-term illnesses to people with severe disabilities, who may welcome intervention and support. The challenge is to make sure that in an economy as successful as ours that we do not overlook or neglect the employment contribution that any individual can make.”

Minister Brennan was speaking when launching in Dublin the 13<sup>th</sup> edition of “Working for Work”, an information booklet for unemployed people, employers and front line staff, in both the State and community sector, published by the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) with funding support from the Department of Social Affairs.

Minister Brennan said that over €1 billion has been invested in recent years in welfare to work initiatives and supports. This year alone some €120 million will be made available in employment supports. Since the Back to Work Allowance was introduced over a decade ago it has assisted over 110,000 in taking up employment and self employment.

In addition, Budget 2006 included a €28 million package, on top of significant increases in general welfare rates, which is being invested in a range of new and enhanced support schemes that promote activation and offer opportunities and choices to welfare recipients, in particular the unemployed.

The Minister said that a tapering of welfare supports for those returning to work was an increasingly important feature of making the transition from welfare to work as seamless as possible. For example, a gradual tapering off of the Disability Allowance is being introduced where the recipient is engaged in rehabilitative employment.

As a significant activation measure, the qualifying period for access to the Back to Work Allowance for employees has been reduced from 5 years on the Live Register to 2 years, and in the case of the self-employed, from 3 years to 2 year. The weekly income for Family Income Supplement (FIS) had been substantially increased so as to provide additional direct cash supports for workers on low incomes with families.

Minister Brennan said that major reforms of restrictive social policies in the area of lone parents are being advanced. As part of this determined new drive to increase opportunities for those parenting alone, the upper earnings income for the One Parent Family Payment has been substantially increased by €82 per week to a new limit of €375. Of the some



## Department of Social and Family Affairs

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80,000 lone parents in receipt of the payment it is estimated that 60% are currently in full or part time employment. The increased income limit will allow several thousand become eligible for a payment and all those recipients who are working will be in a position to increase their earnings further.

The Department of Social Affairs is this year providing funding to the INOU of €126,000 towards the cost of maintaining and developing a Welfare Rights and Information Unit, and a further €38,500 towards the cost of publishing the **Working for Work** book.

**Working for Work** is a comprehensive publication bringing together a wide range of information and supports available for unemployed people trying to return to work, education or training. The book is widely used by individual unemployed people, those in receipt of welfare payments and those experiencing poverty and social exclusion. It outlines individual's rights and entitlements with regard to social welfare payments as well as providing valuable information and advice on the options and opportunities available to those seeking to (re)enter the labour market or to pursue further education and training.

**Working for Work** is widely distributed and used by statutory and community sector workers, who provide front-line services to unemployed people, people in receipt of social welfare payments and those facing poverty and social exclusion. Now entering its 13<sup>th</sup> edition it has proved to be a valuable information booklet for unemployed people, front-line staff both in the state and community sector, and employers.

Minister Brennan said that the importance of information cannot be over emphasised. "People's rights and entitlements can so often stand or fall on the quality of information available to them and on the level of access to information, particularly in relation to unemployed people trying to return to work, education or training. The objective of the information provider must always be to bridge that gap between the citizen in need and the wide variety of services that are available to meet those needs. But it must be done in a way that allows people to identify the totality of their needs and match those with the full range of available services".

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) is the national federation of local centres and groups concerned with combating unemployment. It was set up in 1987 and now comprises nearly 170 local unemployed centres, community development organisations and branches of unemployed people throughout the country.



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