



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Mary Coughlan Minister For Social And Family Affairs To Announce New Social Welfare Code Restrictions

Mary Coughlan the Minister for Social and Family Affairs today said:

"I and my Government colleagues have watched a growing list of EU states imposing conditions on citizens from accession states who seek work, or could seek to benefit from EU State social welfare schemes."

"Ireland is in favour of enlargement of the European Union. We are champions of enlargement, as we have experienced at first hand the opportunities accession to a greater Europe have presented to our own country. I have no doubt that similar opportunity will present itself to the ten accession countries, and equally we too will grow economically and socially as the EU horizon stretches further eastward."

"After May 1st citizens of the new 25 state European Union will be free to travel anywhere within that Union. Workers will be free to travel to any other State to improve their own social condition, to earn a wage and to contribute to their new country of residence. Ireland is a growth economy, and there is a need for workers, and those new workers are welcome to Ireland."

"This Government gave a commitment that EU citizens who want to come and work here from May 1st can do so and we will honour that commitment."

"We have a strong economy and we will welcome people who want to come here to work. Last year Irish businesses depended on 47,000 work permits to be issued to non-nationals to help them meet their labour supply requirements. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment estimates that after May 1st this year, as much as 70 to 80 per cent of that requirement will be met by workers from the 10 new accession countries."

"I have said before that I will not allow our social welfare system to become overburdened and I will be taking the precaution of ring fencing that system of social protection."

"This is a sensible precaution for the benefit of recipients and those who fund the annual social welfare budget, the taxpayer."

"We need to ensure that our social welfare system and other public services are not open to abuse."

"Up until yesterday, both Ireland and Britain were alone in the EU in not restricting incomers from the 10 new member states."

"However, Britain has now put in place a series of measures, which will restrict access, including a new workers registration scheme and new conditions on qualification for social welfare payments."

"I am concerned that as a result of the latest announcement by an EU State on travel restrictions that Ireland would remain the only country that had not put in place protections for its welfare system."



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"Because of our common travel area with Britain it is now important that we put in place some conditions. I have a duty of care to both the recipients of social welfare payments and those who fund such payments, the taxpayer. Consequently, and particularly in light of our common travel area with Britain, I will be proposing changes to the social welfare code which will be no less robust than those introduced in Britain."

"There will be no change to the welcoming conditions already in place for those who arrive here to work."

"Finally, I would reiterate that these measures that I intend to bring in shortly will safeguard our social welfare system. These will be sensible, considered and reasonable measures which will ensure there is no abuse of the social welfare system and also ensure that social welfare funds are directed at those most in need of support."

"I am holding talks with Ministers in relevant departments, and intend bringing comprehensive proposals forward shortly," said Minister Coughlan.

ENDS

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Further Information:

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