



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Announces New Arrangements That End "Signing On" At Garda Stations For 40,000 Social Welfare Clients

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., today (Tuesday, 26th October 2004) announced that under new arrangements he is introducing, approximately 40,000 people receiving unemployment payments will no longer have to "sign-on" at local Garda stations.

Minister Brennan said the new arrangements will allow for greater flexibility and will bring those receiving unemployment benefits into closer and more regular contact with their local Social Welfare Office where they can avail of a range of services and supports, including advice, information and employment opportunities.

Minister Brennan said: "The new arrangements represent a further positive step in the modernisation of the Department. The requirement to sign on at Garda stations has been a part of the welfare system in Ireland since 1926 and has served us well over the decades. Now it is time to move to a system that is more client centered and takes into account the individuals circumstances."

A person claiming Unemployment Benefit or Unemployment Assistance is required, generally on a monthly basis, to sign a declaration of unemployment, or "sign-on", at either a Social Welfare Local or Branch Office or at a Garda Station. At present people living within 6 miles of the nearest Social Welfare office sign the declaration in person at that office and people living more than 6 miles away make the declaration at their local Garda station. The declaration is witnessed or certified by a Social Welfare official or by a member of the Gardaí, as appropriate.

Under the new arrangements:

- Customers residing up to 10 miles from their nearest Social Welfare office will attend that office once every four weeks
- Those living over 10 miles away will self-certify every four weeks and attend the office every 12 weeks.
- A flexible approach to certification will be adopted for customers on offshore islands and other remote areas of the country and, as a general rule, they will not be required to attend at their Social Welfare Office.

The Minister said that the new arrangements will be implemented, on a phased basis, from the end of this year and it is expected that they will be fully in place by March next year.

Minister Brennan stressed that the new arrangements would not have any adverse impact on the ongoing identification of fraud and abuse in the area of unemployment benefits. He pointed out that at present those involved are not required to attend at their local Social Welfare Office, whereas under the new arrangements people residing 6 to 10 miles from the nearest office will have to attend monthly. Those residing over 10 miles will have to attend every three months, and they will self-



Department of Social and Family Affairs

certify each of the other two months. Overall, this represents a significant improvement in so far as the control of fraud and abuse is concerned.

Minister Brennan expressed his thanks to the Garda Síochána who have been providing the current service since 1926.

The following is the estimated number of people in each of the regions that will be facilitated under the new arrangements:

Dublin North	1,400
Dublin South	1,000
Dublin West	2,000
Midlands	3,700
Mid West	5,000
North East	4,700
North West	5,000
South	6,300
South East	5,300
West	6,500
Total	40,900

ENDS October 26th 2004