NEWS RELEASE **August 31 2009**

Cross border welfare crackdown saves €300,000 in first six months

Social Welfare Inspectors working on multi-agency checkpoints along border counties have interviewed over 900 people in the first six months of targeted operations, with savings of some €300,000 realised from completed investigations to date.

Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Hanafin T.D., today (*31st August 2009*) said that the "**high visibility checkpoints were having the desired effect of detecting fraud and deterring others from seeking to claim welfare entitlements they were not due. We intend to continue these operations working closely with our colleagues in the Gardai Siochana and Revenue Commissioners in the fight to counter fraud and abuse of our systems."**

Operations along border counties have been stepped up since March of this year, as part of a crackdown on people travelling from Northern Ireland to Social Welfare offices in border towns to try to claim Jobseekers payments, which are paid at a higher rate in the Republic.

Since March of this year 32 checkpoints were specifically set up by An Garda Siochana with staff from the Department of Social Welfare and the Revenue's Customs service, in counties Louth, Cavan, Monaghan, Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim.

The timing and location of particular checkpoints are linked to signing days at local Social Welfare offices. The officials work in tandem - to tackle social welfare abuses, evasion of Vehicle Registration Tax, marked gas oil abuses as well as detection of Road Traffic offences. A number of cars have been seized by the Customs officers at these checkpoints.

Of the Welfare investigations completed to date, 24 claims by individuals have been suspended as a direct result of the work of the inspectors on the checkpoints, while further customers

whose claims had not gone into payment ceased pursuing their claim following being interviewed by Social Welfare Inspectors.

In addition to this, customers who failed to sign on at the Local SW office on days when the Multi-Agency Vehicle Checkpoints were being operated in particular locations were each reviewed to establish why they failed to do so.

Minister Hanafin went on to say "**more of these multi-agency operations will be taking place in the weeks and months ahead. Staff working in local offices along the border counties have reported a marked decrease in the numbers of new claims from customers who were previously resident in Northern Ireland.**

The rate of increase in claims in the offices along the border has reduced since these operations began. I know too that there has been a positive feedback from customers and the public alike to the on-going efforts to counter fraud and abuse of our system, particularly given the scarce resources available to us currently. We cannot and will not allow our system to be seen as a soft target for abuse."

Special preventative measures have been put in place in local offices to deal with all claims from persons who on registering as unemployed indicate that they were formerly resident in Northern Ireland. A revised and more rigorous set of checks have been initiated at claim registration for all such cases. These cases are thoroughly investigated through home visits and clear proof of residency must be established by the individual concerned.

The Special Investigations Unit of the Department is also stepping up its focus on residency tests for existing applicants for Jobseekers payments with former Northern Ireland addresses. Inspectors are paying home visits to such categories of claimants on an ad-hoc basis to ensure their continued entitlement to claim jobseekers payments.

ENDS

Notes for Editors

Table showing Live Register increase in border counties Jul 08-Jul 09

% Difference Jan 08 – Jan 09*	County	Jul-08	Jul-09	Difference	% Difference **
107%	**Co. Cavan**	4,064	7,376	3,312	82%
111%	**Ballyconnell BO◘**	702	1,372	670	95%
106%	**Cavan LO◘**	3,362	6,004	2,642	79%
74%	**Co. Donegal**	12,475	20,891	8,416	68%
123%	**Ballybofey BO◘**	1,430	2,651	1,221	85%
79%	**Ballyshannon BO◘**	723	1,382	659	91%
105%	**Buncrana LO◘**	2,711	4,852	2,141	79%
83%	**Donegal LO**	765	1,336	571	75%
55%	**Dunfanaghy LO**	935	1,514	579	62%
42%	**Dungloe LO**	1,486	2,166	680	46%
35%	**Killybegs BO**	1,009	1,315	306	30%
63%	**Letterkenny LO**	3,416	5,675	2,259	66%
87%	**Co. Leitrim**	2,000	3,752	1,752	87%
85%	**Carrick-on-Shannon LO**	1,494	2,838	1,344	90%
93%	**Manorhamilton LO◘**	506	914	408	81%
79%	**Co. Louth**	9,324	17,297	7,973	86%

105%	**Ardee BO**	1,166	2,332	1,166	100%
81%	**Drogheda LO**	4,381	8,449	4,068	93%
70%	**Dundalk LO◘**	3,777	6,516	2,739	73%
108%	**Co. Monaghan**	3,568	6,490	2,922	82%
110%	**Carrickmacross BO◘**	872	1,678	806	92%
90%	**Castleblayney BO◘**	939	1,642	703	75%
112%	**Clones BO◘**	473	796	323	68%
120%	**Monaghan BO◘**	1,284	2,374	1,090	85%

◘ indicates Social Welfare Local or Branch office close to border

*Jan 08 –Jan 09 national Live Register increase +80.7% (CSO)

See also previous press release for stats on numbers on Live Register in border counties, at start of campaign in March 2009, available on www.welfare.ie

**Jul 08 – Jul 09 national Live Register increase +82.9% (CSO)

Percentage increase in office more in line with national picture.

Reduction in percentage increase year on year over the two periods can possibly be attributed to a number of factors, including Multi Agency Vehicle checkpoints, as well as people leaving the Live Register as they have exhausted benefits and may not have an entitlement to Jobseekers Allowance, which is subject to means test & habitual residence condition.