

## DSS Monitoring Group Launch

At the next meeting of the *London Irish Youth Forum (LIYF)* on 20th September 1990 welfare agencies are to establish a group which will monitor the problems encountered by young Irish migrants attempting to claim benefits from the Department of Social Security.

The monitoring group is being formed in response to the hoops that Irish people are put through when attempting to claim benefit and the inconsistencies between DSS offices and officers within the same DSS office when dealing with claims from Irish people. Below is a brief outline of some of ongoing problems and issues affecting Irish claimants.

**ID Checks :** AGIY's first report into the problems faced by young Irish people emigrating to London in 1985 revealed that obtaining social security benefit was one of the greatest difficulties facing young emigrants. Of 250 people questioned 33% had a birth certificate but were not carrying any other ID which would have been "acceptable" to the DSS. Almost 66% said that they had experienced problems making a claim and nearly half of those questioned said that they had experienced negative attitudes from DSS officers.

In 1986 due to benefit delays experienced by young emigrants as a result of ID checks and the consequential pressure placed on welfare/advice agencies advising Irish clients, representation was made to the DSS through the Irish Embassy. In response the DSS issued a circular to local DSS offices reminding them that passports were not required as a precondition of payment and

"that social workers may on occasion be helpful in contributing to the confirmation of identity where documentary evidence is not available or raises doubts and that better liaison with Irish community advice centres could contribute to a better understanding over ID problems". Following a slight improvement after the issue of this circular, advice centres reported that Irish claimants continued and continue to experience considerable difficulties and delay in obtaining benefits.

**1988 Changes :** Following the changes in social security legislation in April 1988, AGIY with the assistance of 10 LIYF members co-ordinated a survey to discover the impact of these changes on young Irish clients. The findings confirmed that young Irish people were continuing to experience great difficulty in obtaining access to welfare benefits and that the greatest stumbling block remained the rigorous ID checks implemented by the DSS.

In this survey :

- 35% said that they had experienced great difficulty proving their identity to the DSS.
- 37% were required to furnish the DSS with their passport to prove their identity.
- Due to the delays in receiving benefit 44% applied for a crisis loan but 90% of these applications were unsuccessful. In fact 3 people received food vouchers and only 2 received a crisis loan.

**Travellers:** It is difficult to conceive of any other group which faces consistent and blatant discrimination when attempting to claim benefits. Many incidents have been reported of Travellers being refused benefit

payments despite having acceptable ID and those who do not have full ID for themselves and any partner or dependants are frequently refused emergency payments. ID rules are used to deny whole families access to benefits if ID is missing for a child or partner.

**Birth Certificates:** As a matter of course, rather than in cases of doubt, the DSS require a person to obtain a certified copy of their birth certificate from Ireland. Some advice centres provide clients with a letter for the DSS confirming that they have written to the Registrar of Births in Ireland requesting the certificate. It usually takes at least ten days for the official certified copy of the original certificate to arrive but it can take longer. As claimants may have very little or no money the advice centre often have to meet the cost of the certificate. When an official certified copy of the original birth certificate is produced, welfare agencies continue to report that many DSS officers and offices will still not accept it unless corroborative ID is produced. Some DSS offices for example will accept short form birth certificates and others will not. The same practice applies to long form birth certificates. The DSS continue to reject certified copies of the original birth certificate although in order to obtain one the claimant must give the mother's maiden name, father's name and their date of birth; information which is only likely to be known to the person applying for the certificate.

**Baptismal Certificates:** The DSS also continue to refuse to accept baptismal certificates on their own as proof of identity in spite of the personal information required to obtain them ie the applicant must know the name of their sponsors, the name of their parents, the date of their baptism and date of birth.

**Passports:** Passports are still frequently requested from Irish claimants despite the fact that a passport is not required for travel to Britain; the cost of a passport (£35) is also beyond the reach of most young emigrants.

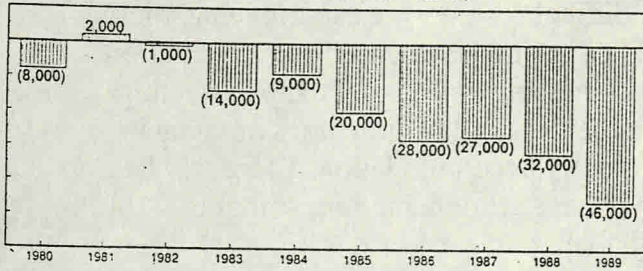
**NI numbers:** The DSS is currently in the process of computerising all benefit claims in local offices and a key element to this process is the possession of a NI number by all claimants. As we reported in "AGIY-INFO" in March 1990 (issue No.15) Irish people are already being denied access to benefit because they do not have a NI number even though a NI number is not a pre-requisite for claiming Income Support.

The Forum's DSS Monitoring Group will examine all of these issues and seek to influence DSS policy at local, regional and national level to obtain fairer treatment for Irish claimants. *If you are attending the LIYF meeting on the 20th please bring along any information about your agency's dealings with the DSS. If your agency is not able to attend the meeting but would like to participate in the Monitoring Group please contact Dave or Joan prior to the meeting.*

## "Thousands are Sailing ....."

Figures just released from the Central Statistics Office in Dublin highlight the continuing trend of high emigration from Ireland. In the period April 1989-April 1990, 31,000 are estimated to have emigrated from the Republic of Ireland. The figure, while showing a drop from the previous year's figure of 46,000 is still extraordinarily high when contextualised within the overall estimate of net migration from 1980-89 as outlined in the diagram over.

Estimated Net Migration 1980-89 (April to April)  
(Inward less Outward)



Source: CSO

In the ten year period April 1980-April 1990 the recent estimate is the third highest annual incidence of emigration.

When these figures are released annually the debate about their validity is also raised. Voluntary agencies in both London and Ireland have consistently argued that the "migration figures" never accurately reflect the real levels of emigration based as they are on passenger movement in and out of the Republic. The figure of 31,000 therefore is a net migration figure being the difference between the number of those people who entered the country and those who left. *Daytrippers, backpackers, holidaymakers, tourists, business travellers, short-stay residents....are all included in the calculation of these figures!*

As far back as 1987 AGIY and TIDE Emigration Research and Action Group called on the Irish Government to ensure that accurate up-to-date statistics on emigration are kept. In the meantime, while we await the 1991 Republic of Ireland Census figures to give us a truer picture of the extent of emigration, AGIY says:

**\* that 31,000 is an underestimate of the real figure**

**\* that the actual emigration figure is closer to 45,000 and**

**\* that no matter what the real figure is - it is still unacceptably high.**

The extent to which emigration has been a convenient "safety valve" for the Irish Government is also reflected in the more recent statistics showing an increase in the Live Register (which records unemployment levels) in the Republic of Ireland.

In June 1990 there was an unexpected increase of 3.6% in unemployment figures compared to June '89 figures. The pattern of increasing unemployment was repeated again in July 1990. The reasons for this? - according to the Government - (i) the return of Irish emigrants from Britain because of shrinking job opportunities in Britain and (ii) a slowdown in emigration to Britain and U.S. for the same economic reasons!

## New Research

AGIY, with the assistance of the Ireland Fund of Great Britain and the RTE People in Need Trust, has just completed the most recent research on the experiences of young Irish people new to London.

The research report entitled "*Over Here - Young Irish Migrants in London*" is written by research consultant Geoffrey Randall and will be published shortly.

It marks the first attempt by an Irish community organisation to examine, in particular, the educational, training and employment situation of young Irish people in London. 136 young Irish people filled in self-completed questionnaires and a random sample of 45 were selected for detailed interviews. The sample was as representative as possible by sex, age and

socio-economic profile of today's young emigrant.

Key issues around access to employment, employment rights, and training needs are identified and the report also provides new information comparing experiences in Ireland before emigration with life here. The report, unique in its attempt to measure the social experiences of young Irish people in London as well as their health experience since emigration, also focuses on young people's experience of anti-Irish racism.

In addition it provides information on housing need and money matters. It is intended that the report will be launched in London and Dublin and a limited print run will be produced. Agencies and individuals wishing to receive a copy, at a cost of £6.00 stg.incl. postage should contact AGIY without delay. Cheques should be made payable to AGIY.

## "Drop-In" for Irish Families

Brent Family Services Unit, in association with South London Family Services Unit has just started a new "drop-in" service for homeless Irish families. Family Service Units (FSUs) concern themselves with the prevention of community and family breakdown. In May 1988 the number of Irish homeless families in bed and breakfast accommodation (B&B) was 878 in Brent with further families in private rented temporary accommodation. The development of the "drop-in" is an attempt to respond to their needs as they settle in their new community.

The project will provide a space and place where Irish families can come to talk about

any difficulties they are experiencing, there will be supportive counselling, information about housing options and help in dealing with the day-to-day difficulties of living in temporary accommodation. There will be a play area, a garden and refreshments available.

The "drop-in" runs on Mondays from 11.00a.m. to 1.00 p.m. at 60 Nicoll Road, Harlesden, London NW10 and is run by two Irish workers, Eugene and Bidy, who can also be contacted by telephoning 081 453 0969/1226.

A similar service is being developed in the South London FSU areas which covers Lambeth and Southwark.

---

## London Irish Youth Forum

(LIYF)

The date of the next LIYF meeting is

**Thursday 20th September 1990 at  
2.30 p.m. in the Irish Centre, 50  
Camden Sq. London NW1**

The main agenda item will be:

*The DSS and Irish claimants - launch of DSS Monitoring Group.*

AGIY INFO is a six weekly publication. Should your group wish to publicise any events, notices, etc. send details, for next issue before 22nd October, to either Joan or Dave at AGIY. 5-15 Cromer St. London WC1H 8LS. Tel. 071 278 1665.

AGIY is funded by the LBGS and DION.