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New Irish "Green Card" system planned for skilled workers

A new 'green card' system planned by the Irish government will allow highly skilled workers coming to [Ireland](#) to bring their families with them and allow spouses to work as soon as they want.

Residency would be automatic after one year. Micheál Martin, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, said the new work permit system would be in operation by early 2006. It will make it easier and more attractive for skilled migrant workers to come to Ireland.

Martin expects about 2,000 people to come to Ireland under the system each year. The Employee Permits Bill, published in June, is expected to have passed through the Oireachtas by the end of the year, allowing for the introduction of the new system.

Martin is expected to bring proposals for a new economic migration policy to cabinet at the end of this month. "I would like to think we will have completed an important piece of work with the Works Permits Bill, which will be introduced in this Dáil," he said.

Martin said the economic migration policy would be the framework for "a more liberal work permits system", which would be "balanced on the side of the employee". Employees with skills in science and technology and financial services are expected to come under the scheme.

"Up to now it has been cumbersome for those kinds of people to come in, because they cannot bring their wife or their kids," Martin said.

"They can in America and they can in Britain."

Martin said he wanted a system that was not administratively cumbersome. "We are heading in the direction of qualification and salary as determining factors as to who gets the green card. The green card will be a passport to residency."

Ireland urged to set up permanent immigration system

The man behind the US Greencard system is advising the Irish government to introduce the opportunity of permanent residence for immigrants.

Bruce Morrison, a former US Congressman, says immigrants should not be admitted on a temporary work permit basis, when they intend to settle in Ireland.

He was speaking at a forum hosted by the Immigrant Council of Ireland in response to the government's draft legislation on immigration.

Mr Morrison says temporary permits are unrealistic.

EU flies illegal Romanian immigrants home

A special flight to Romania has been organized by three European Union countries to send illegal immigrants home. This is the first operation of its kind.

Organised by Spain, the flight left Madrid with 75 immigrants on board before stopping in France and Italy to pick up another 50.

The programme was approved when interior ministers from the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain met in July.

Spain says it is planning another flight next month. That flight will be to repatriate illegal immigrants from Ecuador and Colombia.

The Spanish interior ministry said Italy was also planning a flight to Nigeria in September and had invited its partners from the so-called Group of Five to take part.

Spanish Interior Minister Jose Antonio Alonso has said the flights are needed to improve the controls on illegal immigration and common borders.

None of the Romanians deported had immigration papers.

Automatic citizenship in France questioned

[France's](#) minister for overseas affairs provoked outrage on 17 September by saying illegal immigrants were giving birth on French territory to ensure their children had French nationality. By law, a child born on French ground is French, no matter who the parents are.

Francois Baroin called for a debate on France's birthright laws. The move came as a sign that mainstream politicians are starting to follow the anti-immigration trend in France.

"I have seen things that have shocked me and on the basis of these truths on the ground I want to reopen the debate. The law permits it," he told Radio France Outre-mer (RFO) in a rare outspoken interview by a usually low-profile minister.

He said that on the island of Mayotte, a French territory in the Indian Ocean Comoros archipelago, "more than 30 percent of the inhabitants are of illegal origin".

Some 1.7 million people live in France's overseas territories and departments. The former include French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Mayotte and enjoy more autonomy than departments while retaining certain French rights and obligations.

Baroin, whose ministry governs France's relations with those regions, said he did not exclude a review of the right by birthplace that determines who can become French.

In the weekly *Figaro* magazine, Baroin went a step further and said discussing the law of birthright even on mainland France "should no longer be a taboo".

In Germany, children of foreign parentage must decide as young adults whether to take their parents' nationality instead of the German.

Baroin's remarks provoked condemnation by the opposition Socialist Party (PS) and the SOS Racism association.

Brussels hopes to control EU immigration

Last year 650,000 illegal immigrants were ordered to leave the EU, but only 212,000 did so. According to EU figures, Britain told 70,000 to leave, but only 18,000 went.

The proposal of "common standards on return" for illegal immigrants could hamper attempts by the Government to curb illegal immigration. It would ban governments from detaining people for more than six months before deportation.

The commission also proposed that illegal immigrants deported from one country would be automatically barred from entering any other in the union. At present some immigrants deported from one country can simply take up residence in a neighbouring state.

Austria gets tough on illegal immigrants

A new proposed Austrian law lets police detain immigrants while their asylum applications are being reviewed.

The Austrian government is trying to clamp down on immigrants. Newspapers increasingly blame foreigners for crime, which increased 6.9 percent in the first quarter and an unemployment rate of 4.6 percent. About 64 percent of 3,667 drug-related arrests last year were foreigners, according to police figures.

Most of the 4,222 asylum seekers who arrived in Austria through June this year fled from war-torn places including Chechnya and Afghanistan. After receiving more than 2 million immigrants during the Cold War, newspapers are questioning if the country is absorbing too many people. "Austrians Fear Foreign Workers" read a July 15 headline in Vienna daily Der Standard.

"Austria thinks of itself as having a tradition of receiving refugees and accommodating them," said United Nations spokesman Roland Schoenbauer. "In some respects it's a myth because many of those people used to move on to different countries. Now they're staying."

With Suspicion

Austria took in one refugee for every 1,942 residents in the first quarter this year, according to the United Nations. France, the country that admitted the most refugees last year, has one asylum seeker for every 3,867 residents. The U.S. lets one asylum seeker in for every 29,808 citizens.

About 9 percent of Austria's 8.2 million people are foreign born, according to the UN's High Commission for Refugees. More than 45 percent of prisoners in Austrian jails are foreigners, weekly magazine Profil reported on June 27. Nigerians, Serbs and Turks are the most arrested groups.

New laws promise to speed up asylum seekers' hearings. Daily Salzburger Nachrichten newspaper said July 5 a Kurdish refugee waited 12 years for a decision on whether he can stay.

Campaign Issue

The number of new immigrants to Austria since 2000 almost tripled to 50,582 last year, the United Nations said in a May 2005 report. The unemployment rate, already 1.1 percentage points higher than in 2004, will rise, said Julia Bock-Schappelwien, an analyst at Vienna's Wifo economic institute. Wifo cut its forecast on July 1 for Austrian 2005 economic growth to 1.8 percent from 2.2 percent.

Austria's populist right-wing Freedom Party will put immigration at the center of its campaign, daily Die Presse said June 30. Party leader Heinz-Christian Strache, who wants to remove foreigners from Austria, ran a billboard campaign in April under the slogan "Vienna shouldn't become Istanbul." More than 120,000 Turkish people live in Austria, 40,000 of them in Vienna, said Anita Hoefner, a spokeswoman at the national statistics bureau.

Austria's new law will cost around 14 million euros to implement after it is passed, Schoenbauer estimates. It's the second new asylum bill the country has written since 2003.

"The money could be spent in better ways by helping people to integrate into society," said Schoenbauer, a native Austrian.

France to change its immigration system

French Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy has announced the creation of an interministerial committee tasked with re-evaluating the country's immigration needs and its visa procedures.

Sarkozy wants France to change its immigration policy, and hopes to implement a points-based system of immigration. Points would be given to visa candidates based on "age, education, knowledge of languages and professional experience," Sarkozy said.

The tough-talking interior minister, who has made no secret of his presidential ambitions ahead of the 2007 election, pledged to crack down on illegal immigration and marriages of convenience.

Last week, the European Union's five biggest countries -- Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain -- [agreed at a meeting in Evian, France](#) to establish joint naval patrols in the Mediterranean to stem the tide of illegal migrants. They also agreed to set up joint flights to repatriate would-be immigrants.

About 70 percent of France's immigrants come from North Africa and French-speaking west Africa, but since 2000, more and more immigrants have come from China, the former Soviet Union and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

EU countries agree on illegal immigration issues

Ministers from five European Union countries have agreed to collaborate on repatriating illegal immigrants, according to French interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy.

"All together, the European countries, the five big states, we will organize some flights to repatriate illegal immigrants in Great Britain, Spain, Germany, France and Italy," he said.

Home affairs ministers from Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain met in the French town of Evian on Lake Geneva, to discuss joint efforts against illegal immigration, the drugs trade, organised crime and human trafficking.

The G5 or "Big 5" - minus partner German interior minister Otto Schily who missed the start of the meeting - agreed to begin fingerprinting visa applicants from countries with a record of high rates of illegal migration and adopt stricter screening at airports.

France, Spain and Italy are also to create joint naval patrols in the Mediterranean to stop boats arriving from northern Africa.

Charles Clarke has proposed G5 countries share the cost of employing "airport liaison officers" in countries to help airline staff identify those travelling on illegal papers.

Separately, the home secretary's own department has been heavily criticised for admitting it could not produce reliable statistics on illegal immigration levels.

France will not accept Spain's newly-legalized immigrants

The French government has banned several hundred thousand foreigners who benefited from an [immigration amnesty in Spain](#) from working in France. It was reported that many of those people who were granted the right to stay in Spain were "illegal immigrants" from France. Apparently, they hoped that this would enable them to then go back to France and live and work in France. It should be noted that if you are a non EU Citizen who has gained residence status in a particular EU Country this will not in most cases enable you to work in another EU Country.

France has also ruled out a similar mass legalization of illegal workers.

Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin said the immigrants in Spain would be barred from France. The residence permit "is only good for Spain and not for other countries," Villepin said in a press conference at which he unveiled a new plan to fight illegal immigration and ruled out a mass amnesty in France.

"Labour is a national matter for each of our countries," the interior minister said.

France joins EU-wide trend of trying to reduce illegal immigration

[France](#), which says it has between 200,000 and 400,000 illegal immigrants, has announced tough new measures to end the flow of illegal immigrants. These measures include rules to stop arranged marriages and the use of biometric visas.

France is just the latest European country to increase efforts to stop illegal immigration, adopting policies that favour the regularization of skilled foreign workers.

Last November, European Union leaders adopted a five-year plan to improve cooperation on immigration and asylum policy. This led some to call the EU "Fortress Europe," with strict border controls and fewer visas.

But public opinion across the EU favors the policy shift. A survey in March revealed that 60 percent of those living in the "Old Europe" of 15 EU states before last year's expansion want to see immigration curbed.

The larger EU states in western Europe are trying to resolve the problems of constant illegal immigration and the growing number of foreigners with expired residency papers.

Immigration has become a hot political issue in Britain, France and elsewhere, where the public fears a flood of asylum-seekers and economic migrants from an enlarged European Union.

Europe-wide trend

On January 1, a new law went into effect in [Germany](#) -- home to around 7.3 million foreigners, at least 500,000 of them illegal -- that aims both at attracting highly-skilled workers and deporting those without valid papers.

[Austria](#), considered to have one of the most restrictive asylum laws in Europe, also passed legislation in March, authorizing the force-feeding of hunger-striking asylum seekers and stiffer penalties for bogus marriages.

In [the UK](#), where immigration emerged as a key issue in the May 5 election that saw Prime Minister Tony Blair win a third term in office, efforts have focused on keeping illegal migrants out from the start, thereby reducing the number of asylum requests. A 2002 law authorized police to search companies for illegal workers, and Blair's Labour party has promised to reinforce border controls. The British government has also pledged to put in place a system of "points" similar to those used by [Australia](#) and [Canada](#), under which immigrants would be granted entry based on their usefulness to the national economy.

[Scandinavia](#) has traditionally been very strict on the issue of immigration, while in [Italy](#), a law passed in 2002 deals with the expulsion of illegal immigrants and provides tougher penalties for law breakers. Only those foreigners with a valid work contract are offered Italian residence permits under the new legislation.

One country bucking the current trend is [Spain](#). The country [granted legal status](#) ran to about 700,000 illegal immigrants, who had applied for residence permits.

Netherlands may restrict access to social security benefits to immigrants

The Dutch Government will look at introducing new restrictions on social security benefits to immigrants, the website expatica.com reports.

The Netherlands' Social Affairs State Secretary Henk van Hoof said that there would be particular emphasis on restricting access to unemployment benefits and old age pensions. Under the scheme, [immigrants to the Netherlands](#) will be asked to pay a lump sum prior to entering the country, with those not doing so being refused access to the Netherlands pension scheme.

While Dutch nationals start accruing their old age pensions from the age of 15, immigrants gain 2 percent of the pension for every year spent in the country. This means that an immigrant arriving at age 30 and working until they are 65 would have built up 70 percent of their pension. The minister's proposals would mean that immigrants would have to pay a "catch-up" rate to overcome this difference in pensions.

The Dutch Cabinet will also consider increasing the period it takes for an immigrant to gain full residency rights based on having a Dutch partner from three to five years. There may be an exemption to this requirement for those immigrants who actively integrate into Dutch society. Also, immigrants appealing against decisions refusing the right to reside in the Netherlands will not have access to social security benefits.

Norway seeks to deter asylum seekers

Norway is to consider requiring large bank deposits from tourists coming from certain Countries in a bid to discourage asylum seekers from entering the Country, the newspaper Aftenposten reports.

Under the proposal, tourists from Countries requiring visas to enter Norway, including those from Russia, India, China and African Countries, or those in Norway who have invited them, would have to pay a deposit of NOK 50,000 (about US\$8,500) into a bank account when applying for tourist visas. If the visitor goes home the deposit is refunded, but if the visitor seeks asylum it would go into the State Treasury.

The plan is modeled on tougher immigration rules brought in by Denmark in recent years, and is intended to prevent abuses of the tourist visa system. It has been put forward by the small Democrats Party, but politicians from big political parties are leaning towards supporting it. There is some debate however over the amount of the deposit, with some saying it should not be so high as to deter legitimate tourists.

The number of people seeking asylum in Norway has dropped sharply from 15,600 in 2003 to under 8,000 in 2004. This follows information campaigns in Eastern European Countries by the Norwegian authorities telling people that it was difficult to gain some sort of immigration status in Norway.

"We're beginning to reach a level that's more natural for Norway," said Erna Solber, the minister responsible for immigration, on January 13.

EU may introduce migrant green cards

The European Commission is looking at a range of immigration reforms to deal with Europe's severe shortage of workers the Financial Times newspaper reports.

An ideas paper published by the European Commission proposes measures ranging from fast-track immigration to deal with short-term labor shortages, to a longer-term solution for attracting workers similar to the American green card.

The paper also mentions the possibility of issuing work/residence permits valid for the entire EU so that skilled workers can move around more easily. Although common policies on immigration and asylum are developing between the EU member states, many issues are still controlled at the national level.

Commission representatives stress that the paper is currently just a discussion document and that stringent immigration controls will be maintained in the EU.

"It does not open the door to unrestricted economic migration to the EU," said Franco Frattini, the EU Justice Commissioner.

Immigration is a highly sensitive issue in the EU. There is anti-immigrant sentiment in many countries, but ageing populations across the 25 member block make it imperative that new workers be brought in. However, at the present level of immigration from 2010 to 2030 there will be a decline of 20 million in the number of working-age people in the EU.

Sharp increase of new EU workers to Ireland

The Irish government released figures earlier this month that show that there has been a sharp rise in the number of workers from new EU member states seeking work in Ireland since 1 May 2004.

The government report shows that almost 23,000 people from the new member states have come to Ireland to seek employment in the past three months since enlargement.

This is approximately ten times the number of work permits issued to people from the same ten countries from January to April of this year.

The figures are based on the amount of applications made by citizens from the new member states for a personal public service number, which is like an NI number in the UK and is required to get a job or obtain access to social welfare services.

The greatest number of workers seeking jobs in Ireland were from Poland, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Ireland, along with the United Kingdom and Sweden, decided to open its labour market to nationals of the new EU member states. Most of the 'old' EU countries opted for a long-term transitional approach in allowing workers from Eastern and Central Europe to have access to jobs in their countries.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY IRISH NURSING BOARD

From 1st March, 2005, Applicants may now either provide evidence of English Language Competence through completion of the **International English Language Testing System (IELTS)** or Applicants may provide evidence of English Language Competence through completion of the **Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)**, together with the **Test of Written English (TWE)** and the **Test of Spoken English (TSE)**.

A Test Report Form must be submitted to An Bord Altranais direct from the Test Centre where the Applicant undertook the test. The applicant must nominate An Bord Altranais as a recipient for test results with their Test Centre. Only Test Report Forms that have been forwarded by the Test Centre directly to An Bord Altranais will be accepted.

The test must have been undertaken no more than two years prior to the date of application or the Applicant must provide evidence of having worked as a full time nurse in an English-speaking environment since having completed the test. This will be assessed on an individual basis.

Applicants who have commenced the registration application process prior to 1st March, 2005, may opt to complete either English language Competence option. Further information on the test may be obtained from www.ets.org/toefl/

Sixty 'Irish Born Child' applicants are refused residency.

The Department of Justice has stated that 60 applicants for residency of parents based on the Irish Born Child scheme have been unsuccessful in their applications.

Nigeria tops the list with 16 refusals, Philippines comes second with 11 refusals. The remaining 33 are evenly spread over a range of nationalities.

Out of the 60 refusals 45 were refused because the applicant parent and/or the Irish born child were not resident in the State; 4 refusals because the applicants are not the parents of an Irish born child; 6 were refused because the child was born after January 1st 2005. Refusals for having a criminal record were 3.

Over 7,900 out of the 18,000 applications received have been approved. Nigeria heads the list with 2,783; Romania comes second with 900, Philippines is third with 690 approved, China 447 and India 319.

Presently it costs 342 million per year to keep 6,000 asylum seekers in accommodation, according to the Public Accounts Committee.

Presently there are 137,000 non-national workers working in Ireland, 7% of the labour force. Most of these are EU nationals who do not fall under the work permit or proposed green card system. Under the new work permit bill, workers can change employment. However employers are still required to attempt to fill vacancies with EU nationals. The Minister is to set a maximum number of employment permits to be issued overall by sector. They will be identifying sectors for which permits should be granted, and this assessment will form the basis for a policy paper to be published by the Department in the autumn. On foot of this paper, new 'green card' type employment permit arrangements will be implemented. Under this green card system they can switch jobs freely within certain sectors. However the Bill does nothing to clarify the position of foreign workers wanting to bring their families to Ireland. It will be months before the measures can be debated in the Dail, let alone passed into legislation. So it could sink without trace. There is no reason why the Government could have introduced these measures long ago. This Bill had been scheduled for publication in 2003. Labour's spokesman for Enterprise Brendan Howlin noted with concern that the Minister doesn't have to seek Dail approval to set the maximum number of employment permits. Labour will want this amended when the Bill is debated next autumn.

Ireland top target for EU migrants.

Ireland is the most popular destination for migrants from the EU's 10 new member states. More than 85,000 citizens from accession states joined the workforce during the 12 months since enlargement in May 2004 – six times more per head of population than went to Britain, the next most popular country. Economists and business leaders said the influx of workers was the lifeblood of the economy, and was needed to sustain the country's economic growth.

Polish migrants made up half the number mainly in construction and meat processing. Some 17,700 Lithuanians and 9,000 Latvians moved to Ireland in the past year, many working in horticulture and dairying.

The rate of migration from accession states to Sweden is 17 times lower than that of Ireland, just 4,363 applied for work permits in Sweden from May to the end of December, compared to 130,000 signed up under Britain's worker registration scheme. The truth of the matter is we need more," said Pat Delaney, director of the Small Firms Association. These workers are coming here because Irish employers are in these countries actively looking for them.

New figures from the Dept of Social Welfare show that 85,114 people from the 10 accession countries were allocated PPs numbers from May 2004 to the end of April 2005. However this number included the thousands of migrants already in the country on work permits before enlargement, though it is not possible to say how many.

Micheál Martin TD, Minister for Enterprise, Trade & Employment publishes the Employment Permits Bill 2005

The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Micheál Martin, today, 29 June 2005, published the [Employment Permits Bill 2005](#).

Commenting on the Bill's publication, Minister Martin said, "The aim is that Ireland will have a flexible and responsive employment permit system, which will ensure that the economy's skills and labour needs can be addressed in a pragmatic and speedy manner, while ensuring the rights of all workers are protected. In short, Ireland's economic advance will not be impeded by the absence of the requisite skills and experience".

The new Bill will do three things:

- Firstly, it will clearly and comprehensively set out in legislation the procedures relating to the application, grant and refusal of work permits.
- Secondly, the Bill allows the Minister introduce a "green-card" type system for highly skilled migrant workers and enables the Minister to establish the number of employment permits in total and by sector, and to identify the skills and employment categories in respect of which employment permits may be granted.
- Thirdly, it will provide a number of new important protections for migrant employees.

Migrant Worker Protections

The Bill contains a number of new important protections for migrant employees, principal of which will be the granting of the work permit to the employee. However, the practice of the employer applying for the permit will continue.

The Bill also provides that the employment permit will contain a statement of the rights and entitlements of the employee, including that the employee may change employment through the application for another work permit by a new employer. These new arrangements will offer greater protection and mobility to the employee.

In addition, the Bill prohibits employers from deducting expenses associated with recruitment from the employee's remuneration and from retention of personal documents belonging to the employee. There will be significant penalties for breaches of the legislation, comprising fines to a maximum of €50,000 or terms of imprisonment not exceeding 5 years.

Green- cards & Employment Permits

In relation to Green-cards, the legislation will empower the Minister to formulate a framework within which an active economic migration policy can be implemented. In particular, the Bill allows the Minister to introduce a "green-card" type system for highly skilled migrant workers. The Bill specifically gives the Minister the power to make regulations to grant permission for non-European Economic Area (EU-25 plus Norway, Iceland, Lichtenstein and Switzerland) nationals with specified skills to reside and work here for a defined period of time..

In relation to Work Permits the legislation will enable the Minister, every two years, to set the maximum number of employment permits to be issued both in total and by sector, to identify the skills and qualifications required for the grant of a permit, and to identify the categories of employment that may or may not be the subject of granting employment permits.

[Forfás](#) and the Expert Group for Future Skills Needs are currently engaged in research and consultations on the detailed issues entailed in the implementation of this policy, including the types of skills for which permits should be granted. This work will form the basis for a policy paper to be published by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in the Autumn. On foot of this paper new "green-card" type employment permit arrangements will be implemented.

The aim is that Ireland will have a flexible and responsive employment permit system, which will ensure that the economy's skills and labour needs can be addressed in a pragmatic and speedy manner. We already have 137,000 non-nationals working in Ireland, which represents 7 per cent of our labour force.

However, we will need to attract even more highly skilled workers in order to ensure that Ireland's economic advance is not hindered.

Concluding Minister Martin said "The success of Ireland's economy in recent years has been underpinned by the attraction to Ireland of significant numbers of non-EEA workers. In order to sustain this economic success, we must ensure that labour and skill shortages in the economy are met. The [Employment Permits Bill 2005](#) aims to achieve this end, by placing the policy and administration of Ireland's economic migration policy on a legislative basis, providing for a more effective system of migration, and by providing greater protection for migrant workers."

The Employment Permits Bill 2005 can be downloaded from:
<http://www.entemp.ie/publications/employment/2005/employmentpermitsbill.pdf>