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## Press Release



### Will Ireland become a model for managing labour immigration in the enlarged EU?

The Irish government has promised a comprehensive overhaul of its labour immigration policies.<sup>1</sup> If the right policies are put in place, Ireland could become a model of how to benefit from both the unrestricted employment of accession state nationals and the managed immigration of non-EEA nationals, according to a major new study. The report, launched today by Mr. Tony Killeen, T.D., Minister for Labour Affairs, at Trinity College Dublin's Policy Institute<sup>2</sup>, argues that the key policy requirements for making future labour immigration work for Ireland include: the effective enforcement of employment laws; the introduction of a permanent immigration programme; and the re-adjustment of Ireland's temporary work permit policies.

The study, *'Managing the immigration and employment of non-EU nationals in Ireland'*, by Dr. Martin Ruhs, Senior Labour Market Economist at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at Oxford University, discusses Ireland's labour immigration trends, impacts and policies since the late 1990s. The report lays out the key issues and policy options to consider in the reform of Ireland's labour immigration policies in the aftermath of EU enlargement.

Since May 2004 over 85,000 workers from the new EU member countries have taken up legal employment in Ireland, a figure that is equivalent to more than 4 percent of Ireland's labour force. The figures for 2005 indicate no decline in the number of accession state workers coming to work in Ireland, in fact April 2005 showed the highest monthly number since accession<sup>3</sup>. In light of these figures and Ireland's current immigration policies, the report argues that four key policies are now needed for Ireland to benefit from future labour migration from within and outside the enlarged EU:

- **Addressing the demand for irregular migrant labour**

As of February 2005, only three employers had been convicted of violating Ireland's Employment Permits Act 2003.

"International policy experiences suggest that the failure to effectively punish employers who illegally employ migrant workers is one of the most important factors leading to illegal immigration and, subsequently, to the failure of labour immigration policies" says Dr. Martin Ruhs.

- **Enforcing employment laws**

There has recently been increasing anecdotal evidence suggesting that Ireland's extensive employment and equality legislation may not always be enforced in practice. The report supports calls for enabling Ireland's Labour Inspectorate to play a much stronger and effective role in helping enforce Ireland's employment laws and regulations, especially those pertaining to minimum wages and employment conditions of migrant workers.

“The enforcement of employment laws is necessary to prevent a situation where migrant workers are employed at sub-standard wages and employment conditions that would not be acceptable to local workers” says Dr. Martin Ruhs.

- **Introducing a permanent immigration programme**

The report argues that Ireland's current lack of an immigration programme that grants permanent residence immediately upon arrival will make it difficult for Ireland to compete with other high income countries for highly skilled migrant workers. A permanent immigration programme is also necessary to enable some migrants who are already employed in Ireland on temporary permits to acquire secure permanent immigrant status without having to naturalise.

- **Protecting migrants on temporary work permits by allowing them to freely change employers within defined job categories and after a certain period of time'**

The report recommends that migrants employed on temporary work permits be given the opportunity to freely change employers *within a defined job category* and *after a certain period of time* (e.g. after one year of employment in Ireland). This would help protect migrant workers' rights by enabling them to more easily escape unsatisfactory working conditions than is currently the case.

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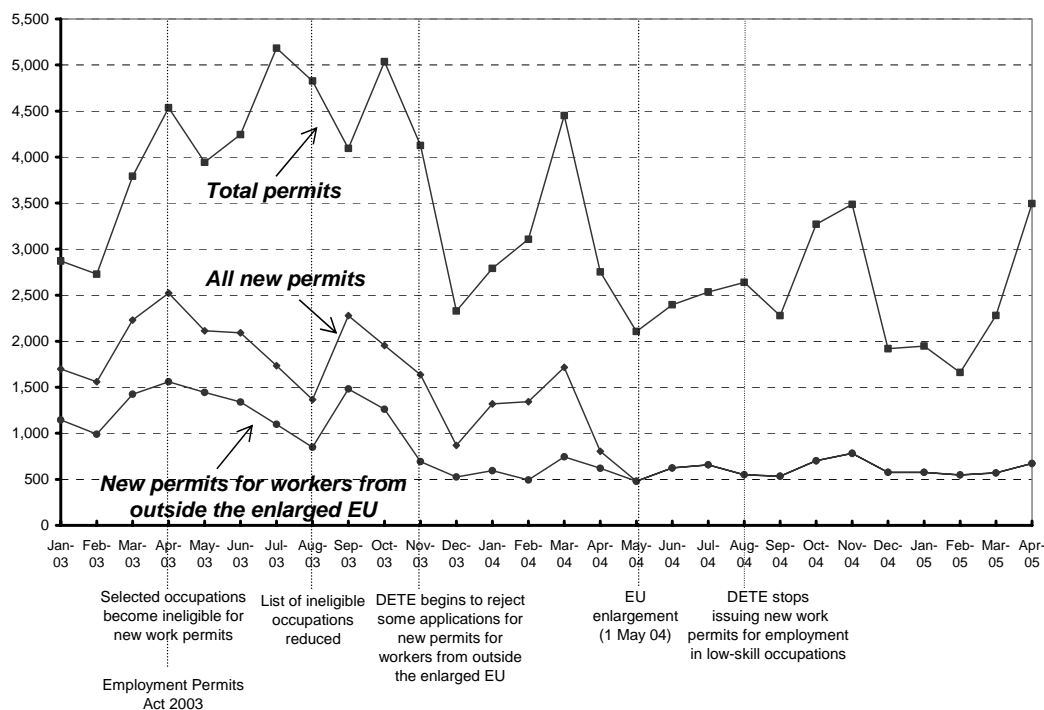
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## Editor's Notes

1. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is currently preparing a new *Immigration and Residence Bill*. A discussion paper and public consultation was launched in April 2005. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment is currently drafting a new *Employment Permits Bill* which is expected to be introduced later this year.
2. The study was co-published by The Policy Institute, Trinity College Dublin [<http://www.policyinstitute.tcd.ie/>] and The Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) – [<http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/>]
3. During May 2004 – April 2005, Ireland's Department of Family and Social Affairs issued PPS (social security) numbers to over 85,000 workers from the new EU member countries. In April 2005, 9,802 PPS numbers were issued to accession state nationals, the highest monthly number since May 2004.
4. Since its decision, in April 2003, to grant workers from the ten new EU member states unrestricted access to the Irish labour market immediately upon EU enlargement, the Irish government has taken a more restrictive approach to managing the immigration of workers from outside the enlarged EU (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Monthly number of work permits issued and major policies affecting work permits, January 2003 – April 2005



Source: *Managing the Immigration and Employment of non-EU nationals in Ireland* by Martin Ruhs