

## In This Issue

1. Access to social welfare assistance for returned Irish citizens
2. Changes arising from Budget 2011
3. Entitlement to health services

## Contact Us

If you or any of your staff or clients have queries with regard to:

- Emigration from Ireland
- Returning to Ireland
- Immigration

and for full details of the services available including opening hours, outreach locations and publications please feel free to contact us:

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**Email:** migrantproject@crosscare.ie

**Website:** www.migrantproject.ie

**Follow us on Twitter:**

<http://twitter.com/LivinginIreland>

**And see also our new multi-language website:**

[www.livinginireland.ie](http://www.livinginireland.ie)

## 1. Access to social welfare assistance for returned Irish citizens

The issue of returned Irish emigrants experiencing difficulties accessing social welfare assistance continues to be one of the most frequent queries we receive in our 'returning to Ireland' information service. It is also a key area of concern for people living abroad who are planning or hoping to return to live in Ireland.

We have seen evidence on more than one occasion of applicants who have been refused social assistance on **grounds related to the recession or the current high rate of unemployment in Ireland**. In our view this is another example of misinterpretation and misapplication of the complex rules around entitlements to payments.

The current economic climate is not mentioned anywhere in legislation or guidelines, and **should in no way impact or affect a person's application or entitlement to a payment, nor be a determining factor in refusing a payment to anyone**.

This issue was highlighted recently in the **Irish Times** - click [here](#) or at the following link: <http://tiny.cc/k8vnnv> to read the article.

**We continue to work with returned Irish citizens who have been refused access to social welfare on grounds such as the above, or on habitual residence grounds. If you are aware of any Irish people refused a payment on such grounds, please get in touch with us.**

## 2. Changes arising from Budget 2011

Budget 2011 was announced last month and set out a range of tough measures to be taken for 2011, some of which we have outlined below.

The **main social welfare payments** for people under 66 (including Jobseeker's Allowance, Disability Allowance, and One Parent Family payment) have all been **reduced by €8 per week** from €196 to €188. The Supplementary Welfare Allowance rate has been reduced by €10 per week to €186. In addition **Child Benefit has been reduced by €10** to €140 per month.

However there is to be **no decrease in the rate of payment of the State Pension**. Nor has there been any change in the rates of other payments for those aged over 66, for example, Living Alone Allowance, Household Benefits Scheme and Fuel Allowance.

The Health Levy and the Income Levy are being replaced by a **new Universal Social Charge**. The previous two levies combined came to 6% which was payable on income between €26k and €75k. The new USC is payable on a graded scale between 2% and 7% on all income over €4,004 per year.

If you do not wish to receive this e-bulletin, please contact amytyndall@crosscare.ie

Some other changes include:

- **Tax credits reduced** by 10%
- An extra €2 per week contribution from certain by certain welfare recipients towards the cost of their rent under the **Rent Supplement Scheme**
- The national **minimum wage rate reduced** by €1 per hour
- €700m to be taken out of Health Service Executive's budget in 2011
- A new **third-level student contribution fee** of €2,000 per year replacing the previous registration fee of €1,500

Citizen's Information has produced a **summary of main changes** available at [http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/money\\_and\\_tax/budget\\_2011.html](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/money_and_tax/budget_2011.html)

Full details of the changes introduced by the Budget are available at [www.budget.gov.ie](http://www.budget.gov.ie).

### 3. Entitlement to health services

Entitlement to health services in Ireland is generally based on a person's residency and means. Any person who is accepted by the Health Service Executive (HSE) as being '**ordinarily resident**' in Ireland is entitled to a range of health services. Generally speaking, if you have returned to live in Ireland and **intend to continue to live here for at least a year**, you will be considered to be 'ordinarily resident'.

Depending on your income, you may be eligible for a **medical card** which entitles you to **certain health services free of charge** such as GP services, public hospital services and a 50 cent charge per item for prescribed drugs and medicine. Usually, to qualify for a medical card you must satisfy a means test which takes account of cash income, savings, investments and property (excluding your own home). Your **income must be below a certain limit** in order to qualify, however there is a higher income limit allowed for those aged over 70.

For anyone who returns to Ireland and is receiving a social security pension from another EU State, there is an **automatic entitlement under EU legislation** to a medical card in Ireland without having to satisfy the means test. This rule only applies provided you are not getting an Irish social welfare payment and you are not employed or self-employed in Ireland.

If you do not qualify for a medical card on income grounds, you may qualify for a **GP Visit Card** instead. It is also means tested, but the income limits are higher than for the medical card. The GP Visit Card allows you to visit your family doctor for free.

More information on entitlement to health services in Ireland can be found at the following link:  
[http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/health/entitlement\\_to\\_health\\_services/](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/health/entitlement_to_health_services/)