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Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs

Mr. Tim Dalton,  
Secretary - General,  
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform,  
72 - 76 St Stephen's Green,  
Dublin 2.

22<sup>nd</sup> October 1997

Dear Tim,

I read the report in today's *Irish Independent* that "Department of Justice officials are investigating the possibility of major welfare fraud by asylum seekers after at least 1,000 refugees disappeared during a mass registration campaign in the last two weeks (and that) this lends weight to fears that hundreds of applicants were claiming multiple welfare benefits". If it is true that most of the missing 1,000 represent multiple applications for supplementary welfare, it does, of course, have implications in terms of follow up and expenditure for this Department and I am naturally concerned to pursue this quickly. In that regard, I understand that we have now received details of these 1,000 applicants so that we can establish if any are being paid welfare benefits.

This Department has not always separately identified asylum seekers within its records of recipients of welfare benefits - the issue simply never arose before this year. However, our best estimate at present is that we, through the Health Boards, are paying Supplementary Welfare Allowance to some 2,000 people who may be asylum seekers. This broadly corresponds to the total number of live cases which your Department has now established following the mass renewal of asylum cards.

I am anxious that our two Departments, along with the Eastern Health Board, should continue to co-operate to the greatest extent possible in relation to the asylum seeker issue. There is, in our view, a need for representatives of the three organisations to meet more regularly at a management level to consider various operational issues so as to facilitate co-operation across the full range of matters arising and to ensure to that momentum is not lost in relation to medium term developments. Two such meetings have been held so far and a third is planned for 24<sup>th</sup> November. These meetings supplement ongoing ad hoc contacts between officials of the three organisations.

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I also feel that there may be scope for the use of more modern technology, such as computer matching of digitised photographs, to identify multiple asylum claims. This is an important issue for us as payments to asylum seekers rely on the identity established by your Department for the individuals concerned. I would be anxious, as I am sure you would be, that we explore all possibilities of improving controls on the identity of asylum seekers, given the expenditure implications arising for this Department. This Department has a well established Information Technology function and the technical expertise of officials is available as necessary, if this would be of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Sullivan', written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

E. Sullivan  
Secretary-General