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## Migrant workers demand meeting with O'Keeffe

by Scott Millar

ENTERPRISE Minister Batt O'Keeffe has failed to meet representatives of migrant workers, despite repeated requests, who claim many are being forced not to report exploitative employers due to the current work permit system.

Yesterday more than 100 migrant workers and their supporters protested outside the Department of Enterprise adjacent to Dáil Eireann demanding reform of the work permit system.

A group, including Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) director Siobhán O'Donoghue and campaigner Fr Bobby Gilmore, delivered a letter requesting a meeting with the minister.

The minister has yet to meet campaigners to discuss the issue despite what MRCI representatives claim was an assurance from department officials that the

issue would be addressed promptly.

Work permit holder from Malaysia Zeno Arumugan said: "We are here today because we are trying to get Minister O'Keeffe to make the employment permit system fairer."

The current employment permits system binds a worker to one employer. The MRCI state that 80% of exploitation cases involve workers in the employment permit system.

The MRCI is seeking an administrative change which would give people the freedom to exit exploitative conditions and find alternative work within their job category, without having to go through an entirely new permit application.

Among those attending yesterday's protest were Labour TDs Micheal D Higgins and Pat Rabbitte, while SIPTU vice-president Patricia King addressed the event.