



The Battle to Keep The Winter Fuel Payment

(The Manipulation of Facts & Statistics by the Department for Work & Pensions)

Selective Briefings by the DWP

On 22nd September 2014 the DWP published the latest statistics relating to Winter Fuel Payments. That publication was followed by these headlines in the Daily Mail, The Telegraph, and The Times:

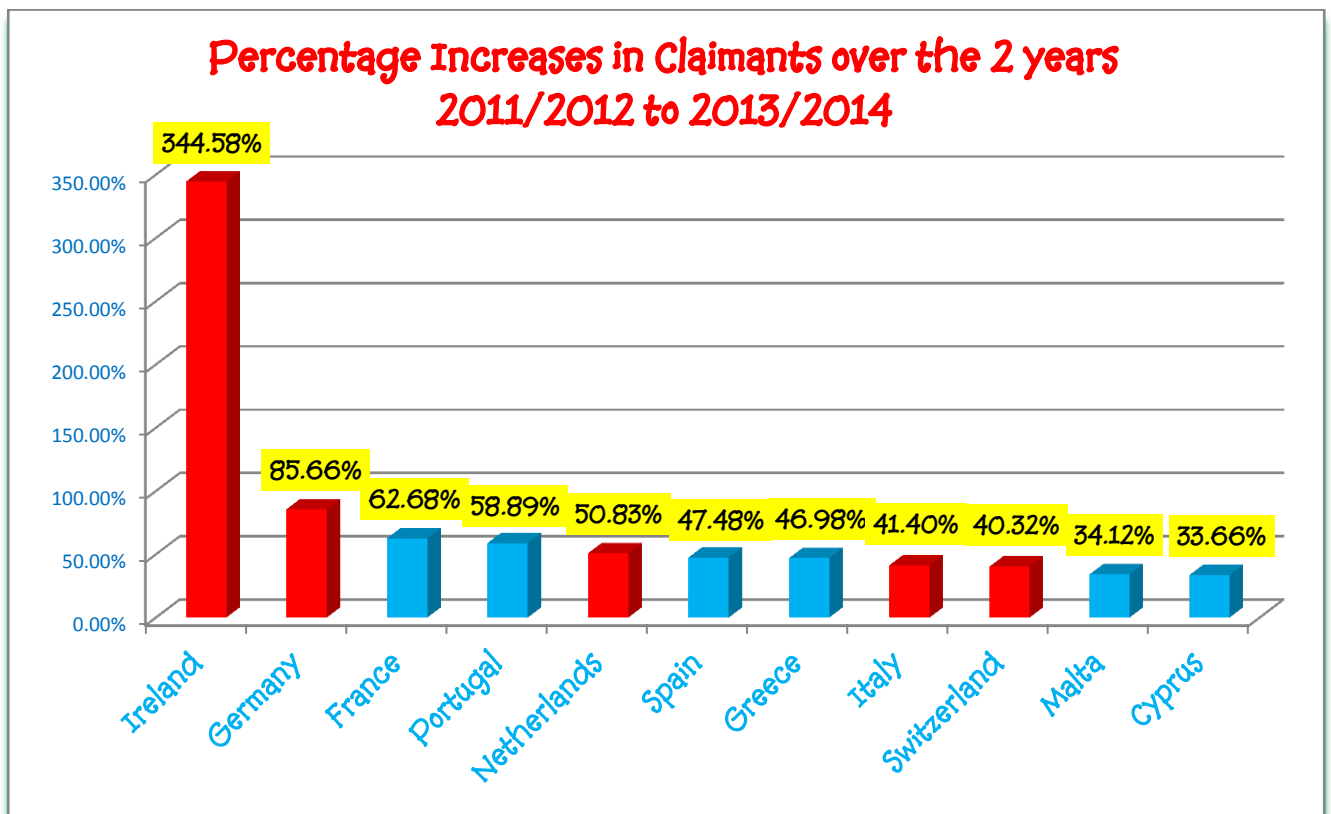
‘Number of expat pensioners claiming winter fuel payment hits record high – and the majority live in sunny France and Spain’

‘Winter fuel allowance: Spanish claims up by 44pc in two years’

£16m winter fuel cash goes to Britons living in the sun

Headlines such as these are enough to convince us that the DWP put out some highly selective briefings with the publication of DWP statistics. All three headlines were obviously designed to denigrate British expat pensioners. And this has been the pattern for more than two years, ever since the Court of Justice of the European Union issued a Judgment against the DWP and Iain Duncan Smith.

If all the facts contained in the statistics published had been properly highlighted minus the DWP’s own ‘spin’, the figures themselves tell a different story. Take a look at the charts shown below:

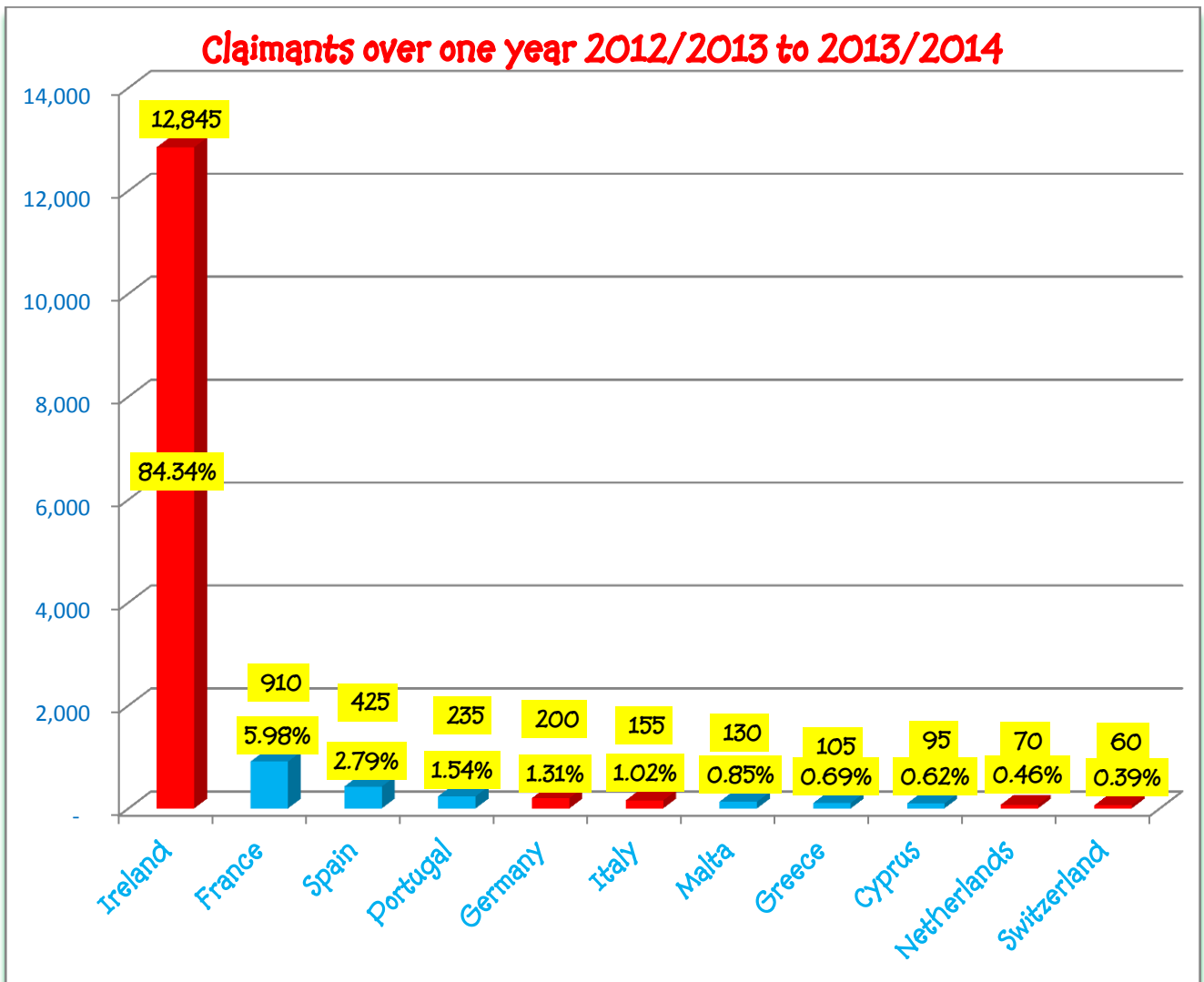




Our chart on the first page shows the increase in the numbers claiming the WFP in the two years following the CJEU Judgment. Why did the DWP focus only on the Spanish increase, and yet make no mention of the 'explosion' of numbers from the Republic of Ireland?

Note - countries declared 'cold' by the DWP as a result of the 'temperature test' policy, are shown in red to retain the WFP - those declared 'hot' and losing the WFP, are shown in blue.

Our second chart below focusses on the last year on record - this shows the increase in claimant numbers from 2012/2013 to 2013/2014. The most significant figure on this chart is once again Ireland.

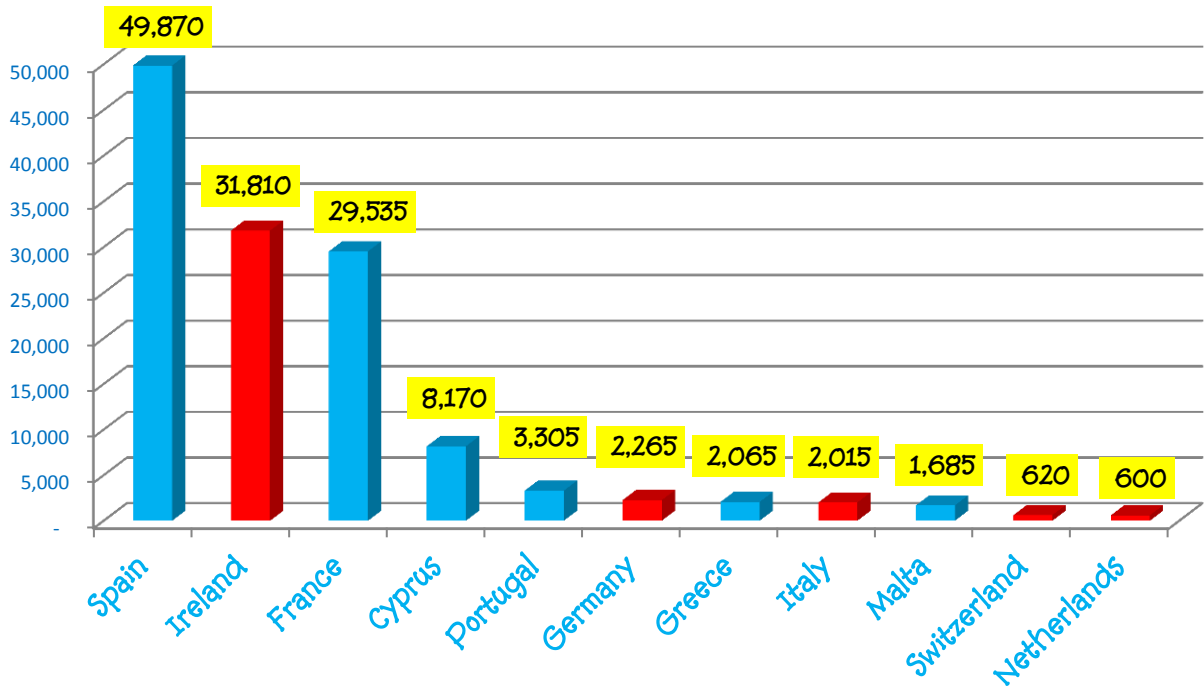


In all the other countries, the spike in extra claimants came only in the first year following the Judgment, and has fallen away to a trickle in year two, whereas claimants from the Republic of Ireland have gone on increasing at what we would consider an alarming rate. And yet, judged by the press coverage the DWP must have conveniently forgotten to draw attention to the figure for Ireland!

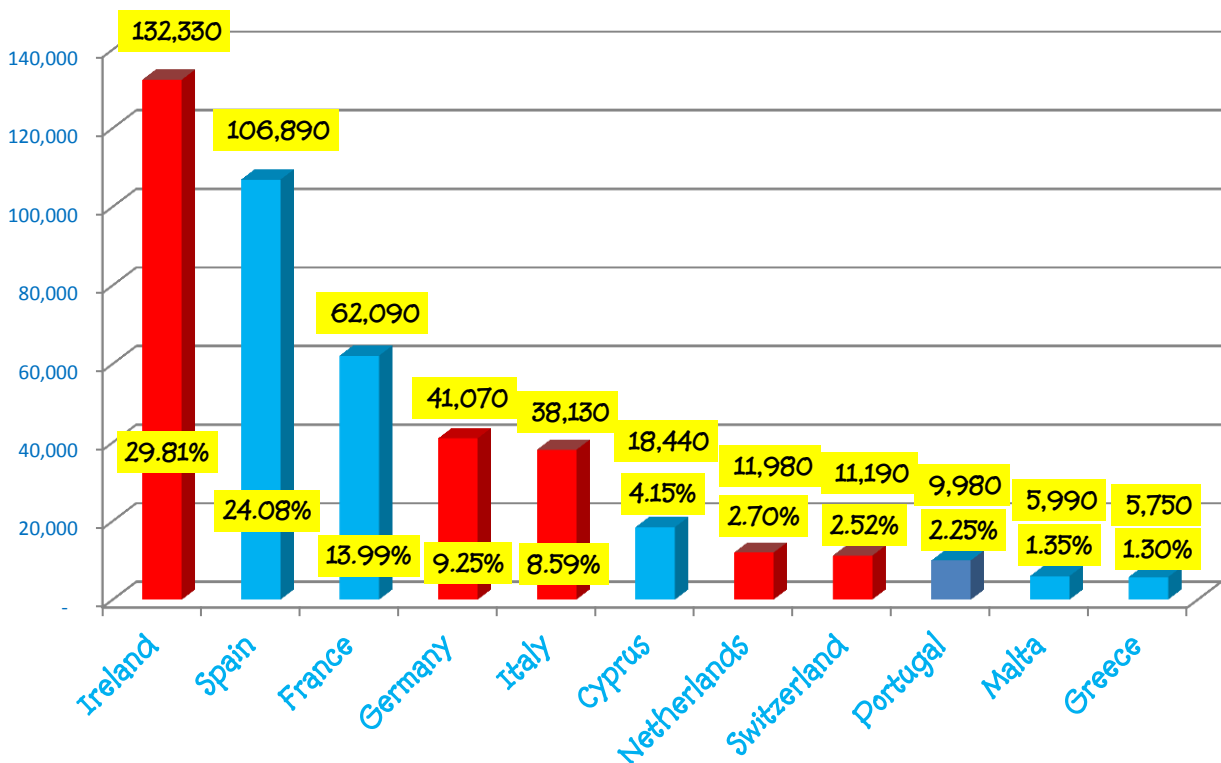
We have two more charts taken from the statistics published by the DWP. The first one overleaf is us being scrupulously fair - it shows the total of all claimants across the eleven countries we have used from within the EEA to illustrate the figures - the outstanding figure is that the Republic of Ireland has outstripped France in the total of all claimants! And yet, this deserves no mention in the DWP briefings!



Total of all Claimants as at 22/09/2014



UK Pensioner Table for EEA Countries at Feb 2014





In our charts we have selected the eleven countries of the EEA - the European Economic Area - which have the highest numbers of WFP claimants. The DWP has identified all EEA countries for examination in the 'temperature test' policy. Our final chart on the previous page shows all those in receipt of UK Pensions.

Whereas the headlines which have appeared following DWP briefings to the Press, all concentrate on British expats living in Spain and France - the 'sunny' countries according to the DWP's 'temperature test' - little or no regard seems to have been paid to the bigger picture.

Going back over the cuttings there is no mention at all of the Republic of Ireland. And yet Ireland is substantially in the lead in three of our four charts and in second place in the third. There is an explanation for the apparent dominance of Ireland in these statistics - a large number of Irish citizens worked for part of their working lives in the UK, earning them a UK pension, so not all of the 132,330 are expats Brits! But all are entitled to claim the WFP.

The Met Office produced a temperature chart for the DWP. It showed the 'temperature test' result for Ireland was 5.5°C - just 0.1°C below the SW of England yardstick, and was therefore declared 'cold'. Italy, on the other hand, which came out at 5.7°C, just 0.1°C above the yardstick was also declared 'cold'. France however, which came out at 4.9°C, 0.8°C **below** the yardstick figure, was declared 'hot'!

Of course we know why - the DWP invented a new figure for France, an average winter temperature for France which none of the meteorological agencies recognises, in order to make France 'hot'. It has to be said however, the invention of 7°C for France by the DWP, pays absolutely no regard to the fact it is not a particularly 'warm' temperature.

For many of our older and infirm compatriots the arrival of temperatures at that level is a sure sign daily heat is needed. Also, we should never overlook the fact that an **average** of 7°C across five months (151 days) masks the highs, and the lows. The lows mean for many, that heat is essential 24/7, and so to remove the WFP from tens of thousands of expat pensioners, who do not have the good fortune to live along the Mediterranean coast, or be particularly wealthy, will create hardship for many of them.



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