

FOREWORD



The family is the most important unit in Irish Society. Our families have shaped us all and it is increasingly recognised that families have a vital role to play in ensuring the development and well being of both individuals and of society as a whole.

But the family as we knew it in the past is facing new challenges. Many of these challenges are identified in this research study - including issues such as the change in the traditional family model and the increase in mothers working outside the home.

This creates major pressures in terms of the caring needs of children and those of older people and people with disabilities who need care. And these pressures will increase in the coming decades as our population ages.

This Government is committed to strengthening families by ensuring that families are at the centre of all our policies.

As Minister with responsibility for family affairs, I want to make sure that public policy makes a real difference to families. That's why I am establishing the Family Support Agency which marks a further step forward in the development of effective and responsive services and supports for families today.

But if we want to strengthen and support families, we need to know much more about families and about family policy. That's why I am delighted to be able to commission and support research studies like this one. We need to know what works and what doesn't; what governments can and should do to support families and also what families are better able to do for themselves.

This study makes an important contribution to advancing our knowledge about what works in family policy in Europe. I would like to thank Professor Mary Daly and Ms Sara Clavero for their many hours of hard work in researching this project. And I can assure them that the lessons from this research will inform future policy development.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Coughlan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Coughlan T.D.

Minister for Social and Family Affairs

August 2002