



NEWS RELEASE

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Government policy shows commitment to Social Inclusion

Hanafin opens 5th Social Inclusion Forum

“The challenge for us all now is to maintain and promote greater social inclusion in these very difficult times for our economy and society. This means ensuring that those who are most vulnerable are protected and have their living standards and access to essential services maintained”

said Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin TD, today (26th November 2008). The Minister was opening the fifth meeting of the Social Inclusion Forum in Croke Park.

Over 300 participants, representing state agencies and voluntary bodies, are represented at the Forum. During the course of the forum, key themes will be discussed including -

- Priorities for Childhood Care and Development,
- Facilitating Employment Participation for those Vulnerable to Exclusion from the Labour Market,
- Integrated services for older people
- Provision of Housing and Accommodation

Addressing delegates at the opening session of the Forum, Minister Hanafin said **“over the past decade we have made major progress in making a decisive impact on poverty through achieving virtually full employment, an end to involuntary emigration and, though major investments in improving and expanding public services, such as social welfare, education, health and housing.”** Minister Hanafin said welfare increases have been the Government’s priority and that since 2004 the lowest social welfare rates have increased by



58% compared to cumulative price increases of 15%. State pensions have gone up by 50% since 2002 and Budget 2009, despite all the difficulties, has provided increases ahead of projected inflation.

Minister Hanafin said that since its inception just five years ago, the Forum has been making a major contribution to policy development on poverty and social exclusion. She urged the Forum participants, taking account of this difficult period, to focus on **“what you consider should be the priorities for your particular area of concern over the coming years.”** A detailed report on the Forum proceedings is due to be published in the New Year, while a separate report identifying and highlighting main issues and the Forums proposals for dealing with them will also be produced.

“The Government remains committed to achieving the social inclusion objectives set out in the various strategies despite the current difficulties” said Minister Hanafin. This includes the priority objective of reducing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012 and aiming to eliminate it by 2016.

“Unlike during previous periods of economic difficulties in Ireland, we now have clear goals and strategies to meet them, which will provide the invaluable guidance we need in making the necessary choices and setting priorities. The views of participants at this Forum will inform us in the coming years, especially as the Government sets out plans and priorities for the European Year of Combating Poverty in 2010.” concluded Minister Hanafin.

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Report on Social Inclusion

The National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010 (NSSPI) was submitted to the European Commission in October 2008 under the EU Open Method of Coordination (OMC) each Member State is required to prepare reports setting out their strategic priorities for Social Inclusion; Pensions, Health and Long-Term Care.

Member States are required to choose priority policy objectives as a way of getting them to focus strategically on achieving real change. The four broad priority policy objectives chosen by Ireland for this report included:

1. Child Poverty
2. Access to Quality Work and Learning Opportunities (with a particular focus on activation measures for lone parents and for people with disabilities.
3. Access to Quality Services (with a focus on the homeless)
4. Integration of our Migrant Population.

^The *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016* (NAPinclusion) can be accessed on the website of the Office for Social Inclusion at www.socialinclusion.ie and at www.welfare.ie

^ Persons are regarded as being in consistent poverty if their income is below 60% of median income and if they are deprived of two or more goods or services from an index of eleven deprivation items.