



Minister Coughlan announces National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Coughlan today sent the National Action Plan against poverty and social exclusion to the European Commission as part of the agreed community wide drive to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

“This plan, covers the period 2003-05 and is a further step in Ireland’s drive, with other Member States, to meet the EU goal of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010, “ said Minister Coughlan..

“This is not just a Government response but a societal response to one of our greatest challenges - eradicating poverty and social exclusion. It is based on our own revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy, *‘Building an Inclusive Society’*, and on *‘Sustaining Progress’* and is a product also of intensive consultations with the social partners and of a consultation process carried out in a series of seminars countrywide and through formal written submissions. It reflects the priorities identified, but also the economic constraints required to maintain competitiveness within which we must operate.”

In broad terms, the four main priority objectives identified in the NAPincl plan are to:

- (i) pursue sound economic and fiscal policies, which will help maintain competitiveness, reduce inflation and sustain high levels of employment, as the key prerequisite to providing the resources for continued high levels of social and public services investment;
- (ii) maintain and increase employment participation, improve the quality of jobs, remove disincentives by “making work pay”, improve employability through education, training and lifelong learning, assist in reconciling work and family life including through child care provision;
- (iii) increase levels of social welfare payments in real terms and improve access to, and standards, in the main public services; and
- (iv) provide focused and tailored support for vulnerable people and to combat the risks of exclusion such as homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse and urban and rural disadvantage.

The Plan identifies an integrated package of policy measures, which aim to achieve these objectives by addressing the multi-dimensional and complex nature of poverty and social exclusion.



The Plan sets out an outline of what has been achieved over the past two years of the previous plan and what we have to build on. It identifies the challenges facing the Government and a clear coherent integrated strategy setting out how we plan to meet these challenges, specific objectives for each policy area such as social welfare, health and education, and targets for each of those areas.

The Minister paid tribute to all those who contributed to the process and informed the plan and particularly to the social partners, members of community and voluntary groups and those who had participated in the regional and national seminars or made submissions. The plan will be formally published shortly.

“The NAPincl blueprint provides a clear roadmap towards the building of a fairer and more inclusive society” said the Minister. “The Plan sets out a coherent strategic approach towards the achievement of this goal, underpinned by a series of measures across the full range of policy areas which will have a positive impact on the lives of those who experience poverty and exclusion. I am convinced that it will bring us well along the road to the EU goal of making a decisive impact on poverty by 2010.”

Ends
1st August 2003