



NEWS RELEASE

4th September 2007

Minister Cullen determined to work for decisive impact on poverty

Minister for Social and Family Affairs, **Martin Cullen TD**, this afternoon (Tuesday 4 September 2007) launched the Annual Report of the **Combat Poverty Agency**, the statutory organisation responsible for advising Government on policies to reduce poverty in Ireland.

Accepting the 2006 Report from Chairperson, Mr Brian Duncan, and complimenting the Agency on its work since its establishment in 1986, **Minister Cullen** said: "During my time as Minister for Social and Family Affairs, my priority aim is to use the opportunities provided by one of the most successful economies in Europe to work towards making a decisive impact on poverty. The problems we face are known and understood, the solutions are clear, the challenge now is to effectively implement the policies and apply the huge resources made available in the NAPinclusion and the National Development Plan. I am determined to work to ensure that effective implementation will be achieved in the coming years, resulting in major improvements in the living standards and quality of life of the most vulnerable groups in our society. In pursuing this aim, I know that I can rely on the quality analysis and advice which the Agency provides".

Minister Cullen said that he draws confidence and inspiration for the challenges ahead from what has been achieved over the last 20 years, since the Combat Poverty Agency was established. Ireland has changed dramatically from a country with high unemployment, high emigration and relatively poor living standards for many citizens to a country with a thriving economy, employment levels at an all-



Department of Social and Family Affairs

time high and immigration replacing emigration. The Minister said:

"Just 10 years ago, the number of people in employment was 1.4 million. Today that figure is more than 2 million. This represents an increase of over 600,000, or 41%, in less than a decade. Between 1997 and 2007, basic social welfare rates have increased by over 123%. That is three times ahead of the 41% increase in the Consumer Price Index, and double the 61% increase in gross average industrial earnings.

"These major improvements have been made because much of the remarkable economic success in recent years has been harnessed to reach out to those who had been left behind or marginalised. These changes were given strategic direction by National Action Plans on social inclusion, developed and implemented in consultation with the social partners and the other relevant stakeholders, not least the Combat Poverty Agency. Through the Cabinet Committee and Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion - right across the spectrum of Government - tackling poverty and social exclusion at national and local levels has been mainstreamed, under the Plans, using a more integrated, multi-policy approach".

The Minister said: "The Combat Poverty Annual Report also addresses some of the major strategic policy issues we face today in deciding on how best to tackle poverty. It recognises that, while income support and community supports are important, the effective provision of public services is also critical. I strongly agree with this view. The model of the 'life cycle approach', which is the main framework for Towards 2016, the NDP and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, places a strong emphasis on services as crucial for child development, activation and employment for those in the working age group, including those with disabilities, and greater autonomy and a better quality of life for older people and people with disabilities".



Department of Social and Family Affairs

The Government in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* 2007 has reiterated its commitment to continue to reduce consistent poverty* to between 2% and 4% by 2012, and finally to eliminate it by 2016. This commitment is underpinned by a number of high level goals, over 150 other targets and actions, and a series of initiatives provided for in a separate Chapter in the NDP.

The Minister concluded: "I wish to reiterate the Government's commitment to delivering on these goals and targets and my determination to achieve effective implementation."

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* 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

* 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.

Press Release Ends