



NEWS RELEASE

NOVEMBER 4 2009

Challenge is to protect most vulnerable groups

Hanafin hears from voluntary groups at 6th Social Inclusion Forum

“The current economic downturn means the challenges we are facing in reducing poverty are more complex than they had been in recent years” said Mary Hanafin T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs today (4th November 2009). **“Much of the progress we made in recent years in reducing poverty was made possible by the high levels of economic growth we experienced. Working to restore economic growth and bring stability to the economic situation is the number one priority for the Government as it prepares the upcoming Budget.”**

Minister Hanafin was addressing over 200 participants attending the sixth meeting of the Social Inclusion Forum in Croke Park. The Forum, which is chaired by Dr. Maureen Gaffney, Chairperson of NESF, provides a voice to members of the public and representatives of the community and voluntary sector as well as representatives of state agencies in policy development.

During the course of the day participants discussed the areas which will be focused on during the EU Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010. The priority areas for Ireland during the year include the following themes:

- Child Poverty – children and their families
- Access to Quality Work and Learning Opportunities – People of Working Age, especially young people and migrants
- Older People – Access to Services
- People with Disabilities – Access to Services

Minister Hanafin said **“that since this forum met last year there has been a decrease in the numbers in employment, consumer**



confidence has dropped and growth in the economy has declined. But in this time too we have seen prices fall which is good for consumers experiencing reduced levels of income.

This past year has also seen the formation of the new Social Inclusion Division in the Department. This new strengthened division has prepared a paper for consideration by Government on the impact of the proposals from the McCarthy report and how they might impact on families and individuals. They are not just looking at the Social Welfare aspects, but proposals that are being made across other departments such as Health and Education.”

Minister Hanafin went on to say with the Government spending over €21billion this year on Social Welfare supports, savings will have to be made. **“Major adjustments will be needed if we are to get the public finances back on track and bring employment back to where it was before the downturn.**

At this time it is all the more important that we set priorities and rigorously examine the value for money of all public expenditure. This presents a major challenge not just for Government but for society as a whole. Consultation with relevant groups and individuals such as we are having here today are a hugely important part of this process.”

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