



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Key EU Priority Will Be Addressed This Week In Galway - Mary Coughlan Minister For Social And Family Affairs

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Coughlan TD, today outlined the programme to be undertaken during the EU Presidency in the Social and Family affairs area.

Making work pay will be a key theme of the Irish Presidency of the EU and this agenda will be advanced by exploring the range of actions needed to ensure that social welfare and employment policies are mutually supportive, said Minister Coughlan.

This will be the theme of the Informal meeting of Employment and Social Policy Ministers in Galway this week, added Minister Coughlan.

Making work pay covers a wide range of areas where social protection and employment policies interact, for example by supporting transitions to employment, prolonging working life, reconciling work and family life, supporting mobility between jobs and incapacity to work.

"Much work is already being done in this area both at national and European level. Many member states have measures in place to address key aspects of these policy areas including activation, employability and financial incentives.

Member states have also considered how best to identify individuals who need priority attention and some will already have evidence of measures which have had a significant impact. I look forward to advancing this agenda at a political level when Ministers meet in Galway this week, "said Minister Coughlan.

Co- ordination of social security for migrant workers

The formal provisions for workers' social security entitlements as they move within an enlarged Union are of fundamental importance. Over the years the regulations which deal with the coordination of social security schemes have become increasingly complex, lengthy and difficult to administer - and they no longer respond to new developments in Member States' social security systems. The Irish Presidency will actively continue the process of reform with the aim of reaching agreement with the European Parliament before the end of its term in May. In addition the Irish Presidency, in co-operation with the Hungarian Government, will host a conference to address the implications of this EU wide reform.

Migration

Mobility within the EU and migration from outside are likely to be key realities for EU Member States for the foreseeable future and can create significant economic and social benefits for both migrants and host States. However, the Irish Presidency is conscious of the fact that the degree to which these benefits are realised is closely related to the extent to which successful integration can be achieved. During the Presidency we will be exploring, the reality of mobility in the enlarged EU, the type of risks to social exclusion that immigrants who move to work in other countries encounter, the risks posed to social cohesion by immigration without proper supports and the ways in which social and employment policies can overcome those risks.

Social inclusion/Poverty

The European Council at Lisbon pledged "to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010".



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In July 2003, the 15 Member States submitted their second national plans to the European Union. The three additional areas chosen for particular consideration under these plans were gender mainstreaming, the situation of immigrants and target settings.

The Second Joint Council- Commission Inclusion report, which will be based on an evaluation of the national action plans, will be submitted for approval by the Council and later presented to the Spring European Council. This report will also give an indication of the progress being achieved, almost at the halfway point, in meeting the Lisbon objective in relation to poverty for the EU 15.

We will also be hosting a meeting of people experiencing poverty from EU countries with the aim of promoting their involvement in the development of the National Action Plans for social inclusion.

Pensions/Prolonging working life

The common challenge of pensions systems in Europe is to ensure long term sustainability, particularly in the context of an ageing population. Based on the conclusions of the Joint Pensions Report 2003, work will advance on the need for reform of national pensions systems, paying particular attention to social protection systems and prolonging working lives. As part of the ground work for the review of future direction of work on pensions, the Irish Presidency will support the ongoing work between the Council and the Commission on the development of pension indicators.

Family Issues

Social, economic and demographic changes are resulting in a much greater variety of family patterns than in the past, and in new stresses and strains, particularly in reconciling the demands of work and family life. The social role of families, despite these changes, remains as fundamental as ever. However, these changes highlight the need to modernise social policy with a view to strengthening families by providing supports that meet their needs.

2004 is the tenth anniversary of the UN International Year of the Family. During this year there will be a world wide focus on family issues. To mark the year, the Irish Presidency will host a major international conference on 13th and 14th May - the days leading up to the International Day of the Family on the 15th - entitled "Families, change and social policy in Europe." Themes to be addressed will include, modernising social protection in the light of family change and reconciling the demands of work and family life.

Ends

January 12th 2004