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## **MINISTER COUGHLAN LAUNCHES REPORT** **– ‘POVERTY AND INEQUALITY’**

Mary Coughlan, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, today launched ‘Poverty and Inequality’ a joint report by the Combat Poverty Agency and the Equality Authority. The report highlights the link between the promotion of equality and the anti-poverty process and concludes that government should adopt a strong integrated poverty and equality proofing approach when formulating policy.

Welcoming the report Minister Coughlan stated; “For some time now, we have recognised that, in order to ensure an equitable and fair society, it is not enough just to have specific actions or legislation targeted at reducing poverty and inequality. It is also vital that all significant policies, regardless of their focus, must be considered in terms of their impact on poverty or inequality.”

“This publication will, undoubtedly, make that job much easier,” said the Minister.

The Minister highlighted the significant progress made addressing poverty, inequality and social exclusion under the revised National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS), the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social inclusion (NAPIncl), by the establishment of the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) and by the work carried out by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in assessing the effectiveness of poverty proofing. Minister Coughlan noted that since 1998 government departments have been required to poverty proof all major policies.

“Many of the key challenges highlighted in ‘Poverty and Inequality’ are in the process of being addressed.

“For example, the report states that pilot projects should be instituted to test the application of an integrated proofing approach. At this time, my Department and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform are examining the feasibility of two such pilots, one in each Department.

“Similarly, the publication stresses the need for initiatives to ensure that data can be disaggregated with reference to the range of equality grounds in the equality legislation. Data gaps relating to vulnerable groups are being addressed by a Technical Advisory



Group of experts we have drawn together to advise on the development of the NAPS data strategy,” the Minister said.

“The Office for Social Inclusion is currently discussing with the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform and the Equality Authority possible ways in which an enhanced poverty proofing process could be integrated with equality proofing.

“The publication stresses that the participation of groups affected by inequality and poverty should be secured. We are currently in the process of putting together Ireland’s second National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPincl) for 2003-2005. As part of this process, we have conducted a wide-ranging consultation process. This has included regional seminars where attention was focussed on the needs of the different vulnerable groups in society, and on the gender dimensions of poverty in particular. National seminars have also been held on standards of public services, on data issues and on the particular issues faced by immigrants, members of ethnic minorities and Travellers,” the Minister added.

Minister Coughlan’s department funds the Combat Poverty Agency. Its main functions include advising the Minister on all aspects of economic and social planning in relation to poverty and to initiate and evaluate measures aimed at eliminating poverty. Minister Coughlan has approved funding of €5.3m for this year.

**ENDS**

**12th June, 2003**