



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Pledges More Supports to Encourage & Assist People With Disabilities to Work or Train

Brennan Says €5 Billion Being Invested in Disability Supports, Services And Entitlements in 2005

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., speaking today at the launch of an ESRI report on ***Disability and Social Inclusion***, said that some €5 billion will be spent in 2005 on services, supports and entitlements for people with disabilities.

Minister Brennan said it was clear from the ESRI research that the barriers faced by people with disabilities and, indeed, other groups who are vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion, continue to be considerable. "As stated in the report, people with disabilities face many barriers to full participation, and so they are likely to face a heightened risk of social exclusion across various dimensions. This is happening despite the clear progress that is being made through the targeting of people with disabilities for particular attention through increased supports, interventions and entitlements."

The Minister said that this year, for example, some €2.9 billion, representing almost 7.5% of gross current public expenditure on services, will be spent in addressing disability issues. This compares with expenditure of just under €0.8 billion in 1997. That figure of €2.9 billion does not include the €2.1 billion which will be spent by the Department of Social Affairs in 2005 on income supports and entitlements for people with disability, illness and their carers.

Minister Brennan said that over the past number of years there have been significant real increases in social welfare, which this report acknowledges.

But it also rightly points out that these have not kept pace with the unprecedented rise in incomes of those in employment, especially those in households with two incomes.



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“As a result, many persons with disabilities who are not in employment saw their living standards improve, but their position relative to other people fell back. It is a situation that can not continue to be tolerated, and action is being taken to close that income gap”, the Minister said.

He said that a review by his Department considered the extent of measured poverty among persons with disability as part of a broader review of the disability and illness income support programmes.

This report identified a number of factors which could be considered as affecting these trends, including:

- The lack of employment opportunities for people with disabilities
- Issues related to the additional costs of disability
- The impact of extended durations on the social welfare system compared with people on shorter durations
- The differences in household composition among the group

The report also identified a number of areas where employment supports could be strengthened within the social welfare system and across government departments generally.

Minister Brennan said his Department is committed to harness a range of supports to encourage and assist people with disabilities and long-term illnesses, who are in receipt of social welfare payments, to identify and take up available employment, training and other self-development opportunities.

This will be achieved through a number of measures, which include-

- Exemptions from the general “no work” conditions which apply to the contributory illness and disability payments so as to engage in employment or training of up to 20 hours per week.
- Earnings disregards in the case of means-tested payments for those engaging in rehabilitative employment or self-employment and rehabilitative training;
- Participation in the Back to Work scheme, whereby people on long-term illness and disability payments can retain those payments on a sliding scale



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- for three years where they take up full-time employment in the open labour market and four years where they engage in self-employment;
- Participation in the Back to Education scheme which provides support for people to avail of second or third level educational opportunities;
 - The Facilitator network, which assists people to return to work, training and education, by advising the of the options and providing supports, where necessary; and
 - Exemptions from liability for employer and employee PRSI contributions, in certain instances.

ENDS