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Tánaiste: Government has steadily improved workers' rights while moving from crisis to recovery

Attached is the statement given by Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton T.D. at today's press conference concluding the OECD Labour and Employment Ministerial Meeting in Paris.

The meeting, chaired by the Tánaiste, saw ministers agree to review the OECD jobs strategy in order to build more resilient and inclusive labour markets – i.e. working to ensure that if any future economic shocks occur, jobs, incomes and workers' rights are protected to a far greater extent than followed the 2008 crash.

During the meeting and in bilaterals, the Tánaiste noted to ministerial colleagues the fact that, despite the severity of Ireland's crisis, the Government in its response increased the national minimum wage and improved workers' rights, through the restoration of wage-setting mechanisms and legislating for collective bargaining, among other measures.

The Tánaiste also emphasised the need, in her view, for the revised OECD jobs strategy to ensure that overall economic policy in member states is one that is supportive of investment and growth, saying:

“Much of our discussion today is, inevitably, about how employment and social protection policies should respond to macro-economic shocks. But there are broader policy challenges as well – of how to manage our affairs so as to minimise the risk of such shocks in the first place; and of ensuring that macro-economic policy is itself as supportive as possible of a high level of employment.”

ENDS

15 January 2016

Photographs of OECD meeting available at the following link:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/oecd/> **Copyright to read: OECD/Marco Illuminati.**

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**“Building more resilient and inclusive labour markets”
Statement by the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection
Joan Burton T.D.**

**Upon conclusion of the OECD Labour and Employment Ministerial Meeting [chaired by
Ireland]
Paris, 15 January 2016**

Thank you, Secretary General Gurría, and good afternoon to all present.

I'm very pleased to have chaired this important meeting of employment ministers from OECD and a number of other partner countries and to have participated in an interesting day of discussion.

One of the main topics of our discussion was how we can promote labour market resilience in the face of economic shocks.

What does that mean?

Briefly:

- How do we limit the impact of economic shocks on employment and unemployment, and ensure that employment recovers as quickly as possible?
- How do we limit the impact of higher unemployment on poverty and inequality?

Ministers have discussed a range of policies that can contribute to these goals, including:-

- Smart and job-friendly welfare systems;
- Activation policies that deliver quality employment services to help and encourage unemployed people in their search for work;
- Maintaining investment in education and skills development; and
- Wage negotiation systems that ensure that wage developments respond to changes in productivity and competitiveness – while also ensuring decent jobs.

Ministers agreed that policies that promote high and inclusive employment in normal times are also the policies that help us in responding to shocks.

Ministers have committed themselves to efforts:

- To address growing inequality, through selective policies promoting participation (upskilling, early childcare, through income support (in unemployment but also in low-paid employment), and through promoting gender equality; and
- To address the *quality* as well as quantity of jobs (with quality broadly being decent pay, economic security through reasonable contracts, and quality of the working environment).

As stressed by the OECD Secretary General, our Ministerial Statement today includes two important OECD Recommendations, on how to address employment issues related to ageing and on the need for an integrated mental health, skills and work policy.

Finally, Ministers have mandated the OECD to undertake an overall review of the Jobs Strategy – first adopted in 1994 and last reviewed in 2006 – with a view to adopting an updated strategy by 2018.

Let me stress that the policy priorities and commitments identified today in our Statement are not to be seen as a one-size-fits-all solution. Countries vary in their individual circumstances and in what combination of policies suits them best.

But I can say that we in Ireland have been trying to follow the broad policy lines identified today, and I think it fair to say they have served us well. We suffered one of the greatest employment shocks of any OECD country in 2008 and 2009, with a loss of over 300,000 jobs – close to 15% of total employment. But:-

- It is widely recognised that our welfare system was effective in limiting the effect of the downturn on poverty and inequality;
- We have had a rapid turnaround since recovery began – with employment growing by 8% in the last three years;
- The recovery has benefitted the groups most affected by the downturn – unemployment has fallen from a peak of 15% to 8.8% and continues to fall rapidly. And most importantly, we have been able to bring down long-term unemployment even more rapidly than the fall in overall unemployment.

We are confident, therefore, in commending the policy priorities agreed at today's meeting.

And we thank the OECD for the preparatory work for the meeting, and we thank the Ministers whose active participation made the meeting a successful one.

ENDS