



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Reporting Significant Progress In Tackling Poverty - Minister Séamus Brennan

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan, TD, today (Friday, 17th December) launched the first Annual Report on implementation of the National Action Plan against poverty and social exclusion for the period 2003 to 2005.

The Report outlines the substantial progress being made across Government Departments in tackling poverty and in meeting the EU objective of "making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty" by 2010.

It also outlines the work of the Office for Social Inclusion, which has overall responsibility for co-ordinating implementation and development of the National Action Plan. The Office, established in 2002, is based in the Department of Social Affairs.

Reviewing the various policy areas covered by the plan the Minister stated: "This broad range of actions underlines the fact that poverty and social exclusion are multi-faceted, requiring co-ordinated, joined up, multi-policy responses. The strategic approach followed in this plan makes such an approach, a reality". Minister Brennan added: "The causes of poverty are many. Working to eradicate it requires action across a range of different policy areas. The National Action Plan includes actions in relation to employment, social welfare, education, health, housing, equality and many other areas. But the strategic approach reflected in the plan means that these actions are being coordinated in an integrated, 'joined up' way, with a view to achieving more effective outcomes in relation both to the people supported and for the considerable resources devoted to providing this support. In the case of my own Department alone this will amount to over €12 billion next year."

Minister Brennan said that considerable progress is being made in his own area of social welfare in identifying the causes of poverty and in taking strong practical measures to tackle it.

"Significant and regular increases in welfare rates are central supports in raising the incomes of those who are most vulnerable. The commitments made by this Government in relation to income support mean that we are well on the way to



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meeting the 2007 target of €150 per week for the lowest social welfare payments in 2002 terms, and of €200 per week for social welfare pension rates”.

“It is also clear from the plan,” the Minister added, “that society makes huge resources available to Government to tackle poverty and social exclusion. We, therefore, want to detail how these resources are being spent, and the progress being achieved. This Report provides all the detail, but we are going further. The detail is now available on the website of the Office for Social Inclusion, which I am also launching today, and will be regularly updated. At any time, therefore, people with internet access worldwide will be able to find out what Ireland is doing to eradicate poverty”.

The new website, www.socialinclusion.ie, will provide an understanding of the work of the Office for Social Inclusion as well as regular updates on progress made under the National Action Plan. It will also include links to other Government Departments and bodies involved in tackling poverty and social exclusion.

The Minister said that it is clear from this first Annual Report that while much has been achieved, much more is required to decisively reduce poverty and social exclusion, and to work towards their eventual eradication. “My aim is to ensure that we maintain what has been achieved, and then further build on it to secure a decent standard of living for all in this country. In the week before Christmas, when being poor and socially excluded is felt most acutely, we must renew our determination, as evidenced in this report, to meet the challenge of creating a more inclusive and cohesive society in which all our citizens, especially our children, can feel they truly belong”.

Minister Brennan said that it must be acknowledged, that despite the substantial improvements in welfare rates and supports, and the many improvements in other policy areas, it has not been possible to ensure that the income of those dependent on social welfare keep adequate pace with the major increases overall which Irish people have enjoyed during the recent period of economic growth.

“The key to keeping pace with such increases in income for those of working age is employment, especially for families with children. We must work more to help



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people better reconcile work and family life. In this way they can improve their standard of living for themselves and their children, while at the same time being able to ensure that their children receive the care and the parental time they need. This will be a key issue to be dealt with in the forthcoming strategy for families in a changing society. Our children are our future and we must support their families in ensuring they get a good start in life”.

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