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Minister Burton launches new research report on the social and living conditions of people with disabilities

Joan Burton TD, Minister for Social Protection, today (Wednesday, 21st September 2011) launched a new ESRI report on the social and living conditions of people with disabilities. The report shows that disability has multiple and reciprocal effects on people's situation, cutting across education, social participation, employment and access to services.

The Minister said: 'I remain concerned with the findings that people with disabilities still have a higher poverty risk than other groups, are more likely to be unemployed and experience exclusion from a range of everyday activities. It is important to note that these disadvantages affect up to 800,000 people with a disability in Ireland, almost one in five of the population, with a core group of 325,000 people reporting disability across multiple data sources.'

The Minister highlighted people with disabilities as one of the priority groups in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion*. She said that promoting social inclusion was a policy imperative even at this critical stage in the economy and the public finances.

She said: 'It is important that we do as much as is possible to ensure that those who did least well out of the Celtic Tiger are protected from the burden of economic adjustment. We need to ensure that the policy choices we make take account of the impact on social welfare recipients, the low-paid and vulnerable families. The very useful evidence gathered meticulously in this report will help us do that.'

The Minister also called for a cultural shift in the attitudes of employers to hiring people with disability including the need for attention to job design.

She continued 'We also need to ensure that the measures we are developing to get out of the economic crisis provide opportunities for all citizens to participate in and contribute to economic recovery. The success of our economic recovery will be judged in part by our ability to reduce poverty and to achieve a more inclusive society. This may take time. But this is what we must strive for in the medium to long-term. It is in this context of maintaining the policy focus on social inclusion that the government earlier this year agreed to review the national poverty target in order to adopt appropriate and achievable national poverty targets to meet Ireland's contribution to the



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Europe 2020 Strategy and the commitments in the programme for government (*Government for National Recovery 2011-2016*).

Dorothy Watson, one of the authors of the report from the ESRI, highlighted a number of policy challenges arising from the research:

- The likely increase in the prevalence of disability as the population ages
- The challenge for the educational system in enabling children and young people with a disability to maximise their achievements
- The need for attention to job design, including flexible hours and modification of tasks, to enable participation of people with disability in work
- The scope for improvements in access to public venues and to medical and transport services.

She added: 'This report brings together data from a range of sources to understand the circumstances of people with a disability. While it is clear that this is a very diverse group, they share many challenges in the areas of education, work and social participation. Policies to promote the social inclusion of people with a disability will need to be broadly-based, taking account of the physical, social, educational, labour market, income support and legal environments.'

The seminar entitled *Promoting social inclusion for people with disabilities: National and European perspectives*, takes place today, Wednesday, 21st September, 2011. The seminar is organised by Department of Social Protection (Social Inclusion Division), the Economic and Social Research Institute and the National Disability Authority.

The research report *Social portrait of people with disabilities in Ireland* is published by the Department of Social Protection and the Economic and Social Research Institute. The authors are Dorothy Watson (ESRI) and Professor Brian Nolan (UCD). The report can be downloaded from www.socialinclusion.ie or from www.esri.ie.

The Minister was speaking at a national seminar on promoting social inclusion for people with disabilities. Speakers at the event came from the ESRI, the OECD, the European Union, the Department of Social Protection and disability representative organisations.



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The speakers at the seminar are Dorothy Watson, Mark Priestley (Academic Network of European Disability Experts), Shruti Singh (OECD) and Eoin Ó Seaghdha (Department of Social Protection).

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