



Major challenges ahead as society changes says Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Coughlan TD

Major changes in the make up of our society will present significant challenges for the delivery of social welfare services in the future, said Mary Coughlan TD Minister for Social and Family Affairs today as she published the Department's strategy statement.

"Increasing numbers of older people, single parent families, the numbers of children of divorced parents, increased migration of non-nationals and the need to tackle poverty and social inclusion will all present challenges specific to my Department," said Minister Coughlan.

Minister Coughlan said that demographic factors, which have been gradually changing, and economic factors over the past years are taken into account in her Department's strategy statement "Promoting a Caring Society 2003 - 2005."

"Our Government has set ambitious targets for tackling poverty –particularly child poverty – and social exclusion. The strategy contains commitments to implementing a co-ordinated programme of measures for older people, including pensions, and carers and to a new benchmark level of €150 (in 2002 terms) for social welfare payments.

"The new Strategy statement provides the comprehensive framework for the Department to progress and develop its services to the public over the next three years.

"The Department of Social and Family Affairs provides essential supports to many people. The delivery of those services has to be of the highest standard to meet the legitimate needs and expectations of our citizens, and I look forward to delivering on the improvements outlined in this strategy for people depending on the social welfare system and families.

"The factors which will impinge on social welfare policy in the future will be taken into account in fulfilling my Department's mission statement in promoting a caring society and building on the commitment of this Government and the experience and achievements of the Department of Social and Family Affairs," said Minister Coughlan.

The main goals set out in the strategy aim to provide support for people on social welfare payment, returning to work and for families, in fighting poverty and exclusion, and the promotion of the e-government agenda and developing the 4,800 people on the staff of the Department. The strategy will be published next month.



A number of demographic factors that have influenced the content and outcome of the Department's Strategy Statement include:

- The continued growth in population will continue, mainly through continued immigration.
- Although dependency ratios will decrease over the three years of the strategy, policy will need to take account of the longer term increase in the elderly population; this has implications for pension expenditure and for long term care.
- Given the continued trend of increases in births outside marriage and the increasing levels of marriage breakdown, the number of one parent households is likely to rise and the issue of support for one parent families and children of divorced parents is likely to feature strongly.
- Increased demands for social housing and other housing supports.
- The increasing participation of women in the labour market raises issues related to childcare and elder care.
- The rate of consistent poverty has continued to drop, but tackling poverty and social inclusion will continue to be major determinants of policy in the social welfare area.

ENDS 23rd May, 2003