



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Coughlan Launches Thematic Report On Families

Mary Coughlan, T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs today officially launched "Families and Family Life in Ireland: Challenges for the Future", a thematic study of the issues which arose during the public consultative family fora she hosted last year. The study will have a major influence on the strategy for family policy, which Minister Coughlan's Department is currently developing.

"It is prudent to consult the experts when drawing up any strategy. In this instance the experts I have wanted to consult above all are family members in the various regions of the country. I wish to pay special tribute to the hundreds of family members who gave up their time to attend the fora, and to participate with such commitment," said Minister Coughlan.

Speaking on the strategy for family policy, Minister Coughlan said: "I look forward to standing before you again by year-end with the finished product – a strategic policy document clearly outlining the challenges we face and with concrete and comprehensive proposals on how Government can strengthen families to meet them."

"But the report is not just an important resource for drawing up the strategy, it is also a resource for wider consultation on the issues it addresses," added Minister Coughlan.

Some of the main topics recurring at the family fora included:

- practical support for parents, including education courses in parenting skills for young parents and for parents of teenagers,
- the need to provide a broader definition of the family in light of modern societal changes,
- the need for increased quality childcare places and supports for families caring for the elderly and other dependent persons,
- and the increased provision of quality, affordable family counselling services.

Referring to the fora discussions on how to define the family, Minister Coughlan said: "This can be a contentious issue as it involves people's values, beliefs and ideals. However, I believe we can find common ground by focussing on supports for strengthening family functions."

"Given the major social and demographic changes that have occurred in Ireland in recent years, it is necessary now to bear in mind the different forms of family in developing policies to promote the well being of individual family members, and social cohesion, a point that came through from many participants at the fora."

ENDS

25th February 2004

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Note for News Editor

Last year Minister Coughlan undertook a nation-wide process of public consultation to take the pulse of the nation on how best the Government can support families.



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Almost 700 people participated in the discussions and workshops held during the Family fora in Cork, Donegal, Dublin, Galway and Kilkenny.

The Fora examined 4 broad themes namely:

- parenting and childhood
- reconciling employment and family life
- relationship difficulties
- the family as carer

The publication of the report is particularly timely in that 2004 marks the tenth anniversary of the international year of the family. The study has been compiled by Mary Daly, Professor of Social Policy, Queen's University, Belfast.

EU Presidency

As part of our EU Presidency programme, Ireland is hosting a major International Conference in Dublin Castle on 13-14 May entitled "Families, Change and European Social Policy" which will be one of the first social policy conferences of the Enlarged Union. The overall aim of the conference is to facilitate exchanges of views on the challenges addressing families in all EU countries and the sharing of ideas and experiences on how we can best work to meet these challenges.

The International Day of the Family will be celebrated on the 15th of May.