



Families continue to shrink in size

– Mary Coughlan Minister for Social and Family Affairs

The number of families with more than two children is shrinking according to the latest figures from the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Over one million children received child benefit payments last year – as the rate of child benefit payments jumped by 50 per cent to a total annual spend of over €1.462 billion.

One in five of the 500,000 plus families who were given the allowance by Mary Coughlan Minister for Social and Family Affairs' Department, had one child.

The number of one parent families has increased annually from 164,809 in 1994 to last year's highest ever total of 214,916. The number of two child families showed a small growth to 176,284 .

But the figures from the Department's annual statistics report shows that the number of families with between three and thirteen children continues to dramatically drop, year on year.

Ten years ago the number of families with between three and thirteen children was 158,504 – and that figure has decreased by over 26,000 to 131,780.

However as family sizes changed the number of families receiving child benefit increased by almost ten per cent over the past ten years.

“From birth through life to death, our system of social supports administered by my Department helps approximately one in three citizens at any one time,” said Minister Mary Coughlan.

”The first financial support people receive from my Department is Child benefit payment –a vital family support. It is interesting to note the changing demographics of our society, and I will continue to monitor the



annual breakdown of these statistics as they provide vital information for forward policy and budget planning.

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”This payment is recognised as important to families and I was glad to be able to further increase the payment again this year, by eight euros for the first and second child and ten euros for the third and each subsequent child, ” said Minister Coughlan.

“With a Budget spend last year of €9.52 billion the increase of 21.4% in social welfare spending has remained above the rate of inflation and increased by over €3.5 billion between 1997 and 2002,” she added.

“The Report will be of significant value in the development of policies responsive to the needs of people in a wide variety of circumstances. Our social service policies allied to our policies on education, housing, health and governance to name a few, make real differences to the lives of our citizens and I am committed to the ongoing maintenance and development of those social services,” added the Minister.

Over 938,000 people were in receipt of a weekly social welfare payment at the end of 2002, with nearly 1.5 million people directly benefiting. The number of recipients and beneficiaries increased by 35,596 (3.9%) and 36,140 (2.5%) respectively, year on year.

In 2002, there was an increase of 21.4% in Social Welfare expenditure, increasing from €7,842 million in 2001 to €9,520 million. This represented 28.8% of Gross Current Government Expenditure and 9.1% of Gross National Product. The main areas of expenditure by programme were:

- ◆ Old Age 24.1%
- ◆ Child Related Payment 16.6%
- ◆ Widows, Widowers and One Parent Families 16.7%
- ◆ Illness Disability and Caring 15.4%



- ◆ Unemployment Supports 9.8%
- ◆ Employment Supports 2.8%
- ◆ Supplementary Welfare Allowance 5.1%

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Expenditure on Old Age Payments increased by 15.5% in 2002 with expenditure in Child Related Payments increasing by 49.2%.

Child Benefit alone increased by 51.6% reflecting the substantial Budget increases. Carer's Allowance expenditure increased by €30 million in 2002, an increase of 22.8% over 2001.

The number of recipients of Family Income Supplement increased by 4.1% with an increase in expenditure of 14.4%.

In 2002, a Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance was paid in respect of 155,811 children, an increase of 12,782 on 2001 with expenditure on the scheme increased by 18.8% to just over €15 million.

Overall expenditure on unemployment payments increased by 29.8% over 2001 with an increase in the live register of 9%.

The report is available on the Department's website at www.welfare.ie

NB: In 2002 the rate of child benefit for one child was €117.60, for two children €235.20, for three children 382.50 and four children €529.80. In 2003 these rates increased to 125.60 for one child, €251.20 for two children, €408.50 and €565.80 respectively.

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