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**Mary Coughlan, Minister for Social and Family Affairs  
launches National Action Plan  
against Poverty and Social Exclusion**

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Coughlan today launched a blueprint for action on poverty and social exclusion to build a fairer society.

“The National Action Plan against poverty and social exclusion provides a clear roadmap towards the building of a fairer and more inclusive society. This plan sets out a coherent strategic approach towards achieving this goal, underpinned by a series of measures across the full range of policy areas which will have a positive impact on the lives of those who experience poverty and exclusion, “ said Minister Coughlan.

“This Plan is a stage in the process of making a decisive impact on poverty by 2010 and beyond. The Plan also identifies the ongoing and emerging trends we have to address in the years ahead and the policy processes involved in addressing them. In this context, the special initiatives from *Sustaining Progress*, such as on child poverty, will be given priority attention for policy development over the next two years, “ said Minister Coughlan.

The main priority objectives identified in the NAPincl plan are to:

- (i) pursue sound economic and fiscal policies, which will help maintain competitiveness, reduce inflation and sustain high levels of employment, as the key prerequisite to providing the resources for continued high levels of social and public services investment;
- (ii) maintain and increase employment participation, improve the quality of jobs, remove disincentives by “making work pay”, improve employability through education, training and lifelong learning, assist in reconciling work and family life including through child care provision;



(iii) increase levels of social welfare payments in real terms and improve access to, and standards, in the main public services; and

(iv) provide focused and tailored support for vulnerable people and to combat the risks of exclusion such as homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse and urban and rural disadvantage.

“The Plan identifies the challenges facing the Government and a clear coherent integrated strategy setting out how we plan to meet these challenges, specific objectives for each policy area such as social welfare, health and education, and targets for each of those areas, “ added Minister Coughlan.

“This plan, covers the period 2003-05 and is a further step in Ireland’s drive, with other Member States, to meet the EU goal of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010, “ said Minister Coughlan.

“This is not just a Government response but a societal response to one of our greatest challenges - eradicating poverty and social exclusion. It is based on our own revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy, *‘Building an Inclusive Society’*, and on *‘Sustaining Progress’* and is a product also of intensive consultations with the social partners and of a consultation process carried out in a series of seminars countrywide and through formal written submissions. It reflects the priorities identified, but also the economic constraints required to maintain competitiveness within which we must operate.”

The Minister paid tribute to all those who contributed to the process and informed the plan and particularly to the social partners, members of community and voluntary groups and those who had participated in the regional and national seminars or made submissions.

**ENDS - 27<sup>th</sup> August 2003**