



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Brennan- "Over 100,000 Children Lifted Out Of Real Poverty In Less Than A Decade As Result Of Targeted Supports & Services"

Minister Outlines A Range Of New Measures & Reforms Targeted Towards Ensuring That No Child's Life Is Blighted By Poverty

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D. today signalled the extent of the significant progress that has been made in tackling child poverty when he announced new figures showing that at least 100,000 children have been lifted out of deprivation and hardship inside the last decade as a result of targeted measures and supports. Overall some 250,000 people were taken out of real poverty over the same period.

Minister Brennan acknowledged it is estimated, based on trends and assessments that some 65,000 children continue to remain in some way in consistent poverty. He said that his priority now, and that of the Government, was to clearly identify these vulnerable young people and to concentrate additional resources and support services at eliminating the unacceptable blemish of children in poverty in 21st century Ireland.

The Minister outlined a range of reforms and increased welfare supports and child-centred services that are being introduced to further strengthen the extensive anti-poverty networks already in place. These include: radical reforms in the area of lone parents, where child poverty is particularly prevalent; a targeted new action plan again poverty and social exclusion later this year; payment of the €1,000 a year early childcare supplement for all children under 6 years; increases in welfare supports and entitlements; progress on initiatives in the current social partnership talks; and the creation of thousands of additional childcare places.

Minister Brennan was speaking when launching "Day In, Day Out -Understanding the Dynamics of Child Poverty", a new research report from the Institute of Public Administration and the Government-funded Combat Poverty Agency which was carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and published by



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the Institute of Public Administration. The study's key finding is that child poverty, and the duration of child poverty, is affected by a wide range of characteristics, including the employment, educational and health status of parents, and by the number and age of children in the household. Minister Brennan welcomed the report as an important contribution to the developing of better policies to eliminate child poverty, including the new national anti-poverty strategy.

However, the Minister said that, as the report was based on data over the eight year period 1994 to 2001, and while welcoming the subsequent policy document "Tackling Child Poverty-A Dynamic Perspective" from the Combat Poverty Agency, it was important that this historic context was also taken into account when viewing the overall findings. He pointed out that in the five years since 2001-

1. Social welfare payments have more than doubled (55.5%), well ahead of the Consumer Price Index (16.4%) and the increase in gross average industrial earnings (28.2%).
2. Child Benefit rates on behalf of almost one million children increased in less than a decade by almost 300% and were now among the highest in the EU.
3. Overall, substantial improvements in welfare support entitlements had seen the Department of Social Affairs budget almost double from €7.8 billion in 2001 to nearly €14 billion this year.
4. The Irish economy continued to grow by an annual average of 6% and unemployment was now one of the lowest in the world.
5. Some 270,000 new jobs had been created and this was particularly significant as employment is accepted as the best route out of poverty.

Minister Brennan said that while the debate continued over the best, most consistent and most accurate ways of measuring poverty levels it was important, for all concerned, that the rate of progress in recent years in tackling and eliminating poverty was also acknowledged as it reflected the significant inroads that anti-poverty strategies were having.

He said that according to his Department's calculations, and assuming a continuation of the trend shown in the original Living in Ireland survey up to 2005, the numbers of children taken out of real poverty between 1997 and the end of 2004 was over



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100,000, possibly as high as 115,000. The numbers would be more if a higher age group than 0-14 years were used. Overall, over this period, it was calculated that more than 250,000 men, women and children were taken out of the grip of real poverty.

Minister Brennan added: "We have made really significant progress in tackling child poverty in recent years. Whether we now have 65,000, or more or less, remaining at risk of poverty can be debated but the reality is that we have an extremely urgent task and that is to concentrate all our efforts on ending for good the unacceptable face of child poverty in 21st century Ireland. Achieving that goal should be our legacy for decades to come. Child poverty blights young lives and curbs opportunities and ambitions. Our priority now is to identify more clearly those who remain in the grip of serious poverty and to urgently channel additional income supports, resources and educational and welfare services directly to them. I look forward to the Combat Poverty Agency making an important contribution to our achieving this task. Over the past decade we have dissected and analysed poverty from every angle through some 83 reports alone from the ESRI and the Agency.

These have made a very valuable contribution to our understanding of poverty and of the policies needed to tackle the issues. It is now time, using this wealth of research and also advice from those agencies working on the ground to combat poverty and social exclusion, to complete the job by making poverty history in modern Ireland. It will require a multi-pronged approach across Government departments and services and it will require determination and commitment from all involved."

Minister Brennan said that a number of initiatives for lone parents were particularly important as many of the 130,000 children of the 80,000 on one parent family supports were deemed to be at risk of poverty. While some 60% of lone parents worked, the reality was that many were in low paid part time work that offered little opportunity for career enhancement.

As an immediate first step to allowing lone parents earn more from employment and expand their career prospects, from next week the upper earnings disregard is being increased by €82 to €375 per week.



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The broader reforms that are now being progressed, and for which he plans to bring forward legislation in the course of this year, will specifically address the difficulties many of the country's one parent families on welfare supports encounter in areas such as access to employment, education and training, income maintenance supports, childcare, cohabitation rules and unfair stereotyping.

Budget 2006 had included a welfare package of over €150m, in addition to the substantial rise in rates, which was being invested in measures targeted at tackling child poverty. The Family Income Supplement, for workers on low incomes with children, had the earnings thresholds substantially increased; the Back to School Clothing & Footwear Allowance had been increased by €40 per child and an additional €2 million funding was being invested in the School Meals Initiative.

Further initiatives now being implemented included:

1. The **Early Childcare Supplement**, introduced from April 2006, provides a new payment of €1,000 a year in respect of all children under six years of age. The payment will be made each quarter to recipients of child benefit.
2. Budget 2006 increased **Child Benefit payments** to €150 per month for each of the first two children and to €185 per month for subsequent children.
3. The **Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme** (EOCP) 2000-2006 has a budget of €500 million targeted at creating 41,000 new childcare places.
4. The **New Childcare Investment Programme** (NCIP) 2006-2010 aims to create an additional-on top of the EOCP provision-50,000 childcare places by 2011 through a commitment of €575 million.
5. It is aimed to increase the supply of **qualified childcare staff** by some 17,000 by 2010.
6. Both paid and unpaid **maternity leave** was increased by 4 weeks with effect from 1 March 2006, with further increases planned from March 2007, resulting in entitlement to 26 weeks paid maternity leave.
7. Under new **childminding provisions** a new tax relief has been introduced for individuals minding up to three children in their own home, with no tax being payable on childminding earnings provided income is less than €10,000.
8. **DEIS (Delivering Equality Of Opportunity In Schools)**, the new action plan for educational inclusion, provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP).
9. **The National Longitudinal Study on Children**, the most significant of its kind to be undertaken, will involve 10,000 infants and 8,000 children aged nine in a the study which is aimed at examining the factors which contribute



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to, or undermine, the well being of children in contemporary Irish families.

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