



Lifting children and lone parents out of poverty through motivation, support and active involvement of agencies – Hanafin

“Becoming actively engaged with all lone parents who receive welfare payments will help those who may have felt marginalised and without support to improve their circumstances” said Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin T.D. The Minister was launching a new research report ***Lone Parents and Employment: what are the real issues?*** – by One Family in Dublin today (17th November 2008)

According to the CSO, there are over 189,000 lone parent families in Ireland, with over 85,000 of those in receipt of social welfare support through the One Parent Family payment (OPF). About two-thirds of those in receipt of the OPF are working, but generally in low paid, part time work. Minister Hanafin said the research provided through the survey by *One Family* will prove useful for the Department of Social and Family Affairs as well as other Departments and agencies in relation to meeting the needs of lone parents.

“Lone parents remain one of the groups who are particularly vulnerable to poverty, with just over 27% of lone parent households recorded as in consistent poverty in 2006. What we need to see is a system that not only delivers income support, but provides support, encouragement, incentives and activation measures tailored to the lone parents’ needs and abilities. This will benefit the parent themselves and their child both economically and socially as well as society by ensuring that no-one is overlooked or left behind by their peers”

Minister Hanafin said that the **“international evidence shows there are better outcomes for all by having earlier and more active interventions with one parent families, so that a range of supports can be tailored to meet their needs. This can include improving their educational levels, up-skilling as well as active assistance with gaining employment as this provides a route out of poverty.”**

The Minister said that her Department has engaged in a number of studies on active interventions in both Coolock and Kilkenny. **“While participation was voluntary, the take up was low, which points**



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to the need for a more active process in order to give lone parents the encouragement as well as the confidence to seek assistance and access to the supports that are available.

There are many thousands of lone parents actively balancing their parenthood and work responsibilities. The challenge for us now is to provide the right supports at the right time to those lone parents who are welfare dependent.

The Government is anxious to enable lone parents to reach their full potential through improved employment prospects. At the same time we are conscious that activation measures without ancillary supports such as education training and quality affordable childcare are not likely to succeed. Taking the first steps towards a better system of engaging with all lone parents on welfare payments is in their long term benefit."

ENDS

Some key facts about lone parents in Ireland

- According to Census figures, there were over 189,000 lone parent families in private households in 2006. About 1 in 6 families in Ireland is a one-parent family.
- Over 85,000 One-Parent Family payment recipients (December 2007) - up by 44% compared to 10 years ago when there was 59,000 recipients.
- Women - 98% of recipients of OFP
- The majority of OFP recipients have one child (59%), with 27% having two children, 10% have 3 children
- 77% of recipients are not married - 12% separated; 8% divorced; 3% deserted
- The percentage of recipients under age 30 falling, while the percentage over 30 increasing - 58% now over 30 years. This could reflect the increasing numbers coming to the scheme after marriage/relationship breakdown and the fact that women generally are having children at a later age.



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- The number of teenage mothers (under age 20), has always been relatively small, but has been dropping further - 4.4% (1997) to 2.2% (2004) to 1.8% (2007)
- 60% working, but generally in low-paid, part-time employment

International Comparison - How work obligations compare:

Ireland - Payment of One Parent Family support is made from the time a child is born until 18 or 22 years of age, if in full time education. There are no conditions set regarding working. It is a means tested payment and a lone parent can earn up to €146.50 per week without loss of payment. Income between that and €425 assessed at 50% and a reduced rate of OPF payable. There is little active engagement with recipients of OPF supports, unless they seek it themselves.

UK – New Deal for Lone Parents - From October 2008, lone parents are required to seek work when their youngest child reaches 12. From October 2009, the minimum age will be further reduced to 10 and from October 2010 to age 7.

Norway, Sweden, Germany, Italy – Work obligation when youngest child is 3.

New Zealand, Netherlands, Australia – Work obligation when child is 5.

Finland – Work obligation when child is 4.

Canada – Work obligation when child is 6.

USA – Work obligation when child is 3 months.