

### MINISTER CULLEN PUBLISHES PEOPLE OF WORKING AGE PORTRAIT

Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Martin Cullen TD, today (26 February 2008) published the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) document *"A Social Portrait of People of Working Age in Ireland."*

This is the third social portrait in the series, following the publication last year of portraits of children and of older people. The series, commissioned by the Office for Social Inclusion, follows the lifecycle approach that underpins the social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016* and the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*.

Minister Cullen welcomed the publication which provides a statistical description and analysis (covering the research period 2005/'06 and early'07) of people of working age in Ireland. "People of working age comprise by far the biggest population category in our country at some 68.6% (census 2006) of the population," the Minister said. Minister Cullen continued: "In many respects people of working age are pivotal for the population as a whole in terms of creating wealth, providing services through economic activity and providing care for children, older people and people with disabilities." He added: "Where people of working age are not in employment or in low income employment it has an impact well beyond the individuals themselves."

Commenting on the publication's content the Minister said: "The data provided in this social portrait will help inform public policy. The portrait will help in identifying the challenges we face in ensuring that the resources of Government are used to best effect in achieving social inclusion."

Minister Cullen noted the rise in labour force participation rates from 57% in 1998 to 63% in 2007 and the rise particularly in women's participation in the labour force which rose from 44% to 53% over the same period. He commented: "A key challenge is to maximise the number who are in employment and to continually improve the quality of the jobs that they have."

Minister Cullen referred to a number of programmes initiated by the Department of Social and Family Affairs which are aimed at improving the quality of life of people of working age.

In **Budget 2008**, the Department's activation and family support programme was allocated **€6.5 million**. The programme provides funding for projects run by third parties to assist welfare recipients and members of their families to enhance their employability through education, training and personal development. The approach is directed towards those who, because of their personal circumstances, face particular difficulties in engaging with the labour market. The programme

builds on the Department's existing relationships with service providers such as FÁS, the VECs, the HSE and local agencies.

The Minister restated the Government's commitment to promote greater social inclusion and to tackle the difficulties faced by many lone parents and other low income families. He referred to the current development of a new income support scheme in his Department saying: "A planned new social assistance payment will have the long-term aim of assisting people to achieve financial independence through supporting them into education, training and ultimately employment – the avenue that is widely agreed to offer the best route out of poverty". He added: "As well as income support, access to training and education supports and to quality, affordable childcare is crucial to ensuring that any new proposal can provide the necessary supports to help lone parents and other families. Any proposed new payment can only be introduced when these necessary co-ordinated supports and services are put in place on the ground by other Departments and Agencies."

Copies of "*A Social Portrait of People of Working Age in Ireland*" (in addition to the other portraits in the series), can be accessed on the website [www.socialinclusion.ie](http://www.socialinclusion.ie)

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