

## **"Pensions Forum Will Inform Policies On Pensions That Will Impact On Society For Decades"**

### **Minister Outlines Further Initiatives To Increase Pensions Awareness And Improve Take Up Rates**

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Séamus Brennan-

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., today announced details of a number of pensions initiatives targeted at improving workers access to coverage, highlighting the legal rights of employees to equal treatment, and increasing awareness of the importance of pensions, and rights and entitlements, amongst trainees and immigrants.

Minister Brennan said it takes a cold look at some hard facts and figures to jolt many people into the realisation that the decisions they take now on pensions will be a major factor in determining how secure and rewarding their retirements will be. The reality is that out of a workforce of some 2 million more than 900,000, more than half of them women do not have personal pensions. The number of people aged over 65 will more than treble from a current level of 464,000 to 1,500,000 by 2056. At present there are over 4 workers contributing to the support of every pensioner. This will fall to 2.7 in 2026 and to less than 1.5 workers per pensioner in 50 years time.

Minister Brennan said that as part of Pensions Action Week (May 1st - 7th) a number of important initiatives were being launched, including:

- The joint venture between the Pensions Board and the National Recruitment Federation that will in future see pensions information distributed through the federations 150 member offices nationwide to future employment candidates. The recruitment industry places over 80,000 people in jobs annually.
- The Pensions Board and FAS cooperating to distribute pensions information to over 100,000 trainees annually.
- Launch of the Pensions Board new information booklet "A Guide to Equal Pension Treatment" which sets out rights and entitlements in the areas of equal treatment, discrimination and victimization.
- Publication and distribution of the Pensions Board Checklist in French, Spanish, Polish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese, as well as Irish. This is to ensure that immigrants coming to work in Ireland are made fully aware of their rights and entitlements as regards pensions.
- The National Pensions Forum, convened by Minister Brennan, on Friday, 5th May in Dublin Castle which will consider the conclusions of the National Pensions Review and examine options for future pension policy reforms.

Minister Brennan, speaking in Dublin at the launch of the information booklet "A Guide to Equal Pension Treatment", said that with the introduction of the concept of the principle of Equal Pension Treatment in law from April 2004 it is unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly in relation to occupational pensions on any of the nine protected grounds - gender, marital status, family

status, race, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation or membership of the Traveller community. All claims of discrimination in occupational pensions occurring since then are made to the Equality Tribunal, which may refer to the Pensions Board for technical advice.

"This ensures a seamless approach to equality complaints no matter what area of employment those complaints relate to", the Minister said. "This should significantly improve access to what can be a very difficult and complex area of employment law".

On the new initiative involving the Pensions Board and the National Recruitment Federation, Minister Brennan said there is much that can be done at the workplace level to promote supplementary pensions cover and to encourage people to participate. The PRSA legislation requires employers to provide access to a PRSA where they do not provide an occupational scheme. Over 76,000 employers have made the necessary arrangements in this regard but only 27,000 employees have availed of the option. This was something which needs to be marketed at the workplace level by employers and employee representatives if pension coverage rates were to improve.

"Another approach is to empower employees and that is why I very much welcome the initiative between the Pensions Board and the National Recruitment Federation. This will see pensions information distributed through the

Federations 150 member offices nationwide to future employment candidates in all employment sectors. This initiative will complement and will build on other very important arrangements I announced in recent months. The Pensions Board and FAS are cooperating to distribute pensions information to over 100,000 trainees annually. On International Women's Day I launched an initiative involving the recruitment firm CPL aimed especially at women workers. Women in particular need to focus on their pensions, as they are particularly vulnerable to poverty in their later years. These link-ups with the recruitment sector and with FAS will help us reach our key target areas. We will continue to look for opportunities and for new ways to reach those who do not have private pensions coverage".

Minister Brennan added "While all of these initiatives are welcome and will all help to increase awareness and improve pension coverage, the fact remains that there is an urgent need to reform our pensions system so that it delivers a decent pensions for all of our citizens. The Pensions Forum on Friday will be of enormous importance in informing policies on pensions that will impact on the shape of society for decades to come. I believe it is now time to face up to the major pensions challenge we face and to take hard and difficult decisions. In this regard, I have asked the Pensions Board to bring a speedy conclusion to their deliberations on the issue of mandatory or quasi-mandatory pensions. I expect to receive that report by June."