

MEDIA RELEASE
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Family Diversity Initiative welcomes proposed reform of law for cohabitees

But notes that progressive changes can only be made within context of European Convention on Human Rights

The Family Diversity Initiative today welcomed as a progressive step the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission's consultation paper on the rights and duties of cohabitees. The paper which recommends a series of legal reform to redress difficulties experienced by non-marital families would, if implemented, provide for the recognition of legal rights for persons living in a "marriage like" relationship for three years or two years where there is a child.

The Family Diversity Initiative welcomes the recommendations in so far as they provide for the introduction of rights for the increasing numbers of people in non-marital relationships, particularly given the fact that 30% of births are to non-marital couples and the increasing numbers of people cohabiting without marriage.

Commenting on the paper, Family Diversity Initiative Chairperson Karen Kiernan noted the reactive nature of some of the recommendations. "The paper, although welcome, tends to focus on the form of families at the expense of the substance of relationships within them. To be effective reform needs to focus on substance rather than form, the approach adopted under the European Convention on Human Rights, enacted by the Irish Government on 31 December 2003".

Family Diversity Initiative spokesperson Catherine Lynch called for the final report in the consultation process to provide a framework for the provision of rights for cohabitees. "A final report without a theoretical framework for the provision of rights will lead to significant difficulties in the provision of rights".

The Family Diversity Initiative welcome the opportunity to submit further comments and recommendations on this paper by 30 September and are calling for the final report to take account of the outstanding issues.

ENDS

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Note to editor:

The Family Diversity Initiative (FDI) is a coalition of organisations working with and representing the interests of diverse families in Ireland. This coalition recognises that the family exists in different structures and circumstances and challenges discrimination. Our vision is to achieve an Ireland in which people define their own families and which all these families are treated equally. Our mission is to promote equality, acceptance and understanding in Ireland for all families.

The objectives of the FDI are to:

- Co-ordinate and develop effective partnership working between NGO's who promote and represent diverse families, including the sharing of relevant resources.
- Identify key knowledge gaps in the experience of diverse families and seek to address these by research or other appropriate means.
- Support and co-ordinate policy interventions that address the institutional and social barriers to equality and social inclusion faced by diverse family groups.
- Co-ordinate an effective public awareness campaign on family diversity in Ireland.
- On achievement of the above objectives the Family diversity Initiative will re-assess its future.

FDI underpinning principles

- An understanding of "family life" that derives from our Vision Statement that people define their own families.
- Promoting equality of opportunity and social justice in its work and within the operating policies/ practices of the initiative.
- Acknowledging the right of people and families facing discrimination/ inequality to participate in solutions to redress that inequality.
- Partnership working with relevant external people/organisations which furthers the mission/aims of FDI.

The FDI currently includes membership from a range of organisations working with and representing families with varying structures and those who live in varying social situations. Current members of the steering group include, Age Action Ireland, Children's Rights Alliance, Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), Focus Ireland, Forum of People with Disabilities, National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI), One Family – Voice, Support, Action for One-Parent Families (formerly Cherish), One Parent Exchange and Network (OPEN), Treoir- National Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children.