PRESS RELEASE

Employment Inequalities in an Economic Downturn

Young people, and particularly young men, are being worst hit by the recession in Northern Ireland, reports the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in its research ‘Employment Inequalities in an Economic Downturn’ launched today, 28 September.

The Commission in its analysis of the impact of the current economic downturn on people in Northern Ireland has found that 18-24 year old people are more negatively affected than any other age group both here and in GB.

It highlights the rise in unemployment rate for this age group which has doubled from 2006 to 2009, from 9.9% to 20.4%. This is almost three times the overall unemployment rate and four times the rate for older workers. It is also above the UK average youth unemployment rate of 18.0%.

In Northern Ireland, the data illustrate that men have been disproportionately affected by this recession, especially those in the younger age groups. Overall male unemployment has increased from 3.8% to 6.4%, but for 18-24 year old men this rate has doubled from 8.7% to 19%.

Launching the research at an event in Equality House, Belfast, Chief Executive Evelyn Collins, CBE, said: "Fully understanding the impact of the recession on people in Northern Ireland to date is absolutely vital. Decision makers faced with greatly reduced budgets will have tough choices to make. The data in this research can inform their
thinking on the impact of the recession and strategies for dealing with it."

"The doubling of unemployment rates for young men may have profound implications for the shaping of our future society, especially where there is a risk of damage to future careers and a possibility of long-term unemployment.

"The literature indicates that this might be a ‘male recession’ but we know that its effects are still unfolding. The research findings provide some pointers to areas where there may be a risk of more negative impacts, especially for women, lone parents and disabled people, as the downturn increasingly affects public sector employment and voluntary and community organisations."

To date, available data has indicated a very slight decline in the employment rate of disabled people in Northern Ireland from 29.4% to 29.3%, however interview evidence as part of the Commission’s research indicated a decline in opportunities for work placements for people with disabilities due to the recession and an increasing feeling of insecurity for those in work.

In terms of community background, there has been a decline in employment and a rise in unemployment for both communities, although the increase in unemployment for the Roman Catholic community has been slightly greater. The unemployment rate for the Roman Catholic community rose by 1.8 percentage points, compared to 0.8 percentage points for the Protestant community. This may be partly accounted for by the age differences in the two communities. The Roman Catholic community has a younger age structure and is more likely to be affected by increases in youth unemployment.

Ms Collins added: "We are committed to working with Government departments, and with public and private employers to help ensure that the most vulnerable groups are not disproportionately hit by this recession. We need to make sure they are not left behind to a lifetime without work or full involvement in society."

The Equality Commission has run a series of training events for government departments on their responsibilities on equality and good relations. The Commission
also works with employers, public and private, to help them comply with all aspects of equality law. On 3 November it will be launching a resource pack on employing people from marginalised groups.

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