



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



National Policy Framework
for Children and Young People
2023-2028



**AN IRELAND
WHICH FULLY
RESPECTS
AND REALISES
THE RIGHTS
OF CHILDREN
AND YOUNG
PEOPLE**



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FOREWORD BY THE TAOISEACH



Ensuring all children and young people have what they need to reach their potential empowers them to contribute to the society we want today, as well as in the future.

Ratified in 1992, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, transformed children's rights in Ireland. It was central in the development of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and continues to guide and inform this successor Strategy, *Young Ireland*. The Convention provides the blueprint for our understanding of the rights of children and young people, and our commitment to them.

In direct response to the UN Convention and recent UN recommendations, this new Framework creates and nurtures an 'enabling environment' to ensure that children and young people are central to all relevant actions throughout Government and broader society.

In developing this Framework, we engaged with children and young people, their parents and those who work with them to understand the challenges they face today. Some of those challenges are new or changing, others we have known about for some time. In this Framework, we intensify our efforts to do everything in our power to address those challenges, to remove the barriers children and young people face, and to create the opportunity for everyone to be happy and healthy.

Child poverty is not inevitable, and it is not something that we have to live with or work around. That is why I have made child poverty and well-being a focus of government, and why I established a Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office in the Department of the Taoiseach. I am very pleased that this work will be a *Spotlight* focus in this Framework, along with the other very important Spotlights on mental health and disabilities. These Spotlights will bring enhanced accountability, focused action and concrete change in children's lives.

Young Ireland can provide the shared purpose that will enable all of us to bring about the outcomes that children and young people expect and deserve.

Leo Varadkar
An Taoiseach

FOREWORD BY THE MINISTER



When Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992, we committed to recognise and promote the rights of those who are under 18. We also know that as new adults, those between 18 and 24 may have particular difficulties accessing their rights, and may need support. However, recognising the rights of children and young people is about more than protecting them from harm, important though that is. It is about recognising children and young people as full participants in society, listening to their voice in decisions which affect them, and appreciating that they are experts in their own lives. It means taking their opinions seriously and recognising that their contributions are valid and valuable.

I am proud to publish *Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028*. *Young Ireland* will place children and

young people at the centre of policy, and support Government to address the most pressing issues for children and young people, now and over its lifetime. *Young Ireland* is a milestone, deepening our implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and ensuring children and young people's rights are a primary consideration whenever policymakers, professionals and others make decisions which affect children and young people.

Young Ireland was written using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as a guide, responding to the hearing on our implementation of the UNCRC which I led in Geneva earlier this year. At this hearing, the international experts on the Committee gave serious consideration to Ireland's record in implementing children's rights, and had some positive messages about our recent progress. The Committee expressed admiration for how Ireland has received children fleeing Ukraine, and in their Concluding Observations they recognised the positive steps taken by the State since Ireland's last review in 2016. In particular, they welcomed the progress made with the commencement of the Children First Act, Children and Family Relationships Act, the Irish Sign Language Act and the adoption of a number of other strategies.

However, they also expressed concern about how we are doing in other areas, and anticipating this policy framework, they rightly pointed out that it should be developed with the meaningful participation of children, and encompass

all areas covered by the Convention. They stressed that children's rights, a child rights-based approach to decisions that affect children, and addressing inequality and discrimination, should be everyone's business.

I am particularly pleased that *Young Ireland* was developed in close consultation with children and young people, relying on the 'What WE Think' consultation with over 1,200 children and young people throughout Ireland, conducted in 2021. This Framework is informed and illustrated throughout by what children and young people said about their lives and difficulties, and each section gives serious consideration to how we can address their main concerns. Just as importantly, we have also looked at many other consultations Government has done with children and young people in recent years on a range of issues, and with specific groups who may be vulnerable to poorer outcomes.

It is also important to note that this Framework has been developed in consultation with all those who support children and young people, such as parents, professionals in Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, the HSE, our partners in civil society, and the general public. I want to specifically thank those who responded to our open, public consultation on the policy framework, and to acknowledge the contribution that they make to children and young people's lives every day. I hope that they will see their priorities reflected in this document.

Across consultations, as well as recent data and evidence, it is clear that some children and young people

face acute challenges in areas such as child poverty and mental health and well-being. I am also aware that throughout the process of developing this framework, many professionals and policymakers told us that while there are many good policy commitments and strategies serving children and young people in Ireland, implementation can be more difficult and fragmented. The governance structures established with *Young Ireland* will ensure that positive actions do not remain on the page but are fully implemented across departments and agencies. In addition, as so much work is currently underway to improve the lives of children and young people, in the form of the many strategies outlined in this document, we need to prioritise in order to focus on areas of significant impact.

I am pleased that *Young Ireland* announces a new way forward for key issues such as child poverty, mental health and disability services through dedicated, time-bound spotlight programmes which will focus on making measurable progress in these areas, bringing together the different Government departments, agencies and others who work in each. *Young Ireland* is also written to be responsive to future challenges, with further spotlights to be announced later in its lifetime. Furthermore, our focus on changing how government works, not just what it does, aims to give policymakers and professionals new tools and skills to better serve children and young people, so we all understand and agree on how to further children's rights in Ireland.

Children and young people's lived experiences of public services and policy must be the focus of all measures in this policy framework. Schools already play a positive role in the lives of the vast majority of children and young people, and we know that they are the public service families are most likely to engage with. In this context, the vision for *Young Ireland* means that education offers spaces in which respect and diversity in all their forms are included, valued and nurtured. Through a quality and inclusive educational experience, children and young people will learn, play, grow and thrive as citizens today.

By fully implementing Young Ireland we will make a positive difference to the lives of many children and young people in Ireland, especially those who face additional challenges in their lives. This framework will guide the activities of my Department in the coming years, and will inform all Government work which affects children and young people. I look forward to working with all of Government and our partners to create an Ireland which fully respects and realises the rights of children and young people, supporting them to lead fulfilling lives.

Roderic O'Gorman, TD.
*Minister for Children, Equality, Disability,
Integration and Youth*





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by Ireland in 1992, sets out the rights of children and young people up to the age of 18 and forms the basis for the vision in *Young Ireland*. While young people aged 18-24 are adults, the Government recognises that they may have specific difficulties accessing their rights, as they face transitions into further education or employment, leaving care or moving from child to adult health or mental health services. The data and public consultations underpinning this Policy Framework show that, in general, children and young people are doing well but there are groups that face additional challenges and need additional support.

Significant work is already underway across Government to address the issues facing children and young people. This new Policy Framework:

- sets out current issues impacting children and young people identified by them, as demonstrated by the Children and Young People's Indicator Set and as recently highlighted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child;
- sets out a programme of work to create an enabling environment to ensure that children and young people are a central part of everyone's agenda;
- announces spotlight programmes to focus on the most significant challenges for children and young people, with resources from across government;
- re-establishes governance structures where the State will work with civil society partners to provide renewed leadership and impetus to realise existing policy commitments such as *First 5*, *Ireland's EU Child Guarantee National Action Plan*, the newly-announced Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office, and other major policy initiatives across Government impacting children and young people;
- identifies the priority areas requiring coordinated action across Government; and,
- identifies a number of complementary actions to address issues that were identified during the development of this framework.

To fully realise children and young people's rights, a robust ecosystem is required. Ensuring that children and young people are a central part of everyone's agenda requires systemic change, placing their rights and well-being as a core part of policy and decision-making. While the development of many of these systemic actions have been guided by the UNCRC General Measures of Implementation,¹ and refer to Government actions, we know that everyone has a role to play. Creating an enabling environment is a whole of society effort for parents, families, communities, civil society organisations, and the private sector, who can all play vital roles ensuring that children and young people's rights are realised. An enabling environment is one in which the voices of children and young people are amplified, where policymakers can access the data and research they need to put children and young people's needs at the centre of policy making, and where services ensure those needs are met.



¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 34th session, 2003, General Comment No. 5

We know that significant progress has been made in Ireland since we ratified the UNCRC in 1992. Since then, both the *National Children's Strategy 2000-2010 and Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* provided policy leadership, based on children and young people's rights, not previously seen in the history of the state. In 2012, the referendum relating to children's rights was approved, ultimately recognising and affirming the natural and imprescriptible rights of all children for the first time. The Policy Framework focuses on those areas which pose significant challenges for children and young people, especially those who may be more vulnerable to poor outcomes. It identifies areas which require action across Government, and highlights these pressing challenges in a focused, time-bound way as 'Spotlights'. It brings visibility to serious issues and fosters a cross-government approach. The first Spotlight has already been identified as child poverty, and has been launched through a new Programme Office in the Department of the Taoiseach. This Programme Office will enhance accountability for actions to address child poverty and well-being, and bring strategic focus to a select number of commitments to accelerate their implementation. Ultimately, its primary goal will be to positively impact the lives of children and young people who are vulnerable to poverty. This will be followed by a spotlight on Mental Health and Well-being and Disability Services.



CHILD AND
YOUTH
POVERTY

MENTAL
HEALTH AND
WELL-BEING

DISABILITY
SERVICES

The central aim of this Policy Framework is to provide a platform to realise the rights of children and young people in Ireland, so that all partners can work effectively together to ensure children and young people can thrive. The Policy Framework will re-establish governance structures to drive policy development and implementation, while demonstrating accountability for children and young people's policy.

These governance structures will ultimately report to the Cabinet Committee on Children and Education. This committee will oversee the implementation of Programme for Government commitments, including this Policy Framework, with a specific focus on child poverty and well-being. It will be supported in its work in this area by a Senior Officials Group with members from across the relevant Government departments. A Policy Forum will be tasked with overseeing and

THE CENTRAL AIM OF THIS POLICY FRAMEWORK IS TO PROVIDE A PLATFORM TO REALISE THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN IRELAND, SO THAT ALL PARTNERS CAN WORK EFFECTIVELY TOGETHER TO ENSURE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CAN THRIVE.

driving the effective implementation of policies impacting children and young people within their respective spheres of responsibility, across departments, agencies and sectors, including the Spotlight initiatives.

The Policy Forum will include representatives from a new Children and Young People's Advisory Council, which will be established to provide a forum for civil society and independent experts to actively inform and support the development and implementation of policies in respect of children

and young people. Consultation with children and young people was central to the development of this Policy Framework and will inform its ongoing implementation. Young people will participate in implementing *Young Ireland* through the structure of the National Youth Assembly of Ireland.

The previous policy framework for children and young people, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, identified five National Outcomes for children and young people which, if achieved, would be a good indication that they are doing well in Ireland. They are:

- 1 ACTIVE AND HEALTHY**
- 2 ACHIEVING IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**
- 3 SAFE AND PROTECTED FROM HARM**
- 4 ECONOMIC SECURITY AND OPPORTUNITY**
- 5 CONNECTED, RESPECTED AND CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR WORLD**



Actions in this framework have been positioned under each national outcome, with some identified as priority areas. The combination of public consultations performed for the purposes of this framework, the data from the Children and Young People's Indicator Set (formerly the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Indicator Set) and the concluding observations from the recent hearing of the UNCRC identify the major issues impacting children and young people and, in turn, inform the key policy areas that are being prioritised for implementation under this Framework. These are:



Over the lifetime of this Framework we will provide a platform for the rights of children and young people, establish an environment where the needs of children and young people are central to everyone's agenda, spotlight challenges, and support children and young people to achieve the five National Outcomes, ensuring an Ireland which fully respects and realises the rights of children and young people.



BACKGROUND

2.1 THE VISION

AN IRELAND WHICH FULLY RESPECTS AND REALISES THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

Children and young people are not just Ireland's future – they are also its present. According to the recent Census, a third of the population are aged 0-24. While Ireland's population has been getting older since the 1980's, it is still relatively young, especially when compared to many other EU countries. The average age of the population was still only 38.8 years as of 2022.

The data and public consultations underpinning this Policy Framework show that, in general, children and young people are doing well, but there are specific groups that face additional challenges and need additional support.

Groups who may face additional challenges include those with a disability; with mental health challenges; living in or at risk of poverty including homelessness; who are members of the Traveller or Roma communities; who are members of the LGBTI+ community; who have suffered abuse or neglect; seeking international protection; from minority ethnic backgrounds; migrant children and young people; living in a single parent household; living in Care or Aftercare; who are young carers; living in a household with substance misuse; or with a family member in prison.

In some cases suffering from one form of disadvantage can make other negative outcomes more likely. For example, mental health problems can contribute to some young people becoming homeless, and homelessness can exacerbate mental health problems.² This also means estimating the total number of children or young people in Ireland who may be vulnerable is difficult, and likely to be incomplete. However, this exercise can illustrate where our attention could be focused, and set the context for the detailed discussion later in this framework. The table below uses the most recent published data available, and is based on, and provides an update to, Ireland's EU Child Guarantee National Action Plan.³

² Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Youth Homelessness Strategy 2023-2025 (Government of Ireland, 2022)*, p.26-7.

³ Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, *EU Child Guarantee National Action Plan (Government of Ireland, 2022)*, p. 17.

DESCRIPTION OF VULNERABLE COHORT	CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE
In consistent poverty (0-17 year-olds) (SILC 2022)	7.5%
At risk of poverty (0-17 year-olds) (SILC 2022)	15.2%
Experiencing deprivation (0-17 year-olds) (SILC 2022)	19.9% ⁴
Children with a parent in prison (Children of Prisoners EU).	Number of children separated from Imprisoned father (1.3 parenting rate) 4,648.8 Imprisoned mother (1.3 parenting rate) 192.4
Families using emergency accommodation (Monthly Homelessness Report April 2023)	1,733 families accessed emergency accommodation between 24-30 April, with 3,594 child dependants.
Children and young people with disabilities	12.9%
Young people with mental health issues (Healthy Ireland Survey 2021)	The Healthy Ireland Survey 2021 suggests 20% of young people (15-24) may have mental health problems.
Number of Traveller children and young people	17,971
Proportion of young people who are carers	1.3%

*Note: Unless otherwise indicated, data is taken from Census 2022.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) articulates the specific rights of children and young people up to the age of 18 and forms the basis for the vision set out in *Young Ireland*. While young people aged 18-24 are adults, the Government recognises that they may have specific difficulties accessing their rights, as they face transitions into further education or employment, leaving care or moving from child to adult health or mental health services. As new adults, they are also covered by this framework. The core principles of the UNCRC are that:

- all children and young people should be entitled to exercise their rights without discrimination,
- the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration of decision-making,
- children and young people have the right to life, survival and development, and
- the voices of children and young people must be heard and listened to in matters affecting them.

⁴ [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\) 2022.](#)

2.2 A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Since the publication of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* in 2014, there have been significant positive developments in Ireland which profoundly affect children's lives. *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028* was published in 2018 and is a significant milestone which aims to deliver a broader range of options for parents to balance working and caring. It announced a new model of parenting support, new developments in child health, including a dedicated child health workforce, reform of the early learning and care system, and a package of measures to tackle early childhood poverty. Following a referendum, the Thirty-first Amendment of the Constitution (Children) Act 2012, recognising and affirming the natural and imprescriptible rights of all children, was signed into law in 2015.

Access to early learning and care has expanded significantly. In 2016, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme was expanded to provide a second pre-school year, available universally for all young children. At the same time, the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) was introduced to ensure that children with disabilities can access early learning. In 2019, the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) was delivered to provide financial support to help families with their early learning and childcare costs, including both a universal subsidy, and an income-assessed subsidy for families who may need additional help.

Recently, *Together for Better*, the new funding model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare was introduced comprising the ECCE programme, including AIM, the NCS and a new Core Funding Scheme. A fourth element of this funding model – the Equal Participation Model (EPM) – is under development. In 2023, State investment in early learning and childcare will exceed €1 billion, achieving the 2028 investment target in *First 5* well ahead of schedule.

There have also been significant, positive developments in different kinds of leave and working arrangements for parents, recognising the importance of time together for both parent and child. In 2016, the Paternity Leave and Benefits Act was passed, providing fathers with Paternity Leave and Paternity Benefit. It was a significant recognition of the key role that fathers or other partners, play in the lives of babies and young children. Employees who become pregnant while in employment are entitled to maternity leave, and may be entitled to Maternity Benefit, as well as additional unpaid leave. The Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 ensures that transgender men who have given birth can access maternity leave. Recently commenced entitlements include an extension of the entitlement of breastfeeding breaks to two years and a new right to unpaid leave for medical purposes for parents and carers.

First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 has delivered new and different kinds of leave for parents, providing flexibility in how a child is cared for. Parent's Leave now entitles each parent to seven weeks' leave during the first two years of a child's life, or in the case of adoption, within two years of the placement of the child with the family. Those taking this leave may also be entitled to Parent's Benefit.

IN 2019, THE NATIONAL CHILDCARE SCHEME (NCS) WAS DELIVERED TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO HELP FAMILIES WITH THEIR EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE COSTS, INCLUDING BOTH A UNIVERSAL SUBSIDY, AND AN INCOME ASSESSED SUBSIDY FOR FAMILIES WHO MAY NEED ADDITIONAL HELP.

Importantly, the Covid-19 pandemic and related public health measures have significantly accelerated a trend towards remote and flexible working, and other alternative working arrangements. The Government's remote working strategy, *Making Remote Work*, notes that homeworking during an emergency is not comparable to a regular scenario. However, it does acknowledge the principle that remote work also provides the opportunity for a better work/life balance and allows families to spend more time together.⁵ Many workers enjoy hybrid working arrangements, where a worker is partially on-site and partially remote,

or fully remote working. In one recent survey capturing employee views on remote working, 91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed working remotely improves work-life balance. 42% of respondents also indicated they spent part of the time saved from commuting on caring responsibilities.⁶

⁵ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, *Making Remote Work: National Remote Working Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2021)*, p.2, p.10.

⁶ Alma McCarthy, Noreen O'Connor, Tomás Ó Siocháin, and Deirdre Frost, *2022 Remote Working in Ireland – Survey Report (NUI Galway Whitaker Institute & Western Development Commission, 2022)*, p.18, p.17.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has grown significantly since its foundation, with over 5,000 staff now directly or indirectly serving the needs of children and families across Ireland. The Children First Act 2015, commenced in full in 2017, places statutory obligations on specific groups of professionals and organisations providing services to children. The Act is intended to raise awareness of child abuse and neglect, provide for mandatory reporting by key professionals, improve child safeguarding arrangements in organisations providing services to children, and provide for cooperation and information-sharing between agencies.

In 2020 the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme was launched, the result of a significant reform process of Ireland's youth service provision aimed at young people aged 10-24 who are disadvantaged, marginalised or vulnerable. The reformed scheme takes a needs-based and outcome-focused approach to ensure that young people most in need have the opportunity to take part in quality out-of-school activities in their community. As of 2023, over 260 youth services have been funded under this scheme throughout the country.

[WHILE THE LAST FEW YEARS HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT FOR MANY PEOPLE, THEY ALSO SHOW THAT STATE INTERVENTION CAN HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON PEOPLE'S LIVES.]

These, and many other significant positive developments for children and young people in recent years, reflect well on the Government's ability to implement policy and services which have a positive, measurable impact

on the lives of children and young people and their families. Critically, children under the age of six are now entitled to free visits to a participating GP, with a commitment in the Programme for Government to extend this to more children. Positive progress was made on addressing child poverty, which fell over the last decade, particularly during the Covid-19 Pandemic in the context of increased income supports. However, it is important to acknowledge that the at risk of poverty rate, deprivation rate and consistent poverty rate have all increased in the latest Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) data, covering 2022. Homelessness and the housing crisis has caused significant distress for many families, as well as children and young people. According to recent data, 3,594 children and young people using emergency accommodation are part of a family.

We also know that while the last few years have been difficult for many people, they also show that state intervention can have a positive impact on people's lives. According to one paper written in the context of the recovery from Covid-19 and the Irish welfare system, "the Covid-19 pandemic has had a large and negative impact on the Irish economy and the incomes of Irish workers as widespread job losses occurred". However, it found that emergency government income supports more than halved the expected drop in disposable incomes due to pandemic-related unemployment. In fact, the bottom income quintile experienced a rise in income of nearly 2%.⁷ Similarly, the successful roll-out of the vaccination

⁷ Claire Keane, Karina Doorley, and Dora Tuda, Covid-19 and the *Irish Welfare System* (ESRI, 2021), p. 32.

programme allowed many people to enjoy sport and recreation with their friends and family again; avail of more in-person learning; and feel safer when working, travelling, or relaxing.

Since the pandemic, more challenges for the state have arisen or intensified. Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022, with immediate, tragic consequences for the people of Ukraine including the mass displacement of individuals and families from their homes. Earlier this year, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) found that the number of those arriving from Ukraine seeking temporary protection was approaching 75,000 people. Additionally, many other people apply for asylum in Ireland from elsewhere in the world, fleeing persecution or with well-founded fears for their safety.

EARLIER THIS YEAR, THE CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE (CSO) FOUND THAT THE NUMBER OF THOSE ARRIVING FROM UKRAINE SEEKING TEMPORARY PROTECTION WAS APPROACHING 75,000 PEOPLE.

We also know that the world is facing a catastrophic climate crisis which, without immediate, radical action, will have devastating effects on people and nature. As Ireland's Climate Action Plan succinctly summarises, the world's climate is changing rapidly with temperatures increasing faster in the last 50 years than in any other 50-year period in the last 2,000 years, and human influence has warmed the atmosphere, oceans and land, severely damaging biodiversity and leading to malign environmental changes

to our ecosystem.⁸ According to a 2015 UNICEF report, children will bear the brunt of climate change, and climate change will make existing inequalities worse.⁹ The report, written from a global perspective, noted that severe weather events will disrupt critical infrastructure for children such as schools, and that climate change is likely to increase the spread of disease to which children are especially vulnerable. Looking at the key climate risks by region, the report argued that Europe will be affected by economic loss and flooding, driving urbanisation, increased sea levels, and coastal erosion, as well as water restrictions and extreme heat events.¹⁰ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) note in their 2023 report that in the near term, every region in the world is projected to face further increases in climate hazards (medium-to-high confidence, depending on region and hazard), increasing multiple risks to ecosystems and humans (very-high confidence).¹¹

⁸ Government of Ireland, *Climate Action Plan 2023* (Government of Ireland, 2023), p. 22.

⁹ UNICEF, *Unless We Act Now: The Impact of Climate Change on Children* (UNICEF, 2015), p.8.

¹⁰ UNICEF, *Unless We Act Now: The Impact of Climate Change on Children* (UNICEF, 2015), p.19.

¹¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.), *Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report, Summary for Policymakers*, A Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023), p.15.

In August 2023, the UN Committee on the Right of the Child formally adopted General Comment 26¹² which underscored children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, while also reaffirming each member State's obligations to urgently implement actions to address the adverse effects of environmental degradation and climate change. This is to ensure a clean, healthy, and sustainable world for children that guarantees each child is able to exercise their inalienable rights. This encompasses their rights to information, participation, and access to justice to ensure that they will be protected from and receive remedies for the environmental harms inflicted upon them by climate change, including those caused as a result of commercial activities.

The recent Commission on Taxation and Welfare observed that "for many decades, there has been an expectation that the benefits of economic growth would be widely shared, so that each succeeding generation can expect its living standards and the opportunities it enjoys to be at least as good as, if not better, than those enjoyed by the generation that went before.

In recent years, this assumption has been challenged in quite a fundamental way by increases in housing costs, higher costs of care and changing access to occupational pensions ... these issues have created a sense of unfairness that should not be ignored".¹³

Faced with these and other challenges, younger people appear to be losing faith in democratic systems, as evidenced by measures of trust in government,¹⁴ increasing the potential for the breakdown of social cohesion, through the rise of extremist politics and civil unrest. Some argue that younger people's interests are not well represented in our democracies, and have expressed deep concern about intergenerational inequality.¹⁵

We all have a role to play to realise children and young people's rights. While government has a particular responsibility to set the policy agenda, fund services and ensure appropriate regulation, many services are delivered by NGOs and

YOUNGER PEOPLE APPEAR TO BE LOSING FAITH IN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS, AS EVIDENCED BY MEASURES OF TRUST IN GOVERNMENT.

¹² UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change (United Nations, 2023) available online at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FGC%2F26&Lang=en (11 September 2023)

¹³ Commission on Taxation and Welfare, *Foundations for the Future: Report of the Commission on Taxation and Welfare* (Government of Ireland, 2022), p.60.

¹⁴ Elsa Pilichowski, *Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy: Main Findings from the OECD Trust Survey* (OECD, 2022) available online at: <https://www.slideshare.net/OECD-GOV/presentation-of-the-oecd-report-building-trust-to-reinforce-democracy> (16 June 2023).

¹⁵ University of Cambridge, available online at: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/youthanddemocracy> (16 June 2023).

private sectors. Furthermore, all of society, including individuals, have a collective responsibility to realise the rights of children and young people so that they can lead fulfilling lives.

2.3 AIMS

Young Ireland strives to place children and young people at the centre of policy, while also addressing their most pressing issues, now and up to 2028. The framework will provide:

A PLATFORM FOR THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Policy Framework will be the government's platform to realise the rights of children and young people in Ireland.

Over the lifetime of *Young Ireland*, we want to make everyone aware of the rights of children and young people, especially children and young people themselves. Everyone has a role to play to make sure children and young people can realise their rights, and that those rights are respected by parents, early years educators, teachers, doctors and other healthcare workers, all professionals and volunteers working with and for children and young people, and the public at large.

Young Ireland will also help government to work together to resolve issues affecting children and young people, through governance structures for children and young people's policy. It will strive to address barriers to coordinated, effective and efficient policy implementation to support achieving better outcomes for children and young people.

AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CENTRAL TO EVERYONE'S AGENDA

Young Ireland will focus on system-level actions which enable an environment where children and young people's rights and needs are central considerations. This Policy Framework aims to change how Government works, not just what it does. These new commitments are based on the UNCRC General Measures of Implementation, which are the recommended steps every country should take to make it easier to realise children and young people's rights. When Government makes decisions, those decisions should always be informed by the rights of children and young people. We will ensure everyone supporting children and young people across government and state agencies are aware of their rights.

The actions under this aim are set out later in this document, but in general, they are designed to help make good decisions in the interests of children and young people. They include improvements to further enable direct participation by children and young people; new ways to see how policy or budgetary decisions are impacting children and young people; and reviewing our legislative compliance with the UNCRC. They also include collecting better and more reliable data and evidence on the needs of children and young people, and making sure professionals working with children and young people have their learning needs met.

SPOTLIGHTS ON CHALLENGES

The Policy Framework will focus on the greatest challenges for children and young people, especially those who may be more vulnerable to poor outcomes. It will identify areas which require action across Government, and concentrate on these pressing challenges in a focused, time-bound way as 'Spotlights'. It will bring visibility to an issue and foster a cross-government approach to make positive progress in the chosen area. This requires a concerted effort over a specified period of time to generate the necessary momentum for change. While future spotlights will be informed by the governance structures under the Policy Framework, the data and evidence is clear about where we should begin: child and youth poverty, mental health and well-being for children and young people, and disability services.

Child poverty will be the first such Spotlight, and this work has been launched through a new Programme Office in the Department of the Taoiseach. This Programme Office will enhance accountability for actions to address child poverty and well-being, and bring strategic focus to a select number of priority commitments to accelerate implementation, making a positive impact for children and young people vulnerable to poverty. This will be followed by a spotlight on Children and Young People's Mental Health and Well-being, led by the Department of Health, and a spotlight on Disability Services.

**CHILD AND
YOUTH
POVERTY**

**MENTAL
HEALTH AND
WELL-BEING**

**DISABILITY
SERVICES**

SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO ACHIEVE FIVE NATIONAL OUTCOMES

Over the lifetime of Young Ireland, Government intends to improve the lives and outcomes of children and young people across Ireland. The five National Outcomes that we want for all children and young people are that they have/are:

- 1 ACTIVE AND HEALTHY**
- 2 ACHIEVING IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**
- 3 SAFE AND PROTECTED FROM HARM**
- 4 ECONOMIC SECURITY AND OPPORTUNITY**
- 5 CONNECTED, RESPECTED AND CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR WORLD**

Government and its partners are already taking many significant actions which contribute to one or more of these outcomes for children and young people, and some examples of these actions are highlighted throughout *Young Ireland*. Moreover, all new actions undertaken for children and young people should be mindful of these outcomes, and aim to realise one or more over the lifetime of this framework.

To measure progress towards these National Outcomes, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) has developed a Children and Young People's Indicator Set which helps to track progress in the lives of children and young people aged 0-24. It tracks progress across each outcome, with relevant indicators which, taken together, give an idea of how children and young people are doing.

The indicators identify and combine data from a range of sources including administrative survey and census data. An updated version of the Indicator Set was published alongside this Policy Framework. Over the lifetime of this Policy Framework, Government will develop this resource, so everyone has access to timely and relevant data on the lives and outcomes of children and young people.

2.4 POLICY CONTEXT

The policy environment affecting children and young people's lives is complex, and influenced by international bodies such as the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as Government. The Programme for Government: Our Shared Future, which is the Government's plan for its term of office, anticipates significant developments in this area for children and young people.

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

In early 2023, Ireland appeared before the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva, Switzerland. Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992 and is required to submit regular state reports on compliance with the Convention. This reporting process monitors the success of countries' measures to realise the Convention, and the rights of children overall.

Following this oral hearing, the UN Committee published its Concluding Observations, reflecting the constructive dialogue which took place between the UN Committee and the Irish delegation. In the Concluding Observations, the Committee recognises the positive steps taken by the State since Ireland's last review in 2016. In particular, they welcome the progress made with the commencement of the Children First Act, Children and Family Relationships Act, the Irish Sign Language Act, and the adoption of several other strategies.

The UN Committee also set out areas of concern and provided recommendations under several topic areas. These recommendations include problems related to non-discrimination, addressing violence, mental health, standards of living, education, and child justice. As a signatory to the UNCRC, it is important to give serious consideration to each of these recommendations, to consider how they can be implemented, or if there are other approaches through which Government can achieve the desired positive effect in the coming years.

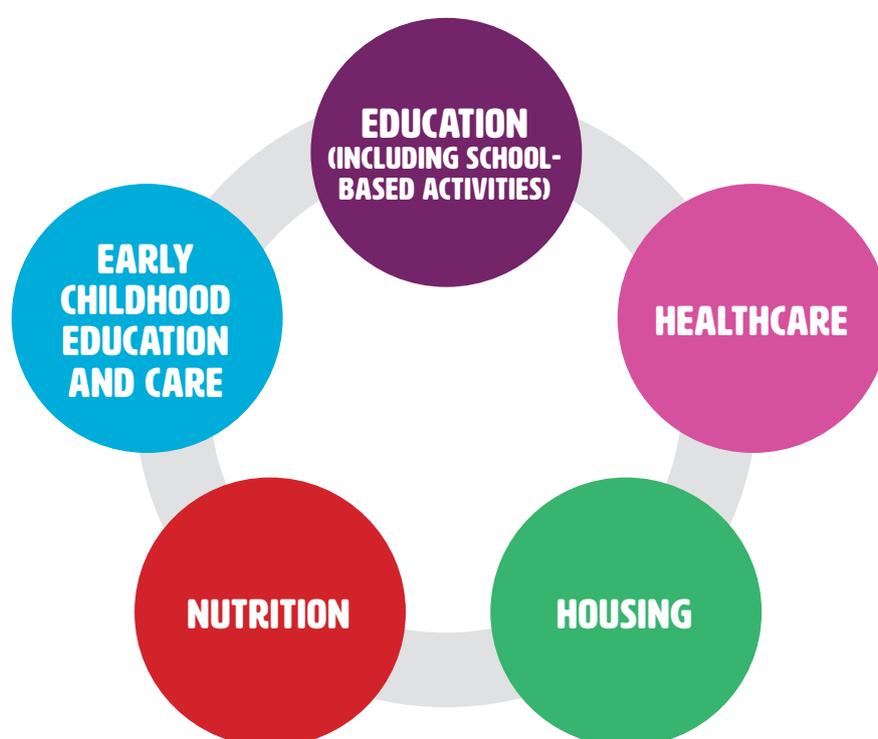
This Policy Framework was written with the UNCRC's Concluding Observations in mind, and responds to many of the recommendations issued by the UN Committee.

Young Ireland is also informed by the Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. These 17 Sustainable Development Goals are an urgent call for action for all countries, and this Framework aims to contribute, in particular, to realising Goal 1: No Poverty, Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, Goal 4: Quality Education, and Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities.

EU CHILD GUARANTEE

In 2019, the European Commission announced the creation of a European Child Guarantee with a view to ensuring that every child in Europe at risk of poverty or social exclusion has access to the most basic of rights like healthcare and education.

The objective of the European Child Guarantee, which was adopted in June 2021, is to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing the access of children in need to a set of key services. They are:



As part of the obligations for Ireland under the Child Guarantee, DCEDIY developed a National Action Plan in collaboration with a range of government departments. On 31 May 2022, the Government approved the publication of Ireland's *EU Child Guarantee National Action Plan* and submitted it to the European Commission. The publication of the Plan was an important first step in implementing the European Child Guarantee.

As part of the EU Child Guarantee process, and in developing the Policy Framework, Government considered the most appropriate and effective structures to pursue the necessary reforms to key services and improve outcomes for our most disadvantaged children and young people. *Young Ireland* aims to make progress in the priority areas the Guarantee identified, and to also ensure it aligns with the Guarantee's mission to prevent and combat social exclusion.

EU YOUTH STRATEGY

The EU Youth Strategy is the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027. It aims to foster youth participation in democratic life, supporting social and civic engagement and aims to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society. The Strategy's 11 European Youth Goals were developed from 2017 to 2018 in dialogue with young people from all over Europe. The goals identify areas across many sectors that affect young people's lives and point out challenges which will require the most concerted effort to resolve.

EQUALITY POLICY

Since the establishment of this Government in 2020, the responsibilities of many departments have changed. Perhaps most significantly, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) has greatly expanded, gaining primary responsibility for both the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021, and the *LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021*, among others.

In drafting *Young Ireland*, we relied heavily on the consultations which have already taken place with groups suffering from disadvantage. A specific consultation with minority ethnic young people, including Traveller young people, strongly informed the content of this Policy Framework. However, it is not a replacement for separate strategies which have the sole objective of addressing systemic discrimination and disadvantage which certain groups face in Ireland, in particular young people in the Traveller and Roma communities.

DCEDIY is considering how to take forward the positive progress made in the Government's equality strategies since 2017, and deliver a new policy which addresses any weaknesses, especially those articulated by marginalised groups. The Department is also carefully reviewing the strategies which have concluded, and expects to announce new plans in this area as soon as possible.

The structures of this Policy Framework will be used to connect with children and young people when developing these strategies, and the policy priorities will be integrated into new equality strategies.

First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 remains a key strategy for Government and will continue to be supported by the Framework. The box below provides an update on First 5 and outlines how it will interact with *Young Ireland*.

First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028

First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 was published in 2018 as a constituent strategy of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, the previous policy framework for children and young people.

The vision of *First 5* is that “all babies’ and young children’s early years will be valued as a critical and distinct period which should be enjoyed. Families will be assisted and enabled to nurture babies and young children and support their development, with additional support for those who need it. Those providing services for babies, young children and their families will be equipped to contribute to their learning, development, health and well-being.”

Significant progress has been made towards realising the vision and aims of *First 5* during the first phase of implementation. For the next phase of implementation, *First 5* will continue to operate in alignment with *Young Ireland* and within the governance arrangements to be re-established by it.

Considerable preparatory work has been undertaken to inform the *First 5 Implementation Plan (2023-2025)*. It has identified a need for increased focus on actions directly and specifically addressing the needs of the *First 5* cohort: babies, young children and their families. While *First 5* focuses on actions directly and specifically addressing the needs during early childhood (antenatal stage to 5 years old), *Young Ireland* sets out actions related to whole of childhood and young adulthood (antenatal stage to 24 years old). In Phase 1 of *First 5* a number of actions addressed needs across the whole of childhood. Phase 2 takes a more streamlined approach and the monitoring of these actions relating to children and young people beyond the *First 5* age cohort will be implemented and reported on within *Young Ireland’s* reporting mechanisms. Both the *First 5 Strategy* and the *Young Ireland Framework* are complimentary and aligned.

To achieve the fulfilment of the *First 5* vision, the *First 5 Implementation Plan (2023-2025)* will focus on progressing *First 5’s* Big Steps. They are:

1. Access to a broader range of options for parents to balance working and caring.
2. A new model of parenting support.
3. New developments in child health.
4. Reform of the Early Learning and Care (ELC) system.
5. A package of measures to tackle early childhood poverty.



ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Ensuring that children and young people are a central part of everyone's agenda requires a number of changes at a systemic level to place their rights and well-being as a core part of policy and decision-making. While the development of many of these systemic actions has been guided by the UNCRC General Measures of Implementation¹⁶ and refer to Government actions, the enabling environment is a whole of society environment as parents, families, communities, civil society organisations, and the private sector play vital roles in ensuring that children and young people's rights are realised.

3.1 PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The UNCRC defines children and young people's participation in decision-making as: "ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes." For children and young people, this means their involvement in decision-making processes in everyday settings such as classrooms, childcare settings, healthcare, and out-of-school settings.

Children and young people are experts in their own lives, and adults do not always know how children feel, what they think or what they like, and must give due weight to children and young people's views in decision-making processes.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE EXPERTS IN THEIR OWN LIVES.

[The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making](#) final report paints a positive picture of how progress in this area, with 93% of the agreed actions of the strategy, first published in 2015, reaching completion or in progress.

The recent [National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making](#) supports departments, agencies and organisations to improve their practice in listening to children and young people and giving them a voice in decision-making. It aims to establish and improve mechanisms to ensure that seldom-heard and vulnerable children and young people are listened to and involved in decision-making for policy, legislation, services and research.

A detailed *Cross Government Action Plan for Participation* will be developed, led by DCEDIY, to progress the high-level actions set out below:

¹⁶ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 34th session, 2003, General Comment No. 5

ACTION 1 PARTICIPATION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
1.1	All Departments	Embed the voice of children and young people in decision-making and the development of policy, legislation and research.	2023-2028
1.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Build capacity through the provision of training, education, resources and supports.	2023-2028
1.3	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth working with the Department of Rural and Community Development; Local Authorities; Department of Education	Embed the voice of children and young people in their communities.	2023-2028
1.4	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth working with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, the Gaeltacht, Sport and Media; Department of Education; Coimisiún na Meán	Embed the voice of children and young people in decision-making in education, health and social services, legal processes, and online.	2023-2028
1.5	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Promote the voice of children and young people in decision-making in their homes.	2023-2028

Children’s Participation in Decision-making in matters that affect them directly under the Child Care Act, 1991

The Heads of Bill and General Scheme of the Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2023 were published in April this year. The General Scheme introduces a guiding principle that the child should participate in the decision-making process for decisions being made under the Act. It also modifies Section 25 to facilitate more children being made party to proceedings.

This builds on the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2022, the main purpose of which is to extend and regulate the guardian *ad litem* system for children involved in child-care proceedings. Guardians *ad litem* convey the child’s views to the court and advise on the child’s best interests. To ensure the voice of children and young people is always at the heart of proceedings, the Act also provided that where a child is capable of forming their own views, the court must determine how to facilitate the child in expressing those views. The court will be required to give any views that the child wishes to express due weight, having regard to the child’s age and maturity. The Government’s intention is that a national service will be established to provide Guardians *ad litem* services and regulate the provision of these services. Work to establish the national office has commenced and will continue over the coming years.

3.2 DATA AND RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

The UNCRC General Measures of Implementation include data collection and analysis and the development of indicators as essential to realising the rights of the child. According to the Committee, the “collection of sufficient and reliable data on children, disaggregated to enable identification of discrimination and/or disparities in the realization of rights, is an essential part of implementation”.¹⁷

In addition to the indicator set developed under *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* the [Outcomes for Children Data Hub](#), a centralised platform hosting an agreed set of indicators sourced from relevant published reports, was developed by the DCEDIY and Tusla through the What Works initiative. Under the *What Works* initiative, DCEDIY worked with Tusla to build an interactive area-based geo-mapping system to provide information for policy-makers, service providers, Tusla management, practitioners, and information managers to support good decision-making regarding service design and delivery.

¹⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the general measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (arts. 4, 42 and 44, para. 6) General Comment No. 5 (United Nations, 2003), p.11*

These developments contribute to the broader *Public Service Data Strategy 2019-2023* which sets out a vision, along with a set of actions, on how we can improve our use of data to support a more joined-up, efficient and effective Government.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S DATA

The *National Equality Data Strategy 2023-2027* will aim to set out a strategic approach to improve the collection, disaggregation and use of equality data. This will be a cross-government strategy that will link both existing and future strategies the individual dimensions of equality.

The Equality Data Strategy will advance the collection, standardisation, use and monitoring of all equality data, including data relating to children and young people, to highlight inequalities that may otherwise remain hidden. Studying children and young people's data as part of a focus on equality will also improve our understanding of how these characteristics can interact, and help to address the resulting inequalities and disadvantage.

However, government is not the only collector or user of data on children and young people. Through their work, our non-statutory partners also collect and use data to understand and address the needs of their service users and improve provision. DCEDIY will support civil society through the What Works initiative. DCEDIY also recently launched the What Works Evidence Hub to increase access to effective prevention and early intervention programmes by making the best evidence on what works available to policy-makers, service commissioners, providers and other audiences. The Evidence Hub is accessible through the What Works website, www.whatworks.gov.ie.

The need for Government to collaborate on the collection and use of data for children and young people has also been noted by the UN Committee in their General Measures of Implementation. DCEDIY will develop a *Cross Government Children and Young People's Research Programme*, beginning with a research landscape and gap analysis. The analysis will be used to inform the breadth and scope of a new research programme from 2024 to 2028 and the prioritisation of actions within this programme.

ACTION 2 EQUALITY DATA STRATEGY

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
2.1 UNCRC	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; CSO; All Departments	Publish and implement the Equality Data Strategy 2023-2027.	Five year strategy

ACTION 3 DATA LINKING

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
3.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Publish findings of DCEDIY, Tusla and the CSO project which will link children in care data with school enrolment.	2023

ACTION 4 GUIDANCE FOR DATA LINKING

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
4.1	CSO	Publish guidance for Departments and agencies on developing cross-government data linking projects with the CSO.	2024

ACTION 5 USING DATA

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
5.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Evaluate the What Works Building Evidence Fund 2023.	2023-2024

ACTION 6 EVIDENCE HUB

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
6.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Promote the use of evidence-informed approaches to prevention and early intervention programmes for children and young people through the What Works Evidence Hub.	2023-2024

ACTION 7 MAPPING

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
7.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Map children's services using Geo Hive and Geo Spatial data to inform planning for service delivery and improve access and information on services for children, young people and their families.	2023-2025

**ACTION
8**
CROSS GOVERNMENT RESEARCH PROGRAMME

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
8.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Carry out a research landscape and gap analysis for children and young people to inform the development of a Cross Government Children and Young People's Research Programme.	2023-2024

THE EQUALITY DATA STRATEGY WILL ADVANCE THE COLLECTION, STANDARDISATION, USE AND MONITORING OF ALL EQUALITY DATA, INCLUDING DATA RELATING TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, TO HIGHLIGHT INEQUALITIES THAT MAY OTHERWISE REMAIN HIDDEN.

3.3 CHILD AND YOUTH IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is explicit in its identification of child impact assessments as an essential tool in implementing the Convention. The Children's Rights Alliance have commenced a new two-year project funded by the EU Commission under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV). DCEDIY are partners of this project, along with Tusla, Eurochild, UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, University of Galway, and Foróige. The project will initially examine the effect of pandemic measures on activities and services for children and young people through groups that were disproportionately affected. The project team will work with youth researchers, using Ireland as a case study to document how well child participation structures worked during the pandemic, and identify best practice in Covid-19 responses in Europe. This will inform an exploration of how Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) can embed a children's rights approach, including during times of emergency, and the development of a prototype CRIA and training supports aimed at embedding children's rights. The work will include consideration of the 'Youth Test' already in place in some EU Member States, as recommended by the Report of the Conference on the Future of Europe and advocated for by youth organisations (e.g. the European Youth Forum).¹⁸

¹⁸ The report of the final outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe was presented on 09 May 2022, including 49 proposals to the three EU Institutions, available online at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20220509RES29121/20220509RES29121.pdf> (17 July 2023)

**ACTION
9**

CHILDREN’S RIGHTS IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
9.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Collaborate with partners on the development of the prototype CRIA.	2024
9.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Roll out the use of CRIA in Government and Government agencies.	2024-2028

3.4 CHILD BUDGETING

Child budgeting is a means of understanding the state’s expenditure on children and is key to ensuring that it is sufficient to meet their needs, is used effectively, and achieves the desired outcomes. There are challenges in calculating the total state expenditure that benefits children, rather than simply calculating direct spending on children. In 2022, DCEDIY published a pilot study [The Irish Government’s Expenditure on Children in 2019: A Pilot Study of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs](#) which sets out a transparent, easy-to-understand methodology that can be reproduced across departments. Further development of the use of child budgeting will examine the allocation and outcomes assessment across the five National Outcomes.

ACTION 10 CHILD BUDGETING

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
10.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department of Education, Department of Health; Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; Department of Justice; Department of Rural and Community Development; Department of Social Protection	Expand child budgeting analysis to include other Departments with the highest level of expenditure benefiting children: Department of Education; Department of Health; Department of Housing; Local Government and Heritage; Department of Justice; Department of Rural and Community Development; and Department of Social Protection.	2024
10.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Examine how child expenditures are allocated and if the balance of expenditures is similar to other developed countries.	2025
10.3	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Assess outcomes for children in terms of how effective this expenditure is in improving the well-being of children.	2028
10.4	Department of the Taoiseach Programme Office	Coordinate an annual child budget statement.	2023 Onwards

ACTION 11 PARTICIPATION IN BUDGETING

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
11.1	Department of Finance; Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform	Build on the experience of children and young people being involved in the National Economic Dialogue for the first time in 2023.	2024

CHILD BUDGETING IS A MEANS OF UNDERSTANDING THE STATE'S EXPENDITURE ON CHILDREN AND IS KEY TO ENSURING THAT IT IS SUFFICIENT TO MEET THEIR NEEDS, IS USED EFFECTIVELY, AND ACHIEVES THE DESIRED OUTCOMES.

3.5 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child “believes a comprehensive review of all domestic legislation and related administrative guidance to ensure full compliance with the Convention is an obligation.”

In 2023, the concluding observations of the Committee reiterated this priority. DCEDIY is committed to ensuring that the adoption process continues to be in the best interest of the child, in line with public policy and best practice. DCEDIY will initiate a review of the Adoption Act 2010, identifying best practice in adoption, and recommending necessary legislative changes to the Act and future administrative reforms.

ACTION 12 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
12.1 UNCRC	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Conduct a review of legislation in relation to the provisions of the UNCRC.	2023-2024
12.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Conduct a review of the Adoption Act 2010.	2023-2025

3.6 CAPACITY BUILDING

DCEDIY will develop training for public servants and wider society to understand and realise the rights of children and young people across the lifetime of the Policy Framework. This will be tailored to ensure that the training is applicable and relevant to different sectors and different professions.

ACTION 13 LEARNING

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
13.1 UNCRC	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Develop training for the public sector on children and young people's rights, tailored with respect to different roles.	2023-2025
13.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Develop training for interested members of the private sector and individuals, to be published and made available online.	2024-2026
13.3	All Departments	Facilitate staff to complete children and young people's rights training.	2024-2028

3.7 RAISING AWARENESS

DCEDIY communicate over the lifetime of *Young Ireland* to promote the rights of children and young people and embed the consideration of those rights across Government and broader society. The Communications Platform will highlight current issues, developments under the Policy Framework and messaging in collaboration with partners across all of society, and feature the voice of the child and input from children and young people. It will also recognise that children need information that is accessible to them in order to participate fully in the realisation of their rights. A part of the Communications Platform will involve the development and dissemination of child-friendly versions of publications that are of relevance to children, over a range of age groups.

**ACTION
14**

RAISING AWARENESS

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
14.1 UNCRC	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Develop and sustain an online site to promote the rights of children and young people across society.	2023-2028
14.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Establish a Communications Youth Advisory Panel to ensure the Communications Platform reflects their priorities.	2023-2024
14.3	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Establish a Network of Champions across society to promote the rights of children and young people.	2004
14.4	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; All Departments and agencies	Publish child-friendly versions of policies and strategies which are relevant to children and young people, for various age groups.	2023-2028

3.8 PARENTING SUPPORT

Supporting Parents is the national model for parenting support services, published in 2022, which takes a whole-of-government approach to improving supports for parenting. It follows a commitment in *First 5* to improve existing parenting supports provided across a range of Government departments and state agencies, through the development of a national model. Importantly, *Supporting Parents* defines a parent as any person with a parenting role, which is any person with primary or major responsibility for the care of a child under the age of 18 years.

Parenting support services provide information and services aimed at strengthening parents’ knowledge, confidence and skills to help achieve the best outcomes for children and families. Examples of parenting supports include: parenting support programmes; parent and toddler groups; parenting talks; information sharing and referrals; mentoring; and specific targeted supports, such as perinatal care or support for single parents.

In response to the recommendation made by the UN Committee in relation to children in informal kinship care, the Department is developing a scoping paper to guide the development of a policy on the rights of children in informal kinship care. The scoping paper will identify the key issues for consideration and the information required to inform the development of a policy specifically to address the needs of children and families in private care arrangements/informal kinship care in Ireland.

It is important that parents have access to support and information. *Connecting Government 2030*, the digital and ICT strategy for the public service, commits to making these processes easier for people, stating that “a priority under this strategy will be the availability of life events services, recognising that no one should need to know every government service or requirement relating to a life event such as registering a birth or death, starting a new business or returning to Ireland.”¹⁹ DCEDIY will work towards achieving intuitive processes for parents engaging online with government through the Life Events Portal.

ACTION 15 PARENTING SUPPORT

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
15.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department of Health; Department of Education; HSE; Tusla	Implement <i>Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services</i> .	2026
15.2	Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Establish Parenting Hubs in all CYPSC areas.	2026
15.3	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Publish a list of effective parenting services available nationwide annually.	2026
15.4	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Develop a scoping paper to guide the development of a policy on the rights of children in informal kinship care.	2024
15.5	Department of Tourism, Arts, Culture, the Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	Support the work of both the Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta and Glór na nGael organisations in providing linguistic supports for Irish speaking families, both within and outside the Gaeltacht.	2024-2028

ACTION 16 LIFE EVENTS

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
16.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Explore options to provide timely, relevant information to parents based on life events, including through the 'Life Events' Portal, working with Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform.	2023-2028

¹⁹ Connecting Government 2030: A Digital and ICT Strategy for Ireland's Public Service

3.9 YOUTH SERVICES

One important way in which Government supports young people to thrive, to achieve their potential and to live fulfilling lives now and in the future is through the provision of youth work and other non-formal development opportunities. Participation in high-quality non-formal youth programmes and projects supports young people across the five National Outcomes. This is especially important in relation to young people experiencing disadvantage, marginalisation or who are otherwise vulnerable.

In recent years, important progress was made in improving access to youth services for vulnerable cohorts of young people. Notably, this has been achieved through a major reform programme that led to the establishment of the *UBU Your Place Your Space* scheme which provides targeted supports to young people who are disadvantaged, marginalised or vulnerable.

Access to mainstream youth services is valuable for all young people, whatever their circumstances. Funding to support services and opportunities aimed at all young people is provided through the *Youth Services Grant Scheme*. This scheme is being reformed with the aim of developing a funding and governance system which is responsive to the current and emerging needs of young people and supported by a sustainable and transparent funding infrastructure.

ACTION 17 YOUTH SERVICES

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
17.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Develop and implement a <i>Youth Services Action Plan</i> to provide a strategic direction for the delivery of youth services over the lifetime of this Framework.	2023-2028
17.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Support the provision of high-quality and inclusive youth opportunities, spaces and services, by providing funding, guidance and other supports to organisations who deliver youth services.	2023-2028
17.3	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Implement a robust data collection and evaluation system so that young people's participation in youth services, and in particular, the inclusion of young people who are marginalised, vulnerable or disadvantaged can be measured and enhanced.	2023-2028
17.4	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Ensure that young people have a role in the development and delivery of youth services.	2023-2028
17.5	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Continue to develop the UBU Your Place Your Space targeted services funding scheme, including by means of an external review ahead of the 2027 application cycle.	2023-2028
17.6	The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	Provide increased investment in Irish-medium youth services for young Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht.	2024-2028

3.10 INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

The concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2023 recommended reviewing the effectiveness of existing mechanisms for facilitating inter-agency coordination and activities affecting children, and taking measures to strengthen the monitoring and coordination of activities for the implementation of the UNCRC.

The responsibility for services for children and young people is shared by multiple government departments and agencies. Furthermore, service planning must account for local area needs and existing service provision. A lack of service coordination was raised as an issue during both public and targeted consultations during *Young Ireland's* development. Gaps may arise where agencies' protocols, procedures, budgets or criteria for services are not aligned to ensure a full coverage of the needs of children, young people or families.

CHILD CARE (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023

The Heads and General Scheme of the Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2023 was published in April 2023 following a very significant review and consultation process. The General Scheme includes proposals to enshrine interagency cooperation in law in the context of matters relevant to the Child Care Act. This cooperation is intended to support State agencies to work together to fulfil their mandate for children.

Cooperation will include the sharing of information between relevant bodies in accordance with the law and as necessary and proportionate. The General Scheme also proposes placing Children and Young People Services Committees (CYPSCs) on a statutory footing in order to recognise and enhance their local coordination role.

A National Child Care Act Advisory Committee is to be established, which will have representatives from relevant government departments, An Garda Síochána, Tusla, HSE and others as appropriate. The purpose of this Committee will be to examine the operation of various sections of the Child Care Act; it is envisaged that it will have a problem-solving focus and that it will be comprised of senior officials who have the authority to make decisions and commitments which are intended to address any issues that the Committee has identified.

It is intended that the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, in consultation with other relevant Ministers, will give direction to the Committee annually setting out a programme of work.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES COMMITTEES

The key structures for inter-agency coordination for children and young people are the Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC).

CYPSC plan and coordinate services for children and young people. These are organised by counties or similar geographic groupings. Their overall purpose is to improve outcomes for children and young people through local and national interagency working. CYPSCs are county-level committees that bring together the main statutory, community and voluntary providers of services to children and young people. Local CYPSCs help identify and agree on key priorities for children and young people with the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), which can then be presented to relevant government departments and state agencies.

CHILD AND FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORKS

Tusla has established 121 Child and Family Support Networks (CFSNs) across the country. These are multi-agency networks established to improve access to support services for children and their families using local, area-based approaches.

These partnership-based networks are open to any local services that have an input into families’ lives. Members of the networks come from a variety of agencies or local, voluntary and community services. CFSNs aim to work effectively in partnership with families to ensure that there is ‘no wrong door’ for families, and that all families in their locality receive easily accessible support, appropriate to meet their needs.

The *Meitheal Early Intervention Practice Model* is the case co-ordinating process for multiagency delivery of supports within CFSNs. Network members work collaboratively to address the needs of the child and ensure a continuum of support. The model promotes a systemic method of service delivery providing a wide range of services, including universal services, to more targeted and intensive supports.

ACTION 18 INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
18.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Tusla	Review of Children and Young People’s Services Committees (CYPSC).	2024
18.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Tusla	Ensure adequate resourcing of CYPSC to perform their coordination role effectively.	2023-2024
18.3	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Establish Children and Young Persons Services Committees on a statutory basis via amendments to the Child Care Act 1991.	2023-2024
18.4	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Tusla	Continue to develop and support Child and Family Support Networks (CFSNs) to ensure children and families can receive easily accessible support, appropriate to meet their identified needs and to support the effective delivery of Meitheal for individual children. This includes increasing participation by all services for children in each local CFSN by providing training and guidance to all members of networks (i.e. all local statutory children and families service providers and local voluntary and community children and families services) and, ensuring that networks can provide feedback into local and national planning and policy-making in a regular and structured manner.	2023-2028
18.5	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Tusla	Build on the work carried out by CYPSC to date in supporting young carers, co-develop and disseminate good practice guidelines for professionals working with children and young people to best support young carers.	2024

3.11 WORKFORCE

Providing quality services for children and young people, and achieving the five National Outcomes, is highly dependent on a skilled and professional workforce. Workforce planning is crucial to ensure that we have sufficient numbers of professionals in social work, health, education, early child care and other areas to meet the needs of children, young people and their families.

ALL OF GOVERNMENT WILL BE REQUIRED TO ADDRESS THESE WORKFORCE ISSUES, AS MANY PROFESSIONS SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

In recent years there has been an increased demand for health services, while an increase in social work vacancies has multiple impacts across service delivery and disability grades also face supply issues. In the Early Learning and Care (ELC) sector, *Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare 2022-2028* set out a series of actions to meet the targets in respect of workforce set out in *First 5*. All of government will be required to address these workforce issues, as many professions support the needs of children and young people.

ACTION 19 WORKFORCE

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
19.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Through the communications platform, support cross-government efforts to promote public service work with children and young people, across all of the relevant professions.	2023-2028
19.2	Department of the Taoiseach; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Promote cross-government coordination in the realisation of children workforce ambitions, including the commitment to develop a children's health workforce.	2023-2025



SPOTLIGHTS

This Framework will identify areas which require action across Government, and focus on these pressing challenges in a focused, time-bound way as ‘Spotlights’. Spotlights will be chosen based on:

- the need for coordinated actions across government,
- significant areas of concern for children and young people identified in published data, and evidence from published sources, and
- feedback from consultations with children, young people and other stakeholders, as well as reports on areas where action is needed.

In short, we recognise that greater, more focused attention is required in some areas where children and young people are struggling. Some of these are readily apparent from our own data set, such as Child Poverty and Mental Health and Well-being, but others will require more detailed consideration over the lifetime of the framework. New Spotlights will be developed in areas where they can make the greatest difference.

4.1 CHILD POVERTY AND WELL-BEING PROGRAMME OFFICE



The establishment of the Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office in the Department of the Taoiseach reflects the Government’s prioritisation of child poverty as a key issue facing Ireland.

The Programme Office will ensure co-ordination across Government, provide strategic leadership from the centre of government, and bring enhanced accountability to the child poverty agenda in order to make a tangible difference to the lives of children and their families. The Programme Office is driven by the belief that an enhanced whole-of-government approach can be complemented by a sharper strategic focus and prioritisation on key issues.

CHILD POVERTY IS A KEY ISSUE FACING IRELAND.

Recently, the government has published the initial Programme Plan: “From Poverty to Potential: A Programme Plan for Child Well-being 2023-2025”. The objective of the programme is to focus cross-government attention on those areas that will make the greatest difference, especially for children who are more likely to experience poverty and who face greater challenges in overcoming it. The programme builds on the six priority areas identified by Government which have the potential to bring about significant change for families and children.



INCOME SUPPORTS AND JOBLESSNESS	<p>International and domestic research shows that adjustments to the welfare system can have a significant impact on child poverty. However, tackling poverty is complex and income supports cannot be considered without an examination of the incentives and supports for work.</p> <p>The Programme Office will monitor efforts to provide supports and services to families to allow them to fully participate in society and continue reducing the level of child poverty, as well as supports for parents in accessing family-friendly employment.</p>
EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE	<p>The benefits of high-quality early learning and care extend widely. Labour force participation of parents reduces the risk of poverty. Early learning and childcare also promotes children's overall well-being, supports good physical and mental health, positive learning and social and emotional outcomes, and positive self-image and identity. These benefits are immediate and long-lasting. In recent years there has been record levels of investment in early learning and care, and there are plans to deepen and broaden the range of supports.</p> <p>The Programme Office will monitor progress in relation to early learning and care including the sufficient supply of suitable qualified personnel and the interplay between this and other supports which are critical to protecting families and children at risk of poverty.</p>
REDUCING THE COST OF EDUCATION	<p>The cost of education is a significant challenge for families living in poverty. Government is developing a range of initiatives aimed at supporting families with the cost of primary, secondary and tertiary education. Access to training and education plays a significant role in supporting labour market participation and reducing the risk of poverty for low-income households, including lone-parent households.</p> <p>The Programme Office will monitor progress on existing commitments in relation to reducing the cost of education and supporting access to third-level education for families.</p>
FAMILY HOMELESSNESS	<p>Stable and appropriate accommodation is an essential pre-requisite for the well-being of children. Given the significant levels of family homelessness it is important to prioritise action aimed at preventing homelessness, accelerating exits from homelessness, and mitigating the impact of inappropriate housing</p> <p>While housing policy generally has a significant momentum and existing oversight arrangements, the Programme Office will help to provide a focus on how other measures can assist in preventing family homelessness and helping those in homeless services as they transition to more stable housing arrangements.</p>

continued



CONSOLIDATING AND INTEGRATING FAMILY AND PARENTAL SUPPORT, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SERVICES

There is a wide range of statutory services, commissioned services, grant supported services on offer to children, young people and their families. Some of these services offer clear and well-documented opportunities to identify vulnerabilities and provide signposts and gateways to other more intensive or specialised services. However, there is substantial variation between the levels of provision, local practice models and the formal or informal integration of supports, services and referral arrangements. There is an opportunity to develop a clearer, more coherent framework for families which can respond to their needs, and create pathways for those children and families to the supports they need. Such a networked multi-disciplinary approach will impact the recruitment and retention of staff working with children.

The Programme Office will work with relevant government departments and agencies to develop this networked approach, to ensure consistency of access to effective supports and to identify funding requirements and activity targets.

ENHANCING PARTICIPATION IN CULTURE, ARTS AND SPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AFFECTED BY POVERTY

Sporting and cultural activities play a crucial part in children's well-being, and long-term outcomes, but participation levels are heavily stratified by parental income, as well as availability and access. The Programme for Government commits to increasing the exposure of children at risk of poverty to such activities. This ambition encompasses a broader range of structured and free-play opportunities.

The Programme Office will monitor progress on existing commitments in relation to culture, sports participation and efforts to tackle disadvantage in Gaeltacht areas.

In order to support its mission of ensuring co-ordination across government, to provide leadership and to enhance accountability, the Programme Office will work closely with the range of stakeholders across government who hold responsibility for actions across these six areas. The Programme Office will work with partners to ensure that existing mechanisms to support budget planning and policy development are responsive to the needs of children and their families.

THE PROGRAMME OFFICE IS DRIVEN BY THE BELIEF THAT AN ENHANCED WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH CAN BE COMPLEMENTED BY A SHARPER STRATEGIC FOCUS AND PRIORITISATION ON KEY ISSUES.

4.2 CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SPOTLIGHT

The *Spotlight* on youth mental health will provide a further opportunity to progress collaborative working, under-pinned by Ireland's national mental health policy *Sharing the Vision*.

Sharing the Vision aims to enhance the provision of mental health services and supports across a broad continuum, from mental health promotion, prevention, and early intervention to acute and specialist mental health service delivery, during the period 2020-2030. *Sharing the Vision Implementation Plan 2022-2024* was collaboratively developed by the HSE and the Department of Health, overseen by the National Implementation and Monitoring Committee (NIMC). The Plan sets out individual programme pathways of implementation for each of the 100 policy recommendations for the next three years. Further implementation phases will be developed and rolled out between 2025-2030.

As part of the implementation of *Sharing the Vision*, key stakeholders from across Government Departments and their agencies are already engaging to drive specific and defined recommendations relating to youth mental health. This *Spotlight* initiative will build on these existing structures while also providing the opportunity to ensure that youth mental health priorities are embedded across relevant policies, initiatives, and service development plans across a wide range of departments and agencies. As such, the *Spotlight* initiative will drive a focused effort to break down the possible siloed nature of youth mental health services under different parent Departments by facilitating cross-working between departments and its agencies in order to identify service gaps, scope out opportunities for youth mental health service improvement, while facilitating a co-ordinated approach to service planning.

THE SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE WILL DRIVE A FOCUSED EFFORT TO BREAK DOWN THE POSSIBLE SILOED NATURE OF YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.

The youth mental health *Spotlight* is a timely support for the delivery of improved mental health supports for young people. In the context of the alignment of HSE services under the Regional Health Areas, and in the context of a new HSE office for Youth Mental Health within the HSE, this Spotlight Programme will also provide a pivotal opportunity for

inter-departmental and cross-agency policy integration and implementation, it will support the developing workplan of the Youth Mental Health Office and will provide the opportunity to align services regionally. Further opportunities also arise in the context of the development of the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy and Action Plan 2024-2027.

There are a variety of specific youth mental health recommendations under *Sharing the Vision* which support improved collaborative working to develop and deliver improved mental health supports for children and young people. These include:

<p>PROMOTION, PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION</p>	<p>It is important that there be a focus in childhood and adolescence on positive mental health and the protective factors for enhancing well-being and quality of life. Early prevention and intervention will strengthen children and young people and improve their emotional resilience.</p> <p>The Child and Youth Mental Health and Well-being Spotlight will monitor implementation of existing commitments to promote mental well-being as outlined in <i>Sharing the Vision</i> (Recommendations 2, 4, 8, 9 and 10), Healthy Ireland and Sláintecare.</p>
<p>ACCESS AND EQUALITY</p>	<p>Children and young people should have timely, appropriate and equal access to evidence-informed mental health supports without fear of discrimination. In recognition of the diverse nature of mental health needs, a multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder approach is required. It is important to strengthen communities and improve social capital through increased participation; and to reduce structural barriers to good mental health through initiatives that reduce discrimination and inequalities.</p> <p>The Child and Youth Mental Health and Well-being Spotlight will monitor implementation of existing commitments to improve access to mental health supports as outlined in <i>Sharing the Vision</i> (Recommendations #7, 13, 17, 20, 34 35, 36, 37, 38), Healthy Ireland and Sláintecare.</p>
<p>SUPPORTING FAMILIES</p>	<p>It is important that families, who are experiencing mental health difficulties, are supported to avail of an adequate income, and to avail of employment, housing, and education opportunities, without fear of discrimination, on the same basis as every other citizen.</p> <p>The Child and Youth Mental Health and Well-being Spotlight will monitor implementation of existing commitments to ensure equality of access as outlined in policy e.g. <i>Sharing the Vision</i>, Comprehensive Employment Strategy 2015-2024, National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027, National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021, Equality Budgeting, the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025, and Future FET: Transforming Learning. National Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024.</p>

continued



DIGITAL MENTAL HEALTH

Health supports for young people, including mental health supports, need to reflect the modern society that young people experience and the way in which they use technology and engage with social media. Digital health refers to using online or other digital technology to provide prevention and care. Some digital mental health programmes focus on promoting health and well-being and preventing ill health, while others deliver early intervention and mental health treatment. There are numerous digital mental health programmes available, increasing individual healthcare management choices and improving access to support.

It is recognised that online safety for young people is a central concern and there is a need to focus on establishing codes that will combat cyber bullying, set up mechanisms for complaints processes, ensure that minimum standards are upheld in terms of advertising and sponsorship, promote digital citizenship among children, support digital literacy, and develop a research programme in this space.

The Child and Youth Mental Health and Well-being Spotlight will monitor implementation of existing commitments to promote online safety for young people and to ensure safe use of digital mental health interventions as outlined in the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill (2022), through the office of the Online Safety Commissioner appointed in 2023 and through national mental health policy implementation (*Sharing the Vision Recommendations #2, #31*)

4.3 DISABILITY SERVICES



Children and young people who have a disability may be more vulnerable to poorer outcomes than those who do not. According to Census 2022, 12.9% of children and young people have a disability to some or a great extent which, while a lower percentage than the population at large, represents 215,945 people. A recent report on public support for disability policy summarised some of the issues for those with disabled people: “many face multiple day-to-day and systemic challenges. These include but are not limited to additional expenses, access to housing, and everyday accessibility difficulties.”²⁰

There is a significant unmet need in disability services for assessments and therapies for children and young people. While funding has been provided to expand the Children’s Disability Network Teams which provide specialist disability therapy services to children with complex needs, waiting times for assessment and therapies are unacceptably long. Ireland is facing significant challenges recruiting staff, and a high rate of staff turnover. While there are over 45,000 children registered with Children’s Disability Network Teams, in late 2022 there were around 700 vacant posts, or a third of all positions.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and UNCRC both underpin the requirement to develop high-quality services for children and young adults with disabilities that will support and empower them to live full and meaningful lives in their communities. According to the UNCRPD, “children with disabilities should have full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children.” The Programme for Government committed to develop a plan to coordinate the implementation of the UNCRPD, as a part of a range of commitments to support our obligations under this convention.

This Spotlight will focus attention on the areas of most significant difficulty in disability services for children and young people. We know there are challenging issues in this area, and we know children and young people themselves rightly expect better. Across many consultations, including consultations in advance of this framework, children and young people, as well as parents and professionals, are clear that they expect a prompt, effective service which meets their individual needs, and supports them to lead fulfilled lives. Importantly, the Spotlight will focus on the needs and experience of the service user, and the measure of success or otherwise will be a measurable improvement to the outcomes of children and young people. This focus will be in the context of resources that are available within relevant services and the priorities that are determined by the relative needs of all service users.

²⁰ Shane Timmons, Eamonn Carroll and Frances McGinnity, *Experimental Tests of Public Support For Disability Policy* (ESRI, 2023), ix.

In this context, it is important that services and policies are responsive to user needs. The underpinning policies will be monitored to ensure a responsive and dynamic approach can be taken in conjunction with the HSE and lead agencies. Emerging issues will be examined closely with HSE National Office and a collaborative approach will be sought to address challenges in a creative and timely manner.

In July 2023, the Government approved the forthcoming *Action Plan for Disability Services 2024-2026*, which is due for publication in the autumn. This Action Plan seeks to address, amongst other things, capacity deficits within the HSE's community-based specialist disability services programmes. Children's services comprise an important focus of the Plan, with a dedicated Roadmap for Children's Services developed by the HSE, and some of the priority areas of action in this regard are as follows:

REDUCE WAITING LISTS

Prompt assessment and delivery of services for children and young people who may have a disability is critical. Early intervention typically delivers better, less disruptive outcomes for the service user, and makes more efficient use of resources. Children and young people should receive a prompt service, and the Disability Action Plan contains actions that seek to reduce waiting lists in 2024, 2025 and 2026.

The Disability Action Plan 2024-2026 will work to increase capacity, in Children's Disability Network Teams up to 2026, in an effort to provide more, better and faster services for those who need them.

INCREASE CAPACITY TO ENHANCE SERVICE DELIVERY

Children and young people with a disability may require several different kinds of services provided by different professionals. Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) were established to deliver this multidisciplinary service, but staffing and retention issues have impacted delivery of this model. Qualified health and social care professionals, across a range of disciplines, are required to improve the services available to children, young people and their families so that the lives of those availing of services are enhanced and optimised.

The Disability Action Plan 2024-2026 will specifically address workforce supply issues affecting CDNTs in an effort to provide a more comprehensive service in which the needs of children and young people with complex disabilities are met with the necessary multidisciplinary interventions. The Action Plan will aim to deliver over 600 extra staff up to 2026.

continued



<p>TACKLE THE DEMAND FOR ASSESSMENT OF NEED IN A TIMELY MANNER</p>	<p>Early intervention is critical to delivering good outcomes for children and young people, and in general the faster a response is delivered, the greater its impact. Focusing on the prevention of problems from arising, and intervening early when they arise, is typically the most rational and effective use of resources. There are particular difficulties with assessing the needs of children and young people which must be addressed as a priority.</p> <p>The Progressing Disability Services Roadmap will drive a new Assessment of Need process and tackle a backlog of statutory Assessments of Need. While health and social care needs can be provided without the AON, the need for children to have their AON to avail of other State services needs to be addressed.</p>
<p>SUPPORT CHILDREN IN CARE</p>	<p>We know that disability can intersect with other disadvantages to compound problems for children and young people. Many professionals are clear that there are particular difficulties where disability services interact with Tusla services.</p> <p>No child with a complex disability will be taken in to state care as a consequence of insufficient service provision. Children in care will be supported to access HSE services in the same way as other children, and an 'in care' status will be an additional vulnerability factor to be considered.</p>
<p>EDUCATION (INCLUDING ELC AND FHE)</p>	<p>In addition to issues with health services specifically, the Spotlight will consider how to support disability education services, and how these can interact with other services through policy initiatives such as AIM and the National Access Plan. The Spotlight programmes are intended to tackle issues where many departments and agencies have shared responsibility, and this represents a good opportunity to bring together the many stakeholders in this area.</p>
<p>SOCIAL INCLUSION</p>	<p>Measures to ensure equality of opportunity for children and young people with a disability are critically important, and we will explore opportunities to work across Government to strengthen or hasten initiatives which are already underway in this space. This will include considering how youth services, can support social inclusion for children and young people with disabilities.</p>
<p>PATHWAYS FOR SCHOOL LEAVERS</p>	<p>Young people with a disability can find the move out of the wraparound supports of school life and disability children's services difficult.</p> <p>The Disability Spotlight will facilitate the move to adult services by ensuring that there are measures in schools on transition planning to support young people with disabilities to plan for their future options. We will continue to provide around 1200 school leavers places annually in HSE specialist disability day services. These will be personalised supports in line with the New Directions model of service. For people who do not wish to enter HSE services, a cross-government approach will be developed to ensure that there are alternatives to day services, through education, training or employment pathways.</p>

continued



INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES

The following actions are being taken to ensure that the permanent participation structures supported by DCEDIY are accessible to seldom heard young people, which can include young people living with disability, and to provide guidance to policy makers and those wishing to consult with them effectively.

Comhairle na nÓg, child and youth councils in each of the 31 Local Authority areas across Ireland, give children and young people a voice in the development of local and national services and policies. The National Youth Assembly of Ireland convenes on specific policy areas, such as climate, rural development and other issues of national importance. The Assembly is made up of delegates from Comhairle na nÓg (youth councils), youth organisations and relevant non-governmental organisations.

DCEDIY is working with the National Participation Office to develop further measures to strengthen the capacity of our youth participation structures to be inclusive of a broad and diverse membership. The aim is to ensure that youth participation structures including Comhairle na nÓg and the National Youth Assembly of Ireland are inclusive of all young people. The focus is on the practical measures that can be taken to enhance inclusivity in the short and longer term.



GOVERNANCE

Young Ireland provides a platform to realise the rights of children and young people in Ireland, so that all partners can work effectively together to ensure children and young people can thrive. The Policy Framework will therefore re-establish governance structures to provide a forum for stakeholder engagement, drive implementation of existing policy commitments and ensure accountability in the development of further policies impacting children and young people.

The overall design of these structures has been informed by both the Mid-term Review of *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*²¹ and the views of the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Advisory Council on shaping the Policy Framework. Key elements of the previous governance structures were broadly endorsed with some observations noted on the composition, recruitment of members, turnover and effectiveness. To address these issues it is intended that the new structures will make greater use of the Senior Officials Group which serves the Cabinet Committee on Children and Education and will act as the key structure to support measures that are cross-governmental in nature.

With the envisaged establishment of a National Child Care Act Advisory Committee and the renewed focus on consolidating and integrating family and parental support, the CYSPC National Steering Group that formed part of Better Outcome Brighter Futures governance structures will not be re-established here.

CABINET COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

The governance structures described below and pictured in Figure 1 will ultimately report in to the Cabinet Committee on Children and Education whose membership includes the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence; Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications and Minister for Transport; Minister for Health, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Minister for Education; Minister for Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform; Minister for Finance; Minister for Social Protection and Minister for Rural and Community Development; Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage; and Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Other Ministers or Ministers of State will be invited to participate as required.

²¹ Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Mid-term review of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020* (Government for Ireland, 2014) available online at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c79614-mid-term-review-of-better-outcomes-brighter-futures/> (23 August, 2023).

This committee will oversee the implementation of Programme for Government commitments, including this Policy Framework, with a specific focus on child poverty and well-being. It is supported in its work in this area by the Senior Officials Group on Children and Education.

The governance structures for the implementation of the Policy Framework will involve the following groups.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S POLICY FORUM

The Policy Forum will be chaired by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth with a Deputy Chair from the Department of the Taoiseach. It will have Assistant Secretary members from all Government departments; and relevant agencies, the Chair and representation from the Children and Young People's Advisory Council.

The Policy Forum will oversee and support implementation of policies impacting children and young people within their respective spheres of responsibility, across government departments, agencies and sectors including the Spotlights. The Forum may also establish interdepartmental or interagency subgroups to address specific cross-Government issues arising during the lifetime of the Policy Framework and members will also have the opportunity to bring proposals to the Forum for the establishment of further Spotlights to address major policy areas.

It is currently envisaged that the Policy Forum would meet two to three times per annum with the Advisory Council proposed to meet formally three to four times per annum. The Terms of Reference and Work Programme, including meeting dates, will be developed by DCEDIY and coordinated with the schedule and work programme for the Cabinet Committee and associated Senior Officials Group.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Children and Young People's Advisory Council will provide a forum for the community and voluntary sector and independent experts to engage with the Children and Young People's Policy Forum to advise and support the development and implementation of policies in respect of children and young people.

It will consist of up to 16 members. In line with the reviews undertaken in respect of its precursor under *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and in light of the evolution of the issues impacting children and young people, its membership may be diversified beyond the three previous pillars of Youth, Early Years and Children. This may include specific representatives with expertise in some of the key issues facing children and young people today, such as disability, mental health, specific inequality issues, digital issues, child poverty, play and recreation or housing.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES

Consultation with children and young people was central to the development of this Policy Framework and will inform its ongoing implementation. Young people will engage with its implementation through the National Youth Assembly of Ireland, which includes delegates from Comhairle na nÓg, Young Voices: EU Youth Dialogue, young people nominated by youth organisations, and guest delegates.

A priority is to embed the participative process in the implementation structures. DCEDIY will further examine the optimum approach for this in consultation with children and young people. This should include primary school-aged children and children under five where decisions have an impact on their lives, using appropriate methodological approaches and settings, with the support of Hub na nÓg as required. Moreover, representatives on the Advisory Council will be tasked with ensuring the voice of children and young people informs their work.

YOUNG PEOPLE WILL ENGAGE WITH ITS IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH THE NATIONAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY OF IRELAND.

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

While acknowledging that most of the commitments outlined within this Policy Framework and other pre-existing Government policies will be implemented by their respective Government departments, an Implementation Team has been established within DCEDIY to:

- support the functioning of the governance structures being established under the framework,
- drive delivery of the majority of the elements of the Enabling Environment set out in Section 7, and
- develop and maintain the communications platform described in Section 7.9 to promote the rights of children and young people, and embed the consideration of those rights across Government and broader society.

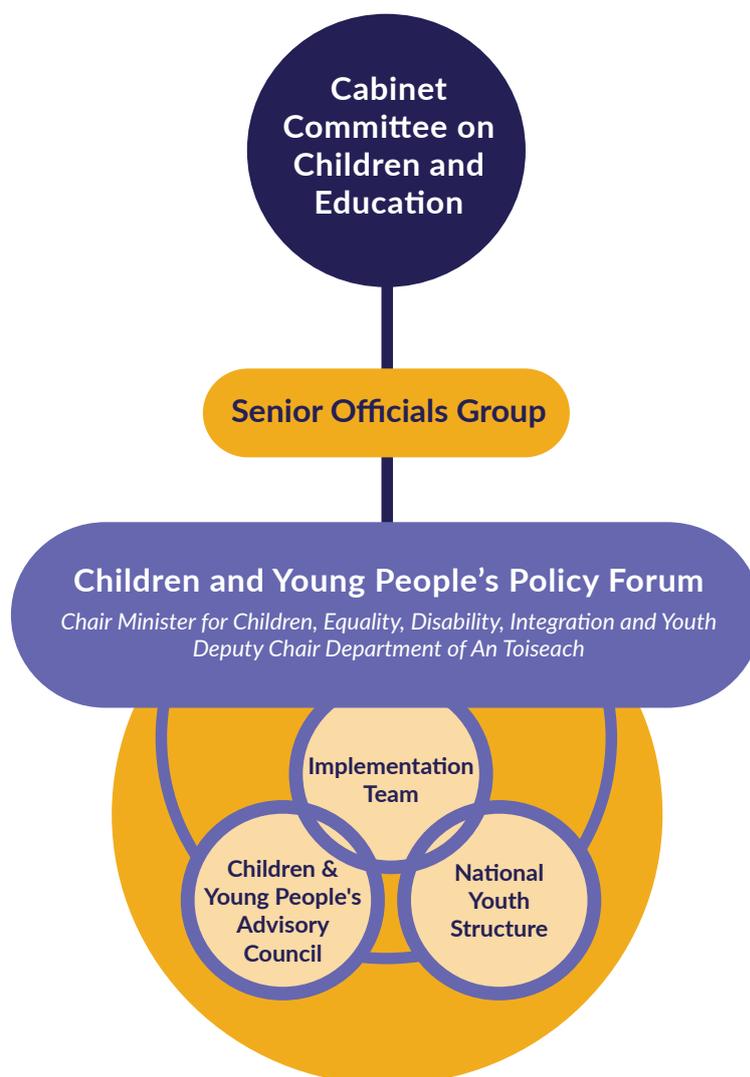


Figure 1 Child and youth policy structures

Further consideration will be given to the role these structures should play in acting as a sponsor to improve integrated delivery of services to children and young people, particularly in the context of the renewed focus on consolidating and integrating family and parental support, health and well-being services as part of the Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme.

Government will assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the commitments in *Young Ireland* to realising better outcomes for children and young people, tracking progress over time. In addition to tracking and reporting on the specific commitments set out in this Framework, improvements in the five National Outcomes will be monitored by reference to the Children and Young People Indicators Set and the exact mechanisms by which this will be done are being determined as part of the OECD project that is described below.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT INSTRUMENT (TSI) PROJECT WITH THE OECD – “TOWARDS A NEW GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH POLICIES IN IRELAND”

The Technical Support Instrument (TSI) is an EU programme that provides tailor-made technical expertise to EU Member States to design and implement reforms at the national level in line with EU priorities. DCEDIY successfully applied for technical support under this initiative in 2022. Entitled “Towards a new governance framework for children and youth policies in Ireland”, the project is aligned with the aims of the [EU Child Guarantee](#) and examines child poverty in Ireland by providing research and expertise towards the implementation of this Policy Framework.

The EU Commission has appointed the OECD to this technical support role and function. Interim outputs from the project have already informed the design and content of *Young Ireland*, but more detail is expected to be completed in 2024 and the above governance structures, including the reporting mechanisms, will be reviewed further at that point.



FIVE NATIONAL OUTCOMES

The previous policy framework for children and young people, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, identified five National Outcomes for children and young people which, if achieved, would be a good indication that they are doing well in Ireland.

ACTIVE AND HEALTHY

- They have the best possible physical and mental health;
- They make informed health and lifestyle choices;
- They enjoy leisure time, express themselves creatively and access nature and recreation.

ACHIEVING IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- They are positively engaging with their learning and development from birth;
- They can successfully navigate life's transitions and make informed choices around their future;
- They have the social, emotional and communication skills to achieve their potential and lead fulfilling lives.

SAFE AND PROTECTED FROM HARM

- They have family and homes that are loving, connected, safe and nurturing;
- They are protected from violence, neglect, ill-treatment and harm;
- Everyone is alert to child protection issues and knows how to report a concern.

ECONOMIC SECURITY AND OPPORTUNITY

- They are protected from poverty and social exclusion;
- They live in stable housing that is affordable, warm and dry, in child- and youth-friendly communities;
- They have pathways to economic participation and independent living.

CONNECTED, RESPECTED AND CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR WORLD

- They are aware of their rights, and are civically socially and environmentally engaged offline and online.
- They are accepted, respected and valued at home, school, and in their community.
- They have their own identity, connected to their culture, language and beliefs.

6.1 ACTIVE AND HEALTHY

BEING ACTIVE AND HEALTHY MEANS...

Children and young people have the best possible physical and mental health

- **39.5%** of infants were breastfed after three months. However, this is still low compared to other developed countries;
- **15.8%** of children and **30%** of young people are overweight or obese, as of 2020 and 2022, respectively;
- **52%** of 11-17 year-olds are happy with the way they are, lower than in 2010, and **42%** of 11-17 year-olds are very happy with life at present, significantly lower than in 2010;
- **20%** of young people 15-24 have probable mental health problems, double the figure from a survey in 2015.

Children and young people make informed health and lifestyle choices

- A substantial proportion of children and young people are not achieving optimum levels of physical activity, with **22.1%** of children (11-17) and **61%** of young people (15-24) achieving this level in 2018 and 2019, respectively.
- Fewer children (11-17) are smoking, fewer children report early alcohol use, and by most measures children are using fewer illicit drugs.
- Significantly fewer teenagers are giving birth in 2020 than in previous years, and fewer children (15-17) report having early sexual activity.

Children and young people enjoy leisure time, express themselves creatively and access nature and recreation

- **70.3%** of those aged 16-19 years and **59.1%** of those aged 20-24 report sports participation on a weekly basis, lower than previous intervals, albeit the data was collected in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- More children report playing with their family, at **41.3%** of 11-13-year-olds in 2018, higher than previous data intervals.

Box 1. What it means to be active and healthy, and findings from the Children and Young People's Indicator Set

Many children and young people are active and healthy, enjoying good physical and mental health. When asked what the best thing about being a child in Ireland was as part of the *'What WE Think'* reports, many children aged 4 to 13 had positive messages about their health, nutrition, active play and sport. When asked what they liked about Ireland, the most common theme was leisure, culture and play, where children enjoyed formal physical activities and sport, as well as playing outside with friends. According to one child: "There is lots of activities such as rugby, GAA, soccer and loads more."²² Children appreciated having access to adequate food, as part of a wider enjoyment of childhood without responsibilities, as well as having access to nature. Some children appreciated having access to healthcare.

There was some overlap between these messages and those expressed by young people aged 13 to 18 years. These young people suggested that their basic rights were met, including healthcare and mental health. One young person said they enjoyed clean air and open space, while another appreciated facilities, including mental health facilities like Jigsaw. According to one young person: "The best thing about being a young person in Ireland is the sport facilities available to us. There are many different clubs in each county, it is good and it's the best thing for us as it is easily achievable and improves mental health."²³

ACCORDING TO ONE CHILD: "THERE IS LOTS OF ACTIVITIES SUCH AS RUGBY, GAA, SOCCER AND LOADS MORE."

On the other hand, children and young people also had negative messages about health, mental health and physical activity when asked about what they don't like about Ireland and what they would change. According to the report, "as well as mentioning Covid-19 and an end to the virus, some children also wanted wider changes to the healthcare system. This included access to free health care, improved GP services with faster responses and treatment for cancer and blindness." Also within this theme was the desire for lifestyle changes. This included the healthier lifestyles of parents and adults (e.g. stop smoking, reduce alcohol use) and children (e.g. less sugar in their diet). Within this theme was a call for improved access to healthier foods (e.g. lower cost fruit and vegetables).²⁴

²² Deirdre Fullerton, *What WE Think: Consultation with Children and Young People on Children's Rights 2021* (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022), p.28.

²³ *Ibid*, p.54.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.9.

Concerns were consistently raised about the limited availability of mental health supports. For example, children raised poor mental health support and mental health education as an issue with the education system, and young people suggested schools lacked safe spaces.²⁵ However, some praised mental health supports, and welcomed the open discussion around mental health and well-being in Ireland.

FINDINGS FROM ADDITIONAL CONSULTATIONS

As part of the preparation for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, a review of these recent Government consultations was commissioned. In total, the review examined 20 consultations with 14,567 children and young people aged between five and 26. Children and young people shared their experiences of specific services such as the child care system, adoption regulation, International Protection, youth work services and the Garda Youth Diversion Projects. Consultations explored young people's views on LGBTI+ issues, school/education/and after-school care or school-aged childcare as well as their thoughts on education for sustainable development, health (healthy weight and mental health), internet safety, leisure, heritage and culture, and the environment.²⁶

Summarising health messages across all the consultations, the report noted that “it was clear from three consultations ... that sexual health, mental health and adolescent health in general is not being sufficiently addressed. For example, in one of the consultations ... young people suggested ways to improve health and well-being by increasing access to support groups and mental health services (e.g., Mindspace or Jigsaw). In the same consultation, young people suggested the concept of 'Nutrition Clinics' to encourage young people to have healthy lifestyles.”²⁷

Box 2. A review of recent consultations with children and young people

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.65.

²⁶ Deirdre Fullerton and Maria Herron, *What WE Think: A review of past consultations with children and young people as part of the UNCRC reporting process* (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022), p.4.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

The Government is already taking big steps to ensure children and young people are active and healthy. Some important policies and strategies under this outcome are:

Sharing the Vision 2020-2030. The Government's mental health policy takes a lifecycle approach and seeks to promote positive mental health and build resilience at all ages and stages in people's lives, specifically outlining recommendations to promote positive mental health and well-being among children and young people.

Stronger Together: HSE Mental Health Promotion Plan 2022-2027. *Stronger Together* is the first mental health promotion plan published by the HSE that includes action areas focused on promoting positive mental health across the population and among HSE staff, with goals to increase the proportion of people who are mentally healthy at every stage of their life, reduce inequities in mental health and well-being, and expand healthy promotion within the HSE and funded agencies.

Connecting for Life: Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020. *Connecting for Life* is Ireland's national cross-sector strategy to prevent suicide. In November 2020, the Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly TD and the Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People, Mary Butler TD, announced the extension of *Connecting for Life*, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide, to 2024.

Sláintecare. *Sláintecare* is the ten-year programme to transform our health and social care services. It is the roadmap for building a world-class health service in Ireland, envisioning one universal health service for all, providing the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme. The Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme aims to improve the long-term health and well-being of children and adults living in the most disadvantaged communities in Ireland by addressing the wider determinants of health.

Well-being Policy Statement and Framework for Practice. The *Well-being Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* supports educational institutions to promote well-being education, and recognise well-being as a priority. According to the framework, schools play a vital role in the promotion of children and young people's academic, physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development.

Progressing Disability Services (PDS) for Children and Young People. This over-arching policy focuses on improving therapy services for children with complex disabilities by reorganising children's services into multi-disciplinary Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT), providing for all children with disabilities based on need, regardless of diagnosis, where they live or where they go to school.

Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027. Part of Creative Ireland, Creative Youth represents a highly significant development in children and young people's arts and culture. This plan enables the creative potential of every child and young person aged 0-24 through a series of expanded and new initiatives that will be delivered between 2023 and 2027.

National Sports Policy 2018-2027. This policy sets out a vision for Irish Sport supported by 57 actions which aim to transform our sporting landscape by 2027. Overall, it aims to ensure more people participate in more sport, for their own health and well-being, enjoyment, community cohesion and for economic benefits for Ireland.

National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027. Ireland's *National Outdoor Recreation Strategy* sets out a vision, mission and series of actions which will lead, guide and facilitate the sustainable development and management of the outdoor recreation sector for the next five years. It also aims to increase participation in outdoor recreation, in order to realise social, health and economic benefits for Ireland.

The National Traveller Health Action Plan 2022-2027. The *National Traveller Health Action Plan* outlines significant Traveller health inequalities that must be addressed, and commits dedicated resources to improve health access and outcomes for Traveller children and young people.

Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025. The *Strategic Action Plan* provides a clear roadmap of how we can continue to work together to bring about good health, access to services, healthy environments, and the promotion of resilience and to ensure that everyone can enjoy physical and mental, health and well-being, to their full potential.

2023 Waiting List Action Plan. The *2023 Waiting List Action Plan* is the Government's plan to deliver sustained reductions in waiting list numbers and waiting times this year. It supports the HSE to deliver on a key priority to ensure timely access to treatment and care.

A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025. The *Obesity Policy and Action Plan* argues that being overweight/obese are significant risk factors for many chronic non-communicable diseases, and takes new steps to address the determinants of obesity and overweight, including among children.

Get Ireland Active! The National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland. Published in 2016, this plan recognises that physical activity is essential for health and well-being and sets out 60 actions to improve the level of physical activity across the population, with children and young people as a priority. As the timeframe of the plan has now expired, a successor policy document and action plan is currently being drafted.

National Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016-2021. The HSE developed this five-year strategic action plan, extended until the end of 2022, to recognise that breastfeeding provides a significant protective factor for children, and supports and encourages those who choose to breastfeed babies and young children up to two in Ireland.

PRIORITY: PLAY AND RECREATION

According to *Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*, “Play is central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child. Play is an important medium through which the child interacts with, explores and makes sense of the world ... Play is a source of joy and fulfilment for the child. It provides an important context and opportunity to enhance and optimise quality early childhood experiences.”

There is more to be done to create cities and urban centres where creative, playful and safe family-centred facilities are provided. Over the lifetime of *Young Ireland*, the built environment should move beyond the provision of playgrounds and recreation facilities in single locations and towards child and youth-friendly urban spaces.

ACTION 20 ACCESS TO PLAY AND RECREATION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
20.1	Department of Rural and Community Development	Through Local Community Development Committees strengthen the capacity of local authorities to integrate culture and creativity across place-making, regeneration, renewal, and in the development of more vibrant, creative, and sustainable places.	2026
20.2	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Ensure adequate provision of play and recreation spaces in the built environment through the planning process.	2025
20.3	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Support initiatives exploring the provision of child and youth-friendly urban spaces such as playable cities.	2026
20.4	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Assess current play and recreation policy, practice and provision and based on findings recommend future actions.	2026

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS

Nutrition

Many children and young people are at an unhealthy weight and may not be eating a nutritious diet. They are not to blame for the diet they consume, and it is important to note that unhealthy foods are easily and cheaply available to children and young people. As summarised in the [Indicator Set](#):

- 15.5% of children in first class were overweight or obese in 2018.
- 30% of young people 15-24 were overweight or obese in 2022.

There are particular barriers to eating healthy food for those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, where a healthy option can be more expensive, or require more time to prepare.

Good, nutritious food support's a child's health and development and allows them to make the most of their education. On 30th March 2023, the Department of Social Protection published an independent evaluation of the School Meals Programme which provides good food to schools and children and young people suffering disadvantage. The evaluation showed that the programme is very effective, and there is sufficient evidence to suggest that it improves attendance at schools and makes a difference to families, saving them both time and money. The Minister for Social Protection has announced that Hot School Meals are to be extended to all Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS) primary schools from September 2023. Budget 2024 is providing for the extension of the Hot School Meals programme to non-DEIS primary schools who apply, on a phased basis throughout next year. Expressions of interest have been received from over 900 non-DEIS schools in respect of 150,000 children.

ACTION 21 ACCESSIBLE NUTRITION EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
21.2	Department of Health, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	Work with An Coimisiún na Meán to develop codes and rules to restrict the advertising of foods and drinks deemed harmful to the health of children, promote healthy eating messaging, including through the <i>safefood</i> START campaign, and develop scientific guidelines for healthy eating for teenagers.	2024-2026

ACTION 22 AVAILABILITY OF NUTRITIOUS FOOD

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
22.1 Obesity Policy Action Plan 2016-2025	Department of Health	Evaluate the impact of the Sugar Sweetened Drinks Tax, and consider the possible impacts of an extension to other sugary snacks.	2025
22.2 Programme for Government	Department of Social Protection	Continue to review and expand the roll-out of the new Hot School Meals initiative, working with the Department of Education and the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform in implementing the roll out of the Hot School Meals programme to non-DEIS primary schools.	Roll-out eligibility to all DEIS primary schools - 2023 Commence roll-out of eligibility to non-DEIS primary schools - 2024
22.3	Department of Health	Following its conclusion in 2025, develop a successor to the <i>Obesity Policy Action Plan</i> with further initiatives to address childhood obesity and promote healthy eating.	2026

Breastfeeding

Ireland fares poorly in terms of the overall proportion of mothers engaged in breastfeeding compared to other rich countries. According to the Children and Young People’s Indicator Set, just 44.2% of mothers were breastfeeding exclusively on discharge from hospital in 2020, and 39.5% were breastfeeding at three months. As *First 5* sets out, ‘[t]he benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, both for babies and for mothers, during the first six months, are clearly demonstrated, and this is recommended, along with breastfeeding in combination with other foods until the age of two, by the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the HSE.’²⁸

Under the new Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023, parents who are working and are breastfeeding are now entitled to take one-hour off work (with pay) each day as a breastfeeding break up to two years after birth. The HSE is enhancing lactation supports by ensuring all professionals can provide advice and support in infant feeding as part of their wider roles.

ACTION 23 BREASTFEEDING

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
23.1 Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016-2021	HSE	Fully implement the <i>Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016-2021</i> .	2023

Exercise and Body Image

Many children and young people are not achieving an optimum level of physical activity and many are at an unhealthy weight. At the same time, a worrying proportion of children and young people suffer from problematic body image issues. As summarised in the [Indicator Set](#):

- 22.1% of children 11-17 achieved an optimum level of physical activity in 2018.
- 61% of young people 15-24 achieved an optimum level of physical activity in 2018.
- 28% of 11-17-year-olds think they are too fat, and 13% think they are too thin.

²⁸ Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028* (Government of Ireland, 2018), p.34.

Far more children and young people should achieve an optimum level of physical activity, especially those who are under 18. The wider findings from the *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children* (HBSC) survey show girls are less likely to exercise than boys, older children are less likely to exercise than younger children, and children from a higher social class were more likely to exercise more. These disparities should also be addressed.

ACTION 24 **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
24.1	Department of Health	Publish a successor <i>National Physical Activity Plan</i> which will build on progress made under the existing plan and seek to increase the proportion of children and young people achieving an optimum level of physical activity over its lifetime.	2024

Mental Health and Well-being

As discussed in the previous section on the Spotlight on mental health, there is strong evidence for prioritising the mental health of children and young people in particular. Government is making some progress in this area through general supports for the mental health and well-being of the whole population, and specific measures for children and young people. While the issues facing children and young people have been set out under the Spotlight, it is important to note that other significant new work is progress in this area, as outlined below.

ACTION 25 **SERVICE IMPROVEMENT**

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
25.1 Tusla/ HSE Protocol	HSE; Tusla	Ensure no child with a complex need, including a mental health issue, will be taken into State care as a consequence of insufficient service provision.	2023-2028

**ACTION
26**
SUICIDE PREVENTION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
26.1	Department of Health; HSE	Work with the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention to better understand methods of suicide among children and young people and ways of reducing access to means of suicide.	2026
26.2	Department of Health; HSE	Work with the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention to explore the suicide prevention training needs of 16-18-year-olds and develop solutions based on the research findings.	2026

**ACTION
27**
SUPPORT THROUGH EDUCATION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
27.1 UNCRC	Department of Education	Provide comprehensive mental health promotion, identification of needs in school and early intervention services in schools.	2027
27.2	Department of Education	Over the lifetime of <i>Young Ireland</i> , evaluate the recent counselling pilot for primary pupils	2028
27.3 First 5	Department of Education; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Ensure the necessary supports are in place to sustain learning for all children as they transition from Early Learning and Care (ELC) settings to primary school	2026

Healthcare

There are some cohorts of children and young people who have significantly worse health outcomes than the general population. According to the CSO, across the whole population affluent or very affluent people are more likely to feel their health is very good, and very disadvantaged people are more likely to have high blood pressure. And, according to a consultation with young people on the previous *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020*, many gaps exist in healthcare for young LGBTI+ people.

Separately, many people, including children and young people, are on hospital waiting lists in Ireland. While some of the significant healthcare developments are set out in the introduction to this chapter, more work is required to ensure all children and young people enjoy sufficient and equal access to healthcare.

While some of the significant healthcare developments are set out in the introduction to this chapter, more work is required to ensure all children and young people enjoy sufficient and equal access to healthcare. Since July 2015 all children aged under six have been entitled to access GP services without charges. In August 2023, this was extended also to children aged six and seven.

ACTION 28 **LGBTI+ HEALTHCARE**

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
28.1	Department of Health	Review the existing healthcare services specifically for LGBTI+ young people, particularly for transgender young people to ensure it meets their needs.	2025

ACTION 29 **CHILD HEALTH WORKFORCE**

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
29.1 First 5 EU Child Guarantee	Department of Health	Deliver a dedicated child health workforce.	2024

ACTION 30 **HEALTHCARE SERVICES**

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
30.1 UNCRC Concluding Observations	Department of Health	Establish maximum waiting times for children in need of hospital care, with a view to reducing the long waiting lists currently faced by children and young people.	2026
30.2	HSE	Develop transition of care principles and a guide for implementation to ensure all clinical pathways, guidelines or models of care take transition of care into account in their development.	2028

**ACTION
31**
CHILDREN AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
31.1	Department of Health	Survey children and young people who interact with a mental health service on their satisfaction with the service they receive, and publish the results.	2024

Active Travel

The Programme for Government commits to “dramatically increase the number of children walking and cycling to primary and secondary school,” and Census 2022 has collected data on modes of travel, including for children and young people travelling to school and, for the first time, babies and young children who go to childcare. This provides an important statistical baseline for measuring progress on this commitment. Data from the Irish Sports Monitor 2022 shows that the number of individuals walking and cycling for transport are higher than pre-pandemic levels, but more progress is required to fully realise the benefits of active travel for those making journeys, their communities, and the environment.

A review of the School Transport Scheme is nearing completion. The review has involved an in-depth analysis of the scheme and its broader effectiveness and sustainability and has built upon the commitments within the Programme for Government as they relate to school transport, including examining options to reduce car journeys and supporting active travel initiatives by assessing how the School Transport Scheme can continue to work in liaison with the Safe Routes to Schools Programme.

**ACTION
32**
ENCOURAGING ACTIVE TRAVEL

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
32.1	Department of Transport	Explore means and methods for the collection of sufficient and reliable data on the number of children walking and cycling to school, including the establishment of necessary baselines, and work to significantly increase the proportion of children using active travel methods over the lifetime of <i>Young Ireland</i> .	2023-2028
32.2	Department of Transport	Explore options to address cost-related barriers to cycling for children and young people through the introduction of financial initiatives, in cooperation with relevant departments.	2025

6.2 ACHIEVING IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

ACHIEVING IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT MEANS...

Children and young people are positively engaging with their learning and development from birth

- Over half of children are engaged in pre-school learning activity at home, with **53%** engaged in numeracy activities, and **58%** engaged in literacy activities as of 2019.
- Average class sizes in primary schools dropped to **22.8** pupils per classroom in 2021.
- A consistently high percentage of young people achieve a Leaving Certificate, with **92.1%** of those young people who entered secondary school in 2015 sitting their exam or getting a calculated grade.
- According to the Education Indicators for Ireland, students in schools with high concentrations of disadvantage were **7.6%** less likely to complete a Leaving Certificate in 2021.

Children and young people can successfully navigate life's transitions and make informed choices around their future

- Pupils completing school in areas with high concentrations of disadvantage were less likely than others to go on to further or higher education. In 2020, **28.9%** of these pupils progressed into further education, and **20.5%** progressed into higher education, which was lower than previous years.
- The non-progression rates of first-year undergraduates was relatively low, at **12%** in 2020.

Children and young people have the social, emotional and communication skills to achieve their potential and lead fulfilling lives

- More children are waiting longer for a speech and language therapy assessment, with **8.3%** waiting more than 52 weeks in 2022, and a consistently high percentage are waiting more than 52 weeks for treatment, at **21.1%** in 2019.
- Over a third of children have consistently experienced schoolwork pressure since 2010, and slightly more children are experiencing it as of 2018, with **43.3%** of 11-17-year-olds reporting such pressure.
- Three-quarters of children and young people like being in school, but fewer young people at age 15 feel like they belonged at school, and more felt like an outsider in 2018 compared to previous years.

Box 4. What it means to be achieving in learning and development, and findings from the Children and Young People's Indicator Set

According to the *What WE Think* reports, children generally valued the opportunity to get an education in Ireland. Education was among the most common themes when asked what they liked about Ireland, and children were most positive about the ease of access to education, and many reported finding education fun. According to one child, the best thing about being a child in Ireland is “being able to go to school and see all my friends and learn things too.” While this theme was less common among young people, they generally noted that they were protected from adult responsibilities in Ireland, with one young person saying the best thing about being a young person is that “everyone is entitled to education in Ireland.”

An additional question on how young people’s rights are valued in Ireland received a positive response, and the report summarised that “overall, the young people acknowledged that their rights were generally valued in Ireland with access to free education at primary and secondary school levels, and low cost third level education. However, the young people were aware that not all children in Ireland enjoy all their rights”.²⁹

When asked about what they disliked, or what they would change, there was significant interest in the education system, with suggestions including changes to homework/uniforms and school times (e.g., shorter days or fewer days), changes to the curriculum (e.g., more choice of subjects in primary school, more PE), free books for low-income families, removal of school uniforms, longer breaks (e.g., more time to play with friends)³⁰, requests for changes to the teaching of Irish, and more fun activities and field trips. In general, primary school pupils felt they had too much homework and too few breaks.

Young people suggested problems with meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs, reforming the process of examinations and assessments, addressing the pressure of passing exams and completing Leaving Certificate, the compulsory nature of some subjects, and discrimination and inequality.

THE BEST THING ABOUT BEING A CHILD IN IRELAND IS “BEING ABLE TO GO TO SCHOOL AND SEE ALL MY FRIENDS AND LEARN THINGS TOO.”

²⁹ Deirdre Fullerton, *What WE Think: Consultation with Children and Young People on Children’s Rights 2021* (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022), p.9.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.8.

FINDINGS FROM ADDITIONAL CONSULTATIONS

In the review of other recent consultations across Government, views on education were mixed. In one consultation with 3,242 young people on teaching and learning, only one in three students thought that their teachers made learning interesting and fun. Most young people felt that they did not have a voice in school and that they would like to have more of a say.³¹ However, schools were often identified as a potentially reliable source of information on important topics. In a consultation with 70 young people aged 13-17 years on harmful digital communications, children repeatedly suggested schools were the ideal place to provide information on subjects such as cyberbullying and sex education.³²

Box 5. A review of recent consultations with children and young people

While children and young people generally appreciate the opportunity to get an education in Ireland, and there is good evidence that most parts of the education system are working well, government must keep working to ensure greater inclusion in education, especially for marginalised groups. They must continue to reform education, including by listening to the views of children and young people themselves, and make greater progress ensuring access to further and higher education from underrepresented groups.

It is important to note that significant progress has been made in recent years enabling children and young people to participate in education and have access to arts and culture. In the final section on additional actions, we describe what's happening, and the additional value of *Young Ireland*.

³¹ Deirdre Fullerton and Maria Herron, *What We Think: A review of past consultations with children and young people as part of the UNCRC reporting process* (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022), p.26.

³² *Ibid*, p.29.

Government is already taking steps to ensure children and young people are achieving in learning and development. Some important policies and strategies which complement the work of *Young Ireland* under this outcome are:

National Access Plan: A strategic action plan for equity of access participation and success in Higher Education. The fourth *National Access Plan* was published in 2022 and will run for seven years. It sets specific targets and goals to increase participation and success for students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, students with a disability including an intellectual disability and for students from the Traveller and Roma communities.

Adult Literacy for Life. The *Adult Literacy for Life Strategy* is a 10-year adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy. It envisages a society in which every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully engage in society and realise their potential.

Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011-2020 and Interim Review 2017. The *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, launched in 2011, addressed the need to target, coordinate and strengthen links between home and education settings, and to develop and promote models of good practice to support literacy and numeracy acquisition. It recognises the need for a cohesive and coordinated national approach. In order to continue to raise standards of learning and teaching of literacy, numeracy and Digital Literacy in our early childhood and care, primary and post-primary school settings a new strategy is under development and will be published in 2023.

DEIS Plan 2017. The *DEIS Plan 2017* sets out the department's vision for education to more fully become a proven pathway to better opportunities for those in communities at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion.

Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages In Education 2017-2026. Ireland's *Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026* has been developed in the context of the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*, which aims to ensure Ireland's education system is the best in Europe within the next decade, increasing and diversifying the range of foreign languages taught and learned across the education system.

STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026. The *STEM Education Policy Statement* sets out a roadmap to achieve and improve the STEM education experience and outcomes for all learners from early childhood and care, primary and post-primary schools.

continued

Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027. The Digital Strategy for Schools sets out the Department of Education’s policy approach on embedding digital technology across the curriculum and in all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment.

Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying. *Cineáltas* provides a collective vision and roadmap for how the whole education community and society can work together to prevent and address bullying in our schools. In addition, it contains actions aimed at increasing the participation of children and young people from the classroom to national policymaking, including the establishment of a Student Participation Unit in the Department of Education.

Well-being Policy Statement and Framework for Practice. The Department of Education’s *Well-being Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* provide support to educational institutions to promote well-being education and recognise well-being as a priority. According to the framework, schools play a vital role in the promotion of children and young people’s academic, physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development.

Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027. Part of the Creative Ireland Programme, Creative Youth represents a highly significant development in children and young people’s access to creativity, arts and culture. This plan enables the creative potential of every child and young person aged 0-24 through a series of expanded and new initiatives that will be delivered between 2023 and 2027.

ESD to 2030: Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development. A second national strategy on education for sustainable development co-sponsored by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Department of Education and Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science aims to ensure that all learners have the skills and knowledge required to promote sustainable development.

Box 6. Existing policies

PRIORITY: INCLUSION IN EDUCATION

Since the publication of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, there has been a shift of emphasis from a focus on students' or children's voices to a focus on participation in decisions that affect them across Government, and in education. Education policy for children and young people has been significantly enhanced in recent years through initiatives such as *Cineáltas*, the Action Plan on Bullying. Many schools already undertake the professional practices that these policies promote for children and young people, leading to better outcomes for pupils. Making sure all children and young people feel like they belong in education is a key way we can measure our system's success. While progress has been made on policy in this area over the lifetime of the previous framework, data suggests there is still work to do. Between 2014 and 2018 the number of children and young people who report being bullied at school has increased to 31.1%, with a sharp increase for children with a disability or chronic illness. The *What WE Think* consultation, conducted with children and young people, included suggestions to improve

education for pupils with disabilities through enhanced assistive technologies and adapted school endowments which are sensitive to the needs of all pupils.

Some cohorts of children and young people appear to have poorer educational outcomes than others. The *Statistical Spotlight on Traveller and Roma Young*

THE STATISTICAL SPOTLIGHT ON TRAVELLER AND ROMA YOUNG PEOPLE HIGHLIGHTED THAT FEW TRAVELLERS ATTEND THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION.

People highlighted that few Travellers attend third level education, and there is some evidence that fewer individuals from these communities progress to the Senior Cycle. In particular, the latest Education Indicators for Ireland also show there were just 52 Travellers in higher education in 2021, just 19 more than in 2020. At primary and post-primary level, the most recently published statistics on Traveller pupils shows some positive trends, including increasing enrolment at post-primary level, a steady increase in progression and retention in the Junior Cycle, and increasing numbers participating in the senior cycle. However, while the data shows ongoing increases in retention to Leaving Certificate (22% for 2014 cohort; 27.1% for 2015 cohort; 31.4% for 2016 cohort), the gap remains significant.

A consultation with young carers in 2022 highlighted issues with schools' lack of understanding and awareness of the pressures and responsibilities on young carers in the home, how this impacts their daily lives (including remaining focused on school work) and how teachers may not understand of young carers' specific needs. In 2016, a higher percentage of 15 to 17-year-old carers (3.3%) ceased their full time education, compared to all 15 to 17-year-olds (2.4%). This is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of different cohorts of children and young people's outcomes in education. Instead, it indicates that progress in this area is still uneven. As the UNCRC highlighted, there are still gaps in the data around the educational outcomes of other disadvantaged cohorts, with more, better data required to inform meaningful policy.

ACTION 33 INCLUSION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
33.1 UNCRC Concluding Observations	Department of Education	Ensure that all children are supported to avail of inclusive education in mainstream schools by implementing the National Council for Special Education's <i>Inclusive Education Framework</i> as well as recent Department of Education policies and guidance, strengthening inclusive education in initial teacher education and CPD, and ensuring adequate supports for integrated classes, acknowledging the need for special schools for children with the most complex needs.	2028 and beyond
33.2	Department of Education	Review the in-school therapy pilot project in light of available resources and evaluation to-date to explore the adaptation of the pilot to scale up therapeutic supports nationally.	2024

ACTION 34 INCLUSION ACROSS EDUCATION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
34.1	Department of Education	Through Senior Cycle redevelopment, ensure that all learning pathways in school are accessible and valued, and develop follow-on programmes for students studying Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes in Junior Cycle for Senior Cycle.	2024
34.2	Department of Education; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Implement targeted measures to improve the educational outcomes of Roma and Traveller children and young people including through the development of a new Traveller and Roma Education Strategy, aligned with the forthcoming <i>National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy</i> .	2028
34.3	Department of Education	Implement <i>Cineáltas</i> , the national <i>Action Plan on Bullying</i> , a whole education approach to preventing and addressing bullying in schools, which includes actions to prevent and address bullying racism, sexism, and sexual harassment and to promote equality, diversity, inclusion and well-being in schools.	2027
34.4	Department of Education	Actively monitor the use of reduced school days in line with 2022 guidelines to ensure that this practice is done only in exceptional circumstances, with the consent of parents, is limited and timebound and is carried out based on the needs and best interests of the individual child.	2025

PRIORITY: EDUCATION REFORM

The desire to reform formal schooling systems was a dominant theme in the recent public consultation on *Young Ireland*. In general, respondents tended to want less focus on academic achievement, broaden how students are assessed, maximise students' opportunity to demonstrate their skills and learning, and ensure that their experience reflects the challenges they will face in their life beyond school. While there was less consensus on curricular reform, views tended to favour more subject choices at a younger age, more time for play and recreation, and a greater focus on what children and young people enjoy.

So How Was School Today explored students' perception of the school system. It showed that exams are a significant source of stress for students, and only 30% felt teachers made learning interesting and fun. Pressure to complete difficult tasks and homework were also a significant sources of stress.

Over the lifetime of *Young Ireland*, an ambitious programme of Senior Cycle redevelopment will be progressed which will empower students to meet the challenges of the 21st century, enrich the student experience, build on what's strong in our current system, and embed well-being and reduce student stress levels. Senior cycle redevelopment will ensure that all learning pathways in school are accessible and equally valued. It will examine approaches to optimise subject choice and curricular provision for all students. This new approach will enable students to follow a broad curriculum, develop their interests and skills and participate in a final assessment process consistent with international best practice, which will support them in their next phase of life whether that's third level, further education and training, apprenticeships or the world of work.

The redeveloped Senior Cycle will include the development of new subjects and revised curricula for all existing subjects, which will be informed by the views of students and teachers in a co-creation process. These will include a significant emphasis on additional assessment components outside of the traditional final written exams.

ACTION 35 EDUCATION REFORM

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
35.1	Department of Education	Implement the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme.	2024-2028

PRIORITY: ACCESS TO FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, INCLUDING APPRENTICESHIPS, FOR DISADVANTAGED COHORTS

Children and young people from disadvantaged cohorts may have reduced access to further and higher education, ultimately contributing to worse outcomes in the labour market and economic instability for all of society. The *National Access Plan: A strategic action plan for equity of access, participation and success in Higher Education 2022-2028* commits to addressing this, and ultimately to widening access to higher education for specific, identified groups who have difficulties accessing education.

According to the plan, equitable access can be achieved by providing targeted economic interventions to reduce or remove barriers to education and apprenticeships, including bursaries for minority groups, and ensuring representation of disadvantaged cohorts in the education and apprenticeship infrastructure. The recently established Access and Inclusion Sub-Committee of the National Apprenticeship Alliance is extending the eligibility for student grants, increasing maintenance grants rates, providing a separate stream of funding to increase participation in Higher Education from members of the Traveller and Roma communities, and increasing the amount of bursaries that are provided to those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

ACTION 36 STUDENT COST SUPPORTS

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
36.1	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science	Publish a cost of education options paper which will set out options for further enhancement of student supports for consideration as part of the budgetary process and consider how educational supports could be expanded to support students from <i>National Access Plan</i> target groups including enhancing supports for more flexible forms of learning.	2023

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS

Participation in Education

For most children and young people, going to school will be an important part of their weekday routine, and the public service they will spend most time in. Making sure their voices are heard in this environment is especially important, and greater participation makes it easier to make good policy decisions about our education system. It is important to recognise the excellent work of many schools today making sure pupils are active participants in their own learning, and to share this work widely in the coming years.

**ACTION
37**
PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
37.1	Department of Education	Encourage the establishment of student councils in all schools that are representative of the pupils and students in the school.	2023-2028
37.2	Department of Education	Progress the Charter Bill and develop Charter guidelines that will strengthen the participation of children and young people and their parents in the development and implementation of school policies.	2024
37.3	Department of Education	Establish a Student Participation Unit in the Department of Education to promote the participation of children and young people in to the development and implementation of Department of Education policy.	2023

Access to Arts and Creativity

While the benefits of engaging with arts and culture are well known for the development and well-being of children and young people, the extent to which they participate in arts and culture today could be better understood to inform more effective policy-making in this area. The public consultation conducted in advance of this Policy Framework raised the issue of improving access to play, leisure and culture as a priority for children and young people, parents and practitioners alike.

It is important to recognise and support the creative potential of children and young people, with improved access especially for seldom-heard children and young people. Culture and the arts should be a core part of children and young people's lives, strongly linked to the formal education system. Creative Youth, part of the Creative Ireland Programme, represents a highly significant development in this area, which is supported by the *Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027*. This plan will build on the success of the first Creative Youth Plan published in 2017, and enable the creative potential of every child and young person aged 0-24 between 2023 and 2027.

ACTION 38 **SUPPORT THE CREATIVE YOUTH PLAN**

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
38.1	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media; Department of Education, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science	Implement the <i>Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027</i> to embed creativity, culture and the arts into children and young people’s lives to contribute to their happiness, well-being and personal development.	2027
38.2	Arts Council; Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	Publish a new policy on children and young people’s arts.	2024

ACTION 39 **SUPPORT ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
39.1	Department of Education; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Department of Education	Implement Ireland’s Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development ESD to 2030 ensuring that, by 2030, all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.	2022- 2030

6.3 SAFE AND PROTECTED FROM HARM

BEING SAFE AND PROTECTED FROM HARM MEANS...

Children and young people have family and homes that are loving, connected, safe and nurturing

- The percentage of 9-year-olds who could talk to someone about a problem is high, with **94.7%** feeling they can talk about a problem to their mother, and 77.9% feeling they can talk to their father.

They are protected from violence, neglect, ill-treatment and harm

- A substantial proportion of children and young people are not achieving optimum levels of physical activity, with **22.1%** of children (11-17) and **61%** of young people (15-24) achieving this level in 2018 and 2019, respectively.
- Fewer children (11-17) are smoking, fewer children report early alcohol use, and by most measures children are using fewer illicit drugs.
- Significantly fewer teenagers are giving birth in 2020 than in previous years, and fewer children (15-17) report having early sexual activity.

Everyone is alert to child protection issues and knows how to report a concern.

- **82,855** referrals were made to Tusla's Child Protection and Welfare Service in 2022, though it is important to note that more than one referral may be made per child.
- **5,759** children were in care at the end of Q4 2022, with **89%** in foster care or relative foster care.

Box 7. What it means to be safe and protected from harm, and findings from the Children and Young People's Indicator Set

Ireland is now accommodating almost 86,945 people between both those fleeing war in Ukraine (66,035) and people seeking international protection (20,910). Over 75,312 Ukrainians and over 15,000 International Protection Applicants arrived in Ireland in 2022 alone.

Child protection and welfare is of paramount concern in all locations where children are accommodated, and the International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) have prioritised the provision of accommodation to children and their families.

Unaccompanied and separated children fleeing war in Ukraine or seeking international protection in Ireland for any reason receive supports and services through the child protection system. Under the equity of care principle, it is their status as a child that is the primary consideration.

The IPAS transition team has made progress in advancing priority projects. These are:

- The significant development of a new local integration model in collaboration with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and the City and County Management Authority (CCMA). Funding will be rolled out to each local authority to recruit permanent integration teams that will provide supports to applicants in each county.
- The delivery of an International Protection Information Hub to function as a resource for applicants, and facilitating their integration to life in Ireland including an orientation programme and English language supports.
- The development of a funding framework to support CYPSC's in further developing, enhancing and expanding the provision of their support services to children, young people and their families in International Protection accommodation settings.
- The roll out of a national Integration Fund offering grants to civil society organisations for initiatives aimed at supporting the integration of International Protection applicants. Over €1.6m in funding was awarded to 67 organisations in 2022 through this new scheme. A second call for proposals to the scheme was launched in April.

Box 8. International Protection and Accommodation Service and Ukraine Crisis

Importantly, many children and young people feel safe in Ireland. When asked the best thing about life in this country as part of the What WE Think report, children appreciated the general safety associated with Ireland. Children appreciating love and care from their parents, time spent with parents, and, according to one child, being “Loved by a lot of people.” Elsewhere, children generally felt that grown-ups look after them and they have someone to take care of them.

There was also a general perception that Ireland is a safe country, with one child suggesting their community was safe. However, these messages also related to Ireland’s peace and neutrality, which was widely appreciated by children, who liked that it is “war-free” and at peace. According to one child: “Ireland is a neutral country, so your dad doesn’t have to go to war.” Young people discussed this aspect less, but suggested Ireland met their basic rights, and that they did not have adult responsibilities. In this consultation, safety was identified as one of the best things about growing up in Ireland.

However, when children were asked what they did not like about life in Ireland, or what they would change, there were some negative messages associated with this theme, including discussion of violence against children. The responses within this theme captured children’s descriptions of bullying by peers, siblings, or older teenagers. This also captured adults shouting at them and “bossing them about.” In this consultation, there were many messages related to bullying with one child saying they didn’t like “People being mean to you and adults not caring if you are sad.” There were also a few messages related to robbery or violence in communities, including a drawing of a robbery scene. When asked what they would change, one child said “for every child to get no abuse off their mams and dad.”

HOWEVER, THESE MESSAGES ALSO RELATED TO IRELAND’S PEACE AND NEUTRALITY, WHICH WAS WIDELY APPRECIATED BY CHILDREN, WHO LIKED THAT IT IS “WAR-FREE” AND AT PEACE.

The Government is already taking big steps to ensure children and young people are safe and protected from harm. Some important policies and strategies which complement the work of this Policy Framework under this outcome are:

Youth Justice Strategy 2021–2027. The Youth Justice Strategy 2021–2027 sets out a vision to address children and young people’s involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour. It works on the basis of collaborating across all sectors of government and society in the development and delivery of opportunities for children and young people, to harness support in their families and communities in order to strengthen their capacities to live free from crime and harm.

Family Justice Strategy 2022–2025. The Family Justice Strategy envisages a modern, streamlined and user-friendly family justice system in Ireland that supports simple, early, fair and – where possible – non-adversarial outcomes. Overall, the strategy aims to make it easier to access information about the family justice system, make services and supports easier to find, and put in place a family courts structure.

Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying. Cineáltas provides a collective vision and roadmap for how the whole education community and society can work together to prevent and address bullying in our schools. In addition, it contains actions aimed at increasing the participation of children and young people from the classroom to national policymaking, including the establishment of a Student Participation Unit in the Department of Education.

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017. This guidance operates with the Children First Act 2015 and sets out how reports about reasonable concerns of child abuse or neglect should be made by the general public and professionals to Tusla and what organisations need to do to keep children safe.

National Aftercare Policy for Alternative Care. This policy commits Tusla to delivering and implementing an aftercare service for young people and young adults which is responsive, inclusive and relevant to each individual’s circumstances, providing an equitable, holistic and integrated service to support them into adulthood.

National Action Plan Against Racism 2023-2027. The National Action Plan Against Racism proposes actions to help make Ireland a place in which the impacts of racism are fully acknowledged and actively addressed.

continued

Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery 2017-2025. *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery* is part of the *Healthy Ireland Framework*, and it aims to promote healthier lifestyles within society and encourage people to make healthier choices around drug and alcohol use.

Oberstown Strategy 2022-2026. Oberstown Children Detention Campus provides care and education to young people on detention or remand orders, supporting them to address their offending and return successfully to society. The Oberstown Strategy aims to ensure young people in detention receive the highest standards of rights-based, child-centred care.

The National Carers' Strategy. The National Carers' Strategy sets out government policy for those who care for older people, children and adults with an illness or a disability.

National Action Plan for Childminding 2021-2028. The aim of this action plan is to develop a pathway that sets out steps towards better regulation, support and subsidies, for all paid non-relative childminders, by providing greater recognition for childminding and by further supporting childminders in their work of providing high quality early learning and care and school-age childcare, thus supporting child development and learning outcomes and helping families.

Box 9. Existing policies

PRIORITY: FOSTER CARE, CARE AND AFTERCARE

Where children must be taken into care for their own welfare and protection, Tusla places the child in either foster care, residential care or special care. The United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, 2010, specified foster care as the most desirable form of alternative care for children. It is therefore noteworthy that the vast majority of looked after children in Ireland reside in foster care. As of January 2023, this equated to over 90% of all children in care, a figure that compares favourably with our European neighbours.

Children in care are a vulnerable group who, in many cases, have suffered from disadvantage and disruption in their lives. Children in care need safe and high-quality placements that meet the child's individual needs, and they need stability of placements across their care journey to ensure good outcomes and a successful transition to independent adulthood. Foster carers, whether assisting with short-term, emergency, longer term and respite care, provide an invaluable service to those who have experienced adversity and should be supported in their role of supporting vulnerable children.

ACTION 40 SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE AND AFTERCARE

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
40.1	Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Increase the number of foster carers over the lifetime of <i>Young Ireland</i> by active recruitment, the enhancement of supports to foster carers and promoting positive messages about foster caring.	2028
40.2	Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Tusla will consider any necessary reforms of the special care service to ensure that it meets the needs of the children that are placed there, with reference, in the longer term, to the Oberstown model and the establishment in Northern Ireland of a Regional Care and Justice Campus.	2028
40.3	Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Take a strategic and evidence-based approach to corporate and area-based planning for the future delivery of Alternative Care, with regard to demographic and other pressures or trends which may impact on service demand or the nature of the service required by children entering the care of the State.	2023-2028
40.4	Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Implement the Strategic Plan for Alternative Care 2022-2025 and evaluate its outcomes and effectiveness once implemented.	2026

ACTION 41 FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR FOSTER CARE

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
41.1	Department of Finance	Apply Group B relationship thresholds for Capital Acquisitions Tax to a foster child in the same manner that would have been applicable if the child in question was, in law, a child of his or her foster parents.	2025
41.2	Department of Social Protection	Consider the credits available to foster carers for periods of time spent caring with a view to supporting eligibility for the State Pension (Contributory), and also include foster carers within the proposed changes to attribute contributions for periods of long-term care (over 20 years) when caring for an incapacitated dependent.	2026
41.3	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Raise the basic rates of the Foster Care allowance, in recognition of the significant service to children and young people provided by foster carers.	2024

**ACTION
42**

INNOVATION IN CARE AND AFTERCARE

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
42.1	Department of Housing, Heritage, and Local Government	Continue to provide Capital Assistance Scheme funding to Approved Housing Bodies for the provision of accommodation for care leavers especially those who have complex needs and are in danger of falling into homelessness. Care Leaver is defined as a person leaving state care upon reaching age 18.	2023-2028
42.2	Department of Education; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Collaborate on the Children in Care and Education Pathfinder Project.	2023-2028
42.3	Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Make specific efforts to include the voices of children and young people in State care and aftercare in the development of policies and procedures that impact on them.	2023-2028
42.4	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department of Justice; Tusla, the Child and Family Agency	Commission cross-sectional and longitudinal research and develop data sources on children in care and adults who were in care as children.	2024

**ACTION
43**

GUARDIAN AD LITEM EXECUTIVE OFFICE

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
43.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Aligned to the commitment in the Family Justice Strategy, and following preparations of the Working Group, establish the Guardian ad litem Executive Office.	2025

**ACTION
44**

COOPERATION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
44.1 Tusla/ HSE Protocol	HSE; Tusla	Ensure no child with a complex disability will be taken into State care as a consequence of insufficient service provision.	2023-2028
44.2 Tusla/ HSE Protocol	HSE; Tusla	Ensure children in care can access HSE services in the same way as other children, and an 'in care' status must be an additional vulnerability factor that needs to be considered.	2023-2028

PRIORITY: CHILD PROTECTION

All children and young people deserve to be protected from harm, and to have a positive home and family life. There are some children and young people who are vulnerable, at risk, or in need of protection. In Q4 2022, 21,437 referrals were made to Child Protection and Welfare Services. More than half of referrals for 2022 were for welfare concerns, 36% were for abuse or neglect, and the report type was not recorded for the remaining 9% of referrals.

Significant progress has been made in this area since the publication of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, including the passage of the Children First Act. The Act, which was fully commenced in December 2017, provides for a number of key child protection measures, including raising awareness of child abuse and neglect, providing for mandated reporting of child protection concerns and improving child protection arrangements in organisations providing services to children.

SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN THIS AREA SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF BETTER OUTCOMES, BRIGHTER FUTURES, INCLUDING THE PASSAGE OF THE CHILDREN FIRST ACT.

ACTION 45 STAFFING

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
45.1	Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Support the <i>Tusla People Strategy 2022 to 2024</i> to make measurable progress addressing staff shortages, and ensure the approach is mutually supportive of other Government workforce initiatives.	2023-2024
45.2	Tusla, the Child and Family Agency	Ensure a dedicated Parenting Support Advisor role is established in all 17 Tusla areas, as part of an integrated response to the needs of children and families, in line with the agreed actions of Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services.	2025

**ACTION
46**
CHILD CARE ACT

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
46.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Complete the review of the Child Care Act and bring forward the Child Care Act Amendment Bill.	2024
46.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Tusla and named Departments and Agencies	Commence implementation of the Child Care Act provisions, including engagement with Tusla and other key bodies to agree implementation of key shared provisions, and establishing the Child Care Act Advisory Committee.	2024 and onwards
46.3	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; All Departments	Support the Special Rapporteur for Child Protection as appropriate to undertake their functions with respect to child protection and welfare legislation and as relevant to seek mechanisms for the implementation of recommendations.	Ongoing

**ACTION
47**
CHILDREN FIRST

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
47.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Tusla; Children First Inter-departmental Implementation Group	Continue to roll out information campaigns to raise awareness about <i>Children First</i> and our collective responsibility to keep children safe.	2023-2028
47.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Update <i>Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children</i> .	2024-2025

PRIORITY: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS VICTIMS AND WITNESSES OF CRIME

According to the new [Victims Charter](#), when someone becomes a victim of a crime, it is important that they know they will be listened to and supported. Children and young people are especially vulnerable as victims of crime, and any crime which victimises a young person is particularly serious.

Recently, *Zero Tolerance: Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026* was released, announcing a range of actions to address training of front-line staff and professionals, taking a specific focus on children as victims and as witnesses. It is also important to acknowledge that children may be victims or witnesses of crime in their own homes.

There are some cohorts of children and young people who are especially vulnerable, such as minority ethnic groups, who may not be willing or able to go to the Gardaí when they are a victim of or a witness to a crime. For example, one recent study on [Irish Traveller's Access to Justice](#) flagged that, compared to the general population, Travellers tend to have less positive attitudes to and less willingness to engage with the Gardaí.

- 71% of the general population agree that “the Gardaí in this area treat everyone fairly regardless of who they are”, while 84% of Travellers disagree, and,
- While 95% of the general population agree with the statement that the Gardaí treat them with respect, 91% of Travellers do not believe that the Gardaí treat Travellers with respect.

The development and implementation of the Barnahus model of service in Ireland is a cross-government, multi-agency project, which is a significant initiative to help victims and survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

The national roll out of the Barnahus model of services involves three departments (the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the Department of Health and the Department of Justice) working together, with the four agencies that will be involved in the delivery of services (Tusla, Children’s Health Ireland, the Health Service Executive and An Garda Síochána).

Box 10. Barnahus

**ACTION
48**
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS VICTIMS AND WITNESSES OF CRIMES

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
48.1 UNCRC	An Garda Síochána; Department of Justice; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	As part of a <i>Garda Young Person's Plan</i> , train every member of An Garda Síochána (AGS) to be aware of children's rights, how their work can support children to realise their rights, and how to respond when a child's rights are breached. Deliver training on children's rights for law enforcement officials, the judiciary, prosecutors and other professionals working with and for children. As part of this work, address the specific issues faced by Traveller and Roma young people, in collaboration with community representatives.	2023-2028
48.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department of Justice; Department of Health	Agree revised terms of reference of three department agreement between DCEDIY, Health and Justice to govern the implementation of the Barnahus model nationally.	2023-2025
48.3	Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department of Justice; Department of Health; An Garda Síochána	Resource the development and delivery of the Barnahus service model, including through the inclusion of costs through the annual estimates process.	2023-2025

**ACTION
49**
DOMESTIC, SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
49.1	Department of Justice	Undertake a review of specialist services for children who have been victims of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV) to ensure they are accessible in all parts of the State. This will be undertaken by the new DSGBV Agency during the lifetime of the national DSGBV Strategy. Continue to support specialist court accompaniment services for children.	2023-2028

ACTION 50 **GROOMING**

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
50.1	Department of Justice	Enact the Criminal Justice (Engagement of Children in Criminal Activity) Bill 2023.	2023
50.2	Department of Justice; An Garda Síochána	Continue to develop and resource the Greentown initiative, which focuses on disrupting recruitment of children by criminal gangs, and mainstream the learning from these pilots into youth justice interventions.	2023

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS

Youth Justice

The involvement of children in crime and anti-social behaviour requires an appropriate response. While protecting the rights of victims, it is important in the long-term interests of society that children are diverted from participation in the criminal justice system and that detention is used as the last resort.

The *Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027* sets out a vision for responding to issues arising in relation to involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour by children. It works on the basis of collaborating across all sectors of government and society, developing and delivering opportunities for children and young people, and seeking to harness support in families and communities to strengthen their capacities to live free from crime and harm.

**ACTION
51**
ACCESS YOUTH JUSTICE

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
51.1	Department of Justice	Encourage positive opportunities for State agencies to cooperate in supporting children and young people who come in contact with the youth justice system, including provision for relevant data sharing, aligned appropriately with development of positive cooperation duties in relation to issues such as child care, or community safety.	2023-2028
51.2	Department of Justice	Develop and enhance the capacity of Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs) to support young people <i>at risk</i> by ensuring the service is available throughout the State and resourcing the YDPs for early intervention, family support work, engagement with harder-to-reach young people and working with schools to assist in retention of at risk children within the education system.	2023-2027
51.3	Department of Justice	Working in partnership with relevant partners, the Department of Justice will develop, evaluate and disseminate the learning from innovative youth justice interventions, such as the Greentown initiative to tackle grooming of children by criminal gangs; and pilot, in collaboration with relevant government departments and agencies, measures to give effect to the <i>no wrong door</i> principle in selected local areas via a collaborative commissioning approach, and disseminate the learnings from these pilots.	2023-2027

Children of Prisoners

The Government recognises that some children and young people face challenges and discrimination that may isolate them from their peers and communities, and impact greatly on their lives. One such issue is parental imprisonment. The impact of a parent's imprisonment should be mitigated as much as possible, and children and young people with an imprisoned parent should experience the best possible outcomes. Significant progress has been made to ensure children remain in contact with imprisoned parents to the greatest possible extent in an appropriate, safe, child-friendly way. The Irish Prison Service supports prisoners to fulfil their parenting role to the greatest possible extent, and it is important to build on recent success in this area over the lifetime of the framework.

ACTION 52 CHILDREN OF PRISONERS

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
52.1	Department of Justice; Irish Prison Service	Improve the reliability and accessibility of data on the number of parents in prison, ultimately to support them in their parenting role.	2023-2028
52.2	Department of Justice; Irish Prison Service	Publish policy on visiting conditions standards. Establish a child-friendly visiting space in every prison in Ireland, and consult with children and families in the development and implementation of their policies on visiting.	2023-2028
52.3	Department of Justice; Irish Prison Service; Department of Children, Equality, Disability and Youth	Provide an opportunity for all prison staff to undertake child rights training.	2023-2028

Prevention and Early Intervention

Prevention and early intervention means anticipating possible problems, minimizing the risk they arise, and targeting resources at those at high risk or showing early signs of a problem. This approach can be applied to many services, not just making sure children and young people are safe and protected from harm. Health services, including the HSE, undertake a significant amount of preventative work which aims to mitigate later, more severe health problems. The Health Services Healthy Ireland Implementation Plan 2023 – 2027 suggested that such preventative work would become even more important in the future, encouraging “the whole healthcare system to shift towards a culture that places greater emphasis and value on prevention and keeping people well”.³³

Harnessing the significant learning in this area and adopting a more preventative approach has the greatest potential for improving outcomes for children and young people, and there are promising developments. The What Works initiative builds on the development of implementation structures and learning harnessed from over a decade of investment in prevention and early intervention in order to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

³³ Health Service Executive (HSE), *Health Services Healthy Ireland Implementation Plan 2023-2027* (HSE, 2023), p.5.

**ACTION
53**
PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
53.1	Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Develop systems to ensure consistency of services, following the example of how Tusla Case Management provides clarity on child protection.	2023-2025
53.2	Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Develop a robust system of funding services based on evidence of good outcomes, and ensure better clarity about services is provided.	2023-2025

Nationality and Birth Registration

At the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child hearing in Geneva earlier this year, the Committee expressed deep concern about the barriers faced by some parents in accessing birth registration and the restrictive nature of the legislative framework for obtaining Irish nationality. Ireland has a fair and sustainable birth registration system for children and young people, especially for those from vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, and it is important that this is clear to all.

Significant developments are underway to ensure the birth registration service continues to provide the best possible service to young children and their parents. For example, there is a legislative mechanism in place whereby the current requirement for parents to attend a Civil Registration Service, in person, to officially sign the Register of Births is waived if such attendance would cause hardship for the parent. This will be significantly enhanced with the introduction of a new system which is currently being examined, which will allow parents to register their child's birth online while utilising existing, authenticated state identification.

**ACTION
54**
STATELESS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
54.1	Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department of Justice	Evaluate how the state can better support children and young people who are stateless, and implement measures to ensure they have robust access to services in light of their vulnerability.	2026

6.4 ECONOMIC SECURITY AND OPPORTUNITY

HAVING ECONOMIC SECURITY AND OPPORTUNITY MEANS...

Children and young people are protected from poverty and social exclusion

- The percentage of children under 18 living in jobless households decreased from **15.9%** in 2014 to **10.4%** in 2022.
- According to the Survey on Income and Living Conditions, the percentage of 0-17-year-olds and 18-34-year-olds experiencing consistent poverty in 2022 was **7.5%** and 4%, respectively.
- The percentage of 0-17-year-olds and 18-34-year-olds experiencing deprivation was **19.9%** and **19.8%** respectively in 2022.
- Households with one adult and children under 18 were likely to be vulnerable: the at-risk of poverty rate was **23.8%**, the deprivation rate was **43.5%**, and the consistent poverty rate was **14.1%**.

Children and young people live in stable housing that is affordable, warm and dry, in child and youth friendly communities

- As of May 2023, **1,770** families accessed emergency accommodation, with **3,699** child dependants, far higher than in when *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was released in 2014.
- **56%** of homeless families were single parent families.
- Most children report having a safe place to play in their area, with **61%** saying they had a safe place for recreation in 2018, higher than in 2010.

Children and young people have pathways to economic participation and independent living

- The percentage of young people aged 18-24 with lower secondary education or less decreased from **7%** in 2014 to **3.7%** in 2022.

Box 11. What it means to have economic security and opportunity, and findings from the Children and Young People's Indicator Set

Participants in the *What WE Think* consultation generally reflected positively on Ireland's efforts to realise the Economic Security and Opportunity outcome. This included positive messages that children could enjoy childhood without the need to earn money, and their needs are provided for by family. According to the report, "Access to education also featured in responses, with an appreciation of the free education they received, with a number commenting that this is not always the case in other countries."³⁴ On the specific topic of housing and standards of living, children specifically praised their family homes.

When children were asked what they disliked, the theme of homelessness and poverty was raised by children: some submitted drawings showing people begging for money, and a smaller number mentioned the high cost of living and lack of work.³⁵

FINDINGS FROM ADDITIONAL CONSULTATIONS

There was more discussion of this outcome in other recent Government consultations. *Children Seen and Heard 1916-2016* sought children and young people's views about Ireland on the centenary of the proclamation of the republic. Children and young people raised the worrying levels of poverty and homelessness in Ireland as one issue among many such as discrimination, bullying, and education.³⁶ Similarly, a consultation on young people in Ireland's experience of Covid-19 stressed the importance of not having to worry about work or money, and affordable housing. On the aim to ensure children and young people live in child-friendly communities, they expressed a desire to have a sense of community.³⁷

Box 12. A review of recent consultations with children and young people

³⁴ Deirdre Fullerton, *What WE Think: Consultation with Children and Young People on Children's Rights 2021* (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022), p.27.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.33.

³⁶ Deirdre Fullerton and Maria Herron, *What We Think: A review of past consultations with children and young people as part of the UNCRC reporting process* (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022), p.26.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.38.

Youth Homelessness Strategy 2023-2025. The *Youth Homelessness Strategy* is a three-year strategy working towards ending homelessness for young people aged 18-24 through prevention and exit strategies, and improving the experience of young people accessing emergency accommodation.

Housing for All. *Housing for All* is the Government's housing plan to 2030. It is a multi-annual, multi-billion Euro plan which aims to improve Ireland's housing system and deliver more homes of different types for people with different housing needs.

Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025. The *Roadmap for Social Inclusion* sets out the Government's ambition for Ireland to become one of the most socially inclusive countries in the EU, with a key aim to reduce the number of people in consistent poverty in Ireland to 2% or less.

Pathways to Work 2021-2025. *Pathways to Work 2021-2025* is the government's national employment services strategy, and the government's overall framework for employment activation and support policy.

Box 13. Existing policies

PRIORITY: CHILD POVERTY AND WELL-BEING

Those children and young people who are living in poverty should have adequate supports to mitigate its impact on their lives currently and over the longer term. Government recognises that children and young people from particular household compositions, such as households headed by a single parent, or a person with a disability, should not experience an elevated risk of poverty and deprivation.

The *What WE Think* consultation with children and young people raised homelessness and poverty as a problem children disliked about Ireland. In the [public consultation](#) on this Policy Framework, addressing social exclusion was identified as a priority for all groups, with widespread calls to eliminate child poverty, and address its deleterious impacts. Chapter 6 has outlined the ambition of the newly-created Programme Office on Child Poverty and Well-being in the Department of the Taoiseach. The Programme Office will enhance delivery across key priority areas, and support strategic initiatives that will amplify the impact of these initiatives on reducing child poverty and supporting well-being.

Government has a longstanding commitment to tackling child poverty. The national target of reducing the number of children in consistent poverty by 70,000 by 2020 from its 2011 level was first identified in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. While this target was not achieved, there was a significant reduction in the child poverty rate over the lifetime of the framework. The *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* commits to continued reporting on this target, and to setting a new

target for the future. A consultation on this target will take place in 2023.

ACTION 55 CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
55.1	Department of Social Protection; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department of the Taoiseach	Over the lifetime of <i>Young Ireland</i> , develop a new child poverty target and reduce the number of children and young people in poverty.	New target in 2024, work to continue over the lifetime of <i>Young Ireland</i> .
55.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department of Rural and Community Development	Deliver four pilot child poverty local area plans in CYPSC areas under Ireland's <i>EU Child Guarantee National Action Plan</i> .	2027

PRIORITY: ACCESS TO HOUSING

Child homelessness increased by over 250% between 2014 and 2020. In May 2023, 1,770 families accessed emergency accommodation in one week, with 3,699 child dependants. In addition to the material deprivation and disruption which may result from homelessness, the negative effects of homelessness on children and young people as they enter adulthood have now been well established, and supported by recent studies.³⁸

All children and young people should be provided with safe housing which is adequate to meet their needs, both due to the impact on their lives today, and the long-term harm which can be caused by homelessness. The specific vulnerabilities of some children and young people, such as Traveller children and young people, should also be addressed over the lifetime of *Young Ireland*.

ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD BE PROVIDED WITH SAFE HOUSING WHICH IS ADEQUATE TO MEET THEIR NEEDS.

³⁸ Social Justice Ireland, *Precarious Housing – the Long-Term Impact of Child and Youth Homelessness* (Social Justice Ireland, 2021) available online at: <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/precious-housing-long-term-impact-child-and-youth-homelessness> (16 June 2023).

ACTION 56 ACCESS TO HOUSING

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
56.1 UNCRC	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Address the root causes of homelessness among children, including by strengthening the collection and analysis of data on children experiencing homelessness.	2028
56.2	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	In line with Ireland's commitments under the Lisbon Declaration to end homelessness by 2030, and greatly reduce homelessness over the lifetime of <i>Young Ireland</i> , meeting or exceeding housing delivery targets, including far more social homes, affordable homes, and cost rental schemes.	2028
56.3	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Provide Traveller-specific accommodation as a key priority and support local authorities to improve the quality and quantity of accommodation and ensure that existing funding is fully drawn down and utilised.	2023-2028

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS

Living Wage

Young people receive, on average, significantly less pay than older workers. Young workers (aged 15-24) account for approximately 10% of all employees in Ireland, however they make up half of all minimum-wage employees. Among employees aged 15-24 years over a third (37.8%) are on the current minimum wage. Young people aged 19 and under may be paid a lower National Minimum Wage.

The recent public consultation with children and young people, parents, practitioners and others repeatedly raised the need for “better pay conditions, to increase or legislate on the minimum wage.” While the National Minimum Wage is often a stepping stone to higher paid employment, young people are among those who are less likely to transition from minimum wage to higher pay.

Recently, significant new efforts have taken place in this area with the development of a national living wage. As agreed by Government, the national living wage will be set at 60% of hourly median wages in line with the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission. It will be introduced over a four-year period and will be in place by 2026, at which point it will replace the National Minimum Wage. This will have significant, positive impacts on those earning less, including many young people.

**ACTION
57**
LOW PAY COMMISSION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
57.1	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Consider the Low Pay Commission's report recommendations on youth rates, and progress to a living wage initially set at 60% of hourly median wages replacing the National Minimum Wage.	2026

Employment Activation

The proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) dropped to 6.8% in 2022. NEETs may be more vulnerable to mental ill-health, in addition to the material impacts likely to result from a lack of education or employment.

Ireland is doing relatively well in this area, with one of the lowest proportions of young people not in employment, education or training in the EU. While there is always room for improvement, Government has made significant progress in this area, including by launching the Employment and Youth Activation Charter in 2014. Companies who signed the Charter agreed to engage with the Department of Social Protection in relation to supporting activities which would benefit unemployed people to find a route back to work, especially for those who were long-term unemployed, including young people. Commitment 62 in the Government's *Pathways to Work* sets the goal to re-launch and promote the Employer Youth Employment Charter with a target of signing-up 300 employers. It recognises the higher levels of youth unemployment by comparison to other age groups, and the need to take action to prevent people slipping into long periods of unemployment.

**ACTION
58**
YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION OR TRAINING

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
58.1	Department of Social Protection	Continue to improve jobseeker supports for people aged under 24.	2024-2028

**ACTION
59**

WORKING AGE PAYMENT

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
59.1	Department of Social Protection	<p>Advance the <i>Pathways to Work</i> commitments to:</p> <p>Prepare a paper on options to modify the longer term jobseeker assistance payment by utilising Revenue’s real-time earnings data to adjust payment levels in line with a person’s weekly earnings, to guarantee a basic income floor and ensure that in all cases a person’s income increases when they work.</p> <p>Ensure that the particular circumstances of lone parents are considered in the assessment of a pilot working age payment.</p>	2024

6.5 CONNECTED, RESPECTED, AND CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR WORLD

BEING CONNECTED, RESPECTED AND CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR WORLD MEANS

Children and young people are aware of their rights, and are civically socially and environmentally engaged off-line and online

- The vast majority of children and young people now have internet access, rising from **92%** of households with dependent children having access in 2014 to **99%** in 2022.
- Children and young people are accepted, respected and valued at home, school, and in their community
- The percentage of 16-24-year-olds who report having high satisfaction with their personal relationships increased from **56.4%** to **57.9%** between 2013 and 2018.
- Children and young people have their own identity, connected to their culture, language and beliefs

Box 14. What it means to be connected, respected and contributing to the world, and findings from the Children and Young People’s Indicator Set

The What WE Think report suggests that being connected, respected and contributing to their world is important to children and young people. Notably, some children said one of the best things about being a child in Ireland was that all children have the right to be treated equally, and all children have a right to a say in their own lives, and to be taken seriously by adults.³⁹ According to one child, “The best thing about being a child in Ireland is free playgrounds open to everyone, free sports, free education, a lot of greenery and entertainment, but most importantly everyone is treated fairly and equally.” Some children had similar comments on their views being taken seriously, with one saying that “The best thing about being a child is being accepted and taken seriously.” Children agreed racism and other kinds of prejudice were unacceptable in Ireland.

However, when asked what they disliked about Ireland, children often mentioned the environment and climate, including pollution, littering, and vandalism. Discrimination was also discussed by children, which captured themes such as racism, but also a noticeable divide between urban and rural Ireland. Some children drew from their own experiences, with one saying: “I don’t like all the hospitals because I think some of the doctors look down on coloured people and might work slower for them. If I was part of the Government I would make sure all the staff are not racist. With just a few changes I am sure Ireland could be the perfect place to live.”

Children also raised issues with the extent to which their voice was heard, and their views taken seriously. As the report summarises, “children described their dissatisfaction with not having a voice or choice on matters that affect them. This included the subject choices in school but also matters such as staying up late, watching TV, playing computer games etc. In a smaller number of responses this captured not having a voice in general with little respect be afforded to children’s views or the views of more marginalised communities.” Children also raised this as something to change about Ireland, suggesting they should get a greater say on issues such as subject choice in schools.

SOME CHILDREN DREW FROM THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES, WITH ONE SAYING: “I DON’T LIKE ALL THE HOSPITALS BECAUSE I THINK SOME OF THE DOCTORS LOOK DOWN ON COLOURED PEOPLE AND MIGHT WORK SLOWER FOR THEM. IF I WAS PART OF THE GOVERNMENT I WOULD MAKE SURE ALL THE STAFF ARE NOT RACIST. WITH JUST A FEW CHANGES I AM SURE IRELAND COULD BE THE PERFECT PLACE TO LIVE.”

³⁹ Deirdre Fullerton, *What WE Think: Consultation with Children and Young People on Children’s Rights 2021* (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022), p.6.

National Action Plan Against Racism 2023-2027. The National Action Plan Against Racism proposes actions to help make Ireland a place in which the impacts of racism are fully acknowledged and actively addressed.

National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021. The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy is a cross-departmental initiative to improve the lives of the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland, including children and young people.

LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021. The LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy is designed to promote inclusion, equality, health, and safety for LGBTI+ individuals, ensuring the changes needed to eliminate the barriers which can prevent LGBTI+ individuals from being treated as full and equal participants are implemented.

National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020. The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 recognised the barriers which prevent women from achieving their full potential and from enjoying opportunities on par with men and sought to address them, promoting societal values of equality, non-discrimination, inclusiveness, generosity, intersectionality, diversity and respect for human rights. In the Programme for Government, the Government committed to developing and implementing a new strategy for women and girls.

National Sustainable Mobility Policy. The National Sustainable Mobility Policy aims to make it easier for people to choose walking, cycling and public transport daily instead of having to use a petrol or diesel car. Updated sustainable mobility targets in the Climate Action Plan 2023 aim to deliver a 50% increase in daily active travel journeys, a 130% increase in daily public transport journeys, and a 20% reduction in total vehicle kilometres travelled by 2030.

20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030. This cross-government strategy is aimed at both maintaining and broadening the use of the Irish language across Irish society. This strategy has nine areas of action, some of which impact upon young people. The Strategy places particular importance on the provision of linguistic supports for Irish speaking families, both within and outside the Gaeltacht as a recognition of the additional challenges faced by parents raising their children through the medium of the Irish language.

Box 15. Existing policies

PRIORITY: DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

The digital environment emerged as an area of concern for parents during the public consultation, conducted during Young Ireland's development. There were concerns about inappropriate content available to children and young people, and the impact this content and social media has on mental health/anxiety. The lack of regulation of social media, poor management of online safety, and the increased risk of cyberbullying and online grooming were also causes for concern.

There is a whole of Government approach to digital regulation and child safety, in particular through the National Digital Strategy. In terms of online safety, an important strand of that strategy is the implementation of the Online Safety and Media Regulation (OSMR) Act that is led by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

In March 2023, the online safety provisions of the OSMR Act were commenced and Coimisiún na Meán formally established, including with the appointment of an Online Safety Commissioner. As part of the coherent approach to digital regulation Coimisiún na Meán has regulatory functions with relevance to child safety online. As provided for under the OSMR Act, An Coimisiún will establish a Youth Advisory Committee by to provide an opportunity for children to participate and have their views heard, particularly in relation to online safety.

ACTION 60 IMPROVED ONLINE SAFETY

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
60.1 UNCRC	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	Implement the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act, drawing from UNCRC recommendations on digital regulation.	2023-2028

PRIORITY: PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRACY

Recent research by the OECD has demonstrated that while Ireland has a generally average trust in Government, the generational gap here is the highest in the OECD. On average, 36.9% of people aged 18-29 tend to trust the government, compared with 45.9% of those aged 50 and over. Efforts to involve young people more in decision-making from an earlier age, in addition to addressing the specific material problems they face, is important to addressing this.

In Ireland, as in many democratic countries, young people are generally less likely to vote than older people. Data from the *Growing up in Ireland* study, a longitudinal study of children and young people in Ireland, shows that just over half young people in one cohort who were eligible to vote in the 2016 election were actually registered.⁴⁰ However, young people in Ireland tend to see voting as an important way to exercise their rights. According to a Eurobarometer study, Irish young people ranked voting in elections and protesting jointly as the most effective actions to make your voice heard.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Desmond O'Mahony, Eoin McNamara, Rebecca McClintock, Aisling Murray, Emer Smyth and Dorothy Watson, *Growing Up In Ireland: The Lives Of 20-Year-Olds: Making the Transition To Adulthood* (Government of Ireland, 2021), p.59.

⁴¹ Ipsos European Public Affairs, *European Parliament Youth Survey* (European Union, 2021), p.34.

**ACTION
61**

PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRACY

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
61.1	An Coimisiún Toghcháin	As mandated by the Electoral Reform Act 2022, promote public awareness of, and participation in, the State's electoral and democratic processes and encourage the public to vote at electoral events. It will do this through educational and information programmes, including by building on the enabling of pre-registration for 16 and 17-year-olds, provided for in the Electoral Reform Act 2022.	Ongoing
61.2	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Guided by the Programme for Government commitment, the Minister for Housing will consider any recommendations from An Coimisiún Toghcháin arising from any research it conducts into the Scottish experience of lowering the voting age to 17.	2024

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS

Access to Public Transport

According to the *National Travel Survey 2019*:

- Young People aged 18-24 were most likely of any age group to cite cost as a barrier to using bus or rail services.
- In line with the population at large, young people were likely to cite more direct routes, easier use of services, and better value as factors which would make them more likely to use public transport.

In the recent public consultation for the Policy Framework, respondents including children and young people, parents, professionals and other adults, cited the cost of transport as a problem, especially as it related to education, in addition to a general desire for more public transport infrastructure.

Some respondents prioritised new and improved local link services for rural communities, including bespoke transport links to mental health or other services for young people. Young carers reported that they are severely affected by poor access to transport in rural areas. One significant development in this area was the launch of the Young Adult Leap Card in 2022, which provided young people aged 19 to 23, and those aged 16 and upwards in full-time third level education, access to a 50% fare discount on all Public Service Obligation services and on participating commercial services compared to adult Leap fares. Under Budget 2024, this Scheme will be expanded to include young people aged 19 to 25.

**ACTION
62**
TRANSPORT DATA COLLECTION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
62.1	Department of Transport; National Transport Authority (NTA)	Engage with the NTA regarding the collection of public transport passenger data. Explore options to ensure sufficient and reliable data is collected on the travel patterns of children and young people (0-23), through the Leap Card data collected by the NTA, the National Travel Survey or another mechanism. This data should be used to help to drive policy to ensure an ever greater proportion of journeys are taken by public transport.	2023-2820

Child and Youth Engagement with Agriculture and Food

Agriculture and food are an important part of Ireland's culture, history, and modern economy. Children and young people should be aware of the food and agricultural sector, and their voices should be considered when policy is made in this area, especially if they or their family are directly affected. Moreover, there are specific issues of inter-generational sustainability of Irish agriculture, and making farming an attractive career option for children and young people. According to the Census of Agriculture in 2020, the majority of farmers are 55 years of age or older, with just 9,338 farms, or 6.9% run by individuals 35 years of age or younger.

Food Vision 2030, the new ten-year strategy for the Irish agri-food sector, recognises the importance of effective dialogue and partnerships with children and young people. With this in mind, it states that "[t]he agri-food sector needs to engage with children and students". The strategy argues that generational renewal is critically important to ensuring the future viability and social sustainability of the Irish agri-food sector and of rural Ireland. Food Vision 2030, which will run concurrently with this framework, will make significant progress in this area within this decade.

**ACTION
63**
ENGAGEMENT WITH AGRICULTURE

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
63.1	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Progress the generational renewal ambitions in <i>Food Vision 2030</i> and <i>Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027</i> . Promote specific initiatives for children and young people to ensure greater engagement with agri-food, including the option of a proposal to establish a National Youth Food Forum.	2024

Family-friendly Working

Family-friendly working refers to employment which supports workers to meet their family commitments, and enjoy family life to the greatest possible extent, including remote working and flexible working. The Government’s 2019 *Remote Work in Ireland* report reflects growing policy interest in the potential of flexible and Family-friendly working arrangements, including remote work, to facilitate improved work-life balance and labour market inclusivity among cohorts with lower participation rates such as women and people with caring responsibilities. The onset of the pandemic stimulated wider discussions of work-life balance, and the opportunities and challenges represented by new ways of working, all of which have significant implications for the well-being of children and young people.

Recent evidence also suggests there may be particular problems in the area of family-friendly working in the Defence Forces, linked to other issues with workplace equality. According to the [Commission on the Defence Forces](#), some hiring practices may be unfriendly towards families. The Commission recommended “urgent reform of working arrangements to allow for flexible service and more family-friendly work practices.” More widely, the report found that in the Defence Forces “there is evidence of a culture that disadvantages, or in some cases damages, certain categories of people within the organisation, such as lower ranks, women, younger officers and specialists.”⁴²

ACTION 64 FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKING

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
64.1	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Legislate for the right of workers to request remote working through the commencement of the relevant provisions of the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023.	2024
64.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Commence the relevant provisions of the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 which introduced a right to request flexible working for parents and carers, following the preparation of a Code of Practice on remote working and flexible working.	2024
64.3	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Workplace Relations Commission	Workplace Relations Commission to develop a Code of Practice to provide guidance on remote working and flexible working arrangements.	2024

continued

⁴² Commission on the Defence Forces, Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022), p.74.

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
64.4	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Promote the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's Guidance for Working Remotely webpage and Employer Checklist.	2023-8
64.5	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; IDA Ireland; Enterprise Ireland; Local Enterprise Offices	Ensure ongoing enterprise engagement by agencies such as IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, and Local Enterprise Offices to promote remote working skills, best practice and equality.	2023-8
64.6	Department of Environment, Climate and Communications; Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Complete and evaluate the impacts of reduced working time or four day working week.	2024

ACTION 65 EQUALITY AND FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKING IN THE DEFENCE FORCES

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
65.1	Department of Defence	Remove the blanket exemption of the Defence Forces from the Organisation of the Working Time Act 1997.	2025
65.2	Department of Defence	As part of the <i>Commission on the Defence Forces</i> Report recommendations, to provide updates on the work to be undertaken by military authorities in the development of a profile on current serving Defence Forces personnel as a means of underpinning the long-term approaches to ensure the Defence Forces is more reflective of the diversity of Irish society, including young people.	2023-2028

Gender Recognition

Young people consulted as part of the preparation of the *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020* identified the need for improved gender recognition for transgender young people. The specific points raised related to the legal recognition of these groups were:

- Need for inclusion of non-binary within the Gender Recognition Act;
- Improve gender recognition for under 18s;
- Simplify the process of changing one's name, and modifying official forms to reflect different genders including non-binary;⁴³

⁴³ Deirdre Fullerton and Maria Herron, *What We Think: A review of past consultations with children and young people as part of the UNCRRC reporting process* (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022), p. 20-21.

All children and young people have a right to express their own identity, and all young people should be treated with dignity irrespective of their gender identity.

ACTION 66 GENDER RECOGNITION

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
66.1 UNCRC	Department of Social Protection	In line with the Health (Assisted Human Reproduction) Bill, amend the Gender Recognition Act 2015 to allow children aged 16 and 17 to achieve legal recognition of their gender identity through a simplified procedure. Prepare and introduce legislation for amending the process of gender recognition for children aged 16 and 17.	2024
66.2 UNCRC	Department of Social Protection; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Complete research on introducing a system of gender recognition for children under 16 years of age in close consultation with children, including transgender children.	2023

Climate Awareness

According to a 2015 [UNICEF report](#), children will bear the brunt of climate change, and climate change will make existing inequalities worse. Looking at the key climate risks by region, the report argued that people in Europe will become increasingly impacted by a wide range of adverse environmental conditions such as extreme drought or flooding. The resulting impacts of rising sea levels, wildfire outbreak, fresh water scarcity, biodiversity and air pollution, is predicted to spread disease, dangerous respiratory conditions, exacerbating forced migration and further compounding social and economic inequities, all of which will have a disproportionate impact on marginalized groups, especially children.⁴⁴ The UN has recognised that the climate emergency, the collapse of biodiversity and pervasive pollution pose ‘an urgent and systemic threat to children’s rights globally’.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ UNICEF, *Unless we act now: The impact of climate change on children* (UNICEF, 2015).

⁴⁵ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General comment No. 26 (2023) on children’s rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change* (United Nations, 2023) available online at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FGC%2F26&Lang=en (11 September 2023).

Furthermore, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child reiterated, in the recent publication of its General Comment No. 2646, each State's obligations to urgently implement legislative and administrative measures to address adverse environmental harms, urging immediate collective action by each member State and to guarantee that children are able to exercise their rights in mitigating the impacts of climate change. The Committee specifically underlined that States must also commit to undertake urgent and assertive action to protect children including against environmental damage from commercial activities, which includes taking 'all necessary measures to protect against harms to children's rights related to climate change caused by business enterprises, such as by ensuring that businesses rapidly reduce their emissions'.

Government is seeking to engage, enable and empower young people through a two-way dialogue leading to the co-creation of climate actions that are meaningful, inclusive, accessible, and fair. The NDCA is the main Government initiative through which this ambition is being realised in Ireland. The National Youth Assembly on Climate, which consists of 50 young people aged 12 – 24 years also makes a significant contribution to this process, and its recent recommendations will be considered for inclusion in the forthcoming *Climate Action Plan 2024*.

ACTION 67 CLIMATE AWARENESS

NO.	OWNER	ACTION	TIMELINE
67.1	Department of the Environment, Climate, and Communications	Acknowledge the leadership role of children and young people in advocating for climate policy, and ensure all of society, including parents, also contribute to these efforts.	2023
67.2	Department of the Environment, Climate, and Communications; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Promote climate literacy among parents.	2024-2028
67.3	Department of the Environment, Climate, and Communications; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Provide information for children on the relative impact of pro-environment actions and pro-environment policies, and behaviours which have a negative impact on the climate, mindful of the relative impact individual action can have on climate breakdown.	2024

⁴⁶ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Urgent action by States needed to tackle climate change, says UN Committee in guidance on children's rights and environment (OHCHR, 2023) available online at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/08/urgent-action-states-needed-tackle-climate-change-says-un-committee-guidance> (11 September 2023).



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – ACTIONS BEING TRANSFERRED TO YOUNG IRELAND FROM FIRST 5

First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 is a constituent strategy of the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures 2014-2020* and its successor *Young Ireland 2023-2028*. The *First 5 Phase 2 Implementation Plan* focuses on achieving actions which relate specifically to babies, young children and their families. The following actions with a broader 0 - 24 years focus have been extracted from *First 5* and will feature in the future implementation and monitoring arrangements for *Young Ireland*.

STRATEGIC ACTION	ACTION	ACTION DERIVED FROM FIRST 5	LEAD
Develop a tiered model of parenting services built on a foundation of universal provision, with extra support available for parents in line with their level of need on a progressive basis.	A.2.2.2	Increase access to services through continued investment in Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme.	Tusla
Building on the existing infrastructure of supports, review and develop initiatives to maximise the incomes of families with young children, with a particular focus on children at risk of poverty.	A.3.1.1	Keep the Home Carer Tax Credit under review as part of the annual Budgetary process in line with government policies.	DoF
Building on the existing infrastructure of supports, review and develop initiatives to maximise the incomes of families with young children, with a particular focus on children at risk of poverty.	A.3.1.2	The Report of the Child Maintenance Review Group was published in November 2022 and the Government accepted the Group's recommendations in relation to the social welfare system. As a result: (i) The "efforts to seek maintenance" requirement no longer applies to One-Parent Family Payment and Jobseeker's Transitional Payment. (ii) The liable relative provisions are being removed from the One-Parent Family Payment arrangements which means that the Department of Social Protection will no longer seek to recoup a portion of claim costs from the non-resident parent in these cases. Removing these provisions does not replace or supersede the primary responsibility of parents to maintain their children.	Joint Leads: DSP and DoJ

continued

STRATEGIC ACTION	ACTION	ACTION DERIVED FROM FIRST 5	LEAD
		<p>(iii) Child maintenance payments will be disregarded in the means test for social welfare payments. This measure will mean that many lone parents currently on reduced rates of payment will see their payment increase and some additional lone parents will qualify for a payment.</p> <p>Social welfare means tests will no longer include an assessment of child maintenance payments and the liable relative provisions will no longer be applied to applicants for One-Parent Family Payment following the necessary changes to primary and secondary legislation as well as system and form changes.</p> <p>At the same time, the Minister for Justice published the first Family Justice Strategy, with a set of goals and actions which seek to put children at the centre of a reform family justice system. An action in that Strategy was to review the enforcement of child maintenance orders and identify proposals for reform.</p>	
Building on the existing infrastructure of supports, review and develop initiatives to maximise the incomes of families with young children, with a particular focus on children at risk of poverty.	A.3.1.3	Continue to support people, including families with young children, to meet their immediate energy needs with a focus on using deeper energy efficiency upgrades to help tackle the root causes of energy poverty.	DECC
Support the development of suitable accommodation to meet the needs of babies, young children and their families.	A.3.2.1	In line with the policies outlined in <i>Housing for All: A New Housing Plan for Ireland</i> , implement a range of actions to ensure an increased supply of social, affordable and private homes so that children and their families are provided with suitable accommodation.	DHLGH
Support the development of suitable accommodation to meet the needs of babies, young children and their families.	A.3.2.2	Provide increased accommodation facilities appropriate for families experiencing homelessness and ensure that the appropriate supports are provided to these families to support them being re-homed in suitable homes within the shortest possible timeframe and having regard to their individual requirements and circumstances.	DHLGH

continued

STRATEGIC ACTION	ACTION	ACTION DERIVED FROM FIRST 5	LEAD
Support the development of suitable accommodation to meet the needs of babies, young children and their families.	A.3.2.3	Following consultation process, publish standards for accommodation offered to people in the protection process to ensure that the delivery of services and supports for people living in this type of accommodation, including babies, young children and their parents, is of high quality, appropriate, safe and effective.	DCEDIY
Support the development of suitable accommodation to meet the needs of babies, young children and their families.	A.3.2.4	Provide increased delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation through the expenditure of funding by Local Authorities for the delivery of such accommodation provision.	DHLGH
Ensure that the design and development of physical and social infrastructure takes account of the needs and rights of babies, young children and their families so that communities where children are born and grow up support positive early development.	A.3.3.1	Develop guidelines on planning and developing child-friendly communities for local authorities. The guidelines will focus on building sustainable communities that ensure that children have safe environments to play, explore and learn. These will include recommendations on amenity space, appropriate scale, walking and cycling routes, and public spaces including play spaces and natural environments.	DHLGH
Promote and support positive health behaviours among pregnant women, babies, young children and their families.	B.4.1.5	Expand and maintain comprehensive, accessible information for parents on all aspects of their child's health and well-being through the mychild.ie website supported by social media.	HSE
Integrate health behaviour supports and services into child-serving settings and the wider community.	B.4.2.2	Extend the Community Based Nutrition and Cooking Programmes.	HSE
Integrate health behaviour supports and services into child-serving settings and the wider community.	B.5.2.1	Commence the implementation of Model of Care for Paediatric Healthcare Services with initial focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expansion in consultant paediatrician numbers, with a definite focus on general paediatrics, emergency paediatrics and community child health. - Expanded roles for advanced nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists and health and social care professionals. - Developing the regional acute paediatric units to provide an appropriate range of regional services. 	Joint Leads: DoH and HSE

continued

STRATEGIC ACTION	ACTION	ACTION DERIVED FROM FIRST 5	LEAD
Make therapeutic and medical provision available to babies, young children on a consistent, equitable and timely basis.	B.5.2.2	Continue to support the reconfiguration of services for children with disabilities in line with the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People programme.	Joint Leads: DCEDIY, DoH and HSE
Make therapeutic and medical provision available to babies, young children on a consistent, equitable and timely basis.	B.5.2.3	Reduce children's waiting lists for primary care and early intervention, including waiting times.	Joint Leads: DoH and HSE
Make therapeutic and medical provision available to babies, young children on a consistent, equitable and timely basis.	B.5.2.6	Progress the establishment of the new children's hospital to provide specialist tertiary and quaternary services for children from all over Ireland.	Joint Leads: DoH and HSE
Babies and young children and their parents enjoy positive mental health.	B.6.2.2	Ensure priority is given to all children, young people and their families in <i>Sharing the Vision - A Mental Health Policy for Everyone</i> and the National Mental Health Promotion Plan.	DoH
Improve access to mental health supports and services for babies, young children and families, with a particular focus on initiatives that integrate mental health supports and services into child serving settings and the wider community.	B.6.2.4	Improve the capacity of community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and implement the revised operational guidelines.	HSE
Improve access to mental health supports and services for babies, young children and families, with a particular focus on initiatives that integrate mental health supports and services into child serving settings and the wider community.	B.6.2.5	Improve access to parental mental health services (including counselling and psychological services) that treat maternal depression, anxiety disorders and substance abuse and identify and address any gaps in mental health services for very young children.	HSE
Improve access to mental health supports and services for babies, young children and families, with a particular focus on initiatives that integrate mental health supports and services into child serving settings and the wider community.	B.6.2.8	Continue to roll out and invest in the Clinical Programmes in eating disorders, self-harm and early intervention in psychosis (EIP). a) Eating Disorders National Clinical Programme. b) Assessment and management of self-harm presentation to emergency department following self-harm National Clinical Programme. c) Early Intervention in Psychosis National Clinical Programme. d) ADHD in Adults National Clinical Programme. e) Dual Diagnosis.	HSE

continued

STRATEGIC ACTION	ACTION	ACTION DERIVED FROM FIRST 5	LEAD
Strengthen leadership and governance across the early childhood system at a national and local level.	D.1.B.4	Progress the Implementation of From Poverty to Potential: A Programme Plan for Child Poverty and Well-being 2023-2025.	D/Taoiseach
Strengthen leadership and governance across the early childhood system at a national and local level.	D.1.B.5	Identify and scope the issue of food poverty as a cross-sectoral priority under Young Ireland, and in alignment with overall Healthy Ireland implementation, led by the Department of Health.	DoH
Develop, enhance and implement national standards for early childhood supports and services.	D.2.A.2	Develop guidance and support for Family Resource Centres (FRCs) to enhance and consolidate the delivery of the FRC programme.	Tusla
Develop, enhance and implement national standards for early childhood supports and services.	D.2.A.3	Review current assessment and screening tools for babies, young children and families, particularly those with additional support needs, to facilitate collaborative working across health and social care professionals and effective referral pathways. Ensure that these are consistently implemented nationally.	DCEDIY
Develop, enhance and implement national standards for early childhood supports and services.	D.2.A.7	Through Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) and Child and Family Services Networks (CFSNs), and linked to the development of the Children's Workforce Initiative, pilot the development of "No Wrong Door" policy in services for babies, young children and their families to ensure that anyone seeking assistance and services is appropriately supported by the relevant professionals in their community. The development of a revised blueprint for CYPSC and Child and Family Support Networks will support the development of this initiative.	DCEDIY
Identify and put in place the staff requirements to deliver early childhood supports and services.	D.3.A.2	Develop the Tusla multi-annual strategic workforce plan, focussing on innovative approaches to recruiting and retaining social workers and family support practitioners. Include a pilot scheme of funded bursaries for Traveller and Roma students to become Tusla social workers or social care workers.	Tusla

continued

STRATEGIC ACTION	ACTION	ACTION DERIVED FROM FIRST 5	LEAD
Develop and enhance administrative data systems on babies, young children and their families to assess the quality and support the delivery of integrated supports and services.	D.4.B.8	Develop rigorous approaches to capturing outcomes data at key development stages across child health and learning systems as part of the Cross Government Research Programme. This will include but not be limited to data on babies and young children.	DCEDIY
Put in place robust systems of monitoring and evaluation across Government.	D.4.C.2	Building on and updating previous work, progress the development of a methodological approach to support and inform any wider Government response to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child concluding observations recommending that the Irish state "...include children's rights impact assessments in the framework for integrated social impact assessments to ensure that fiscal and budgetary decisions are compliant with obligations under the Convention."	DCEDIY
Develop more strategic approaches to funding supports for babies, young children and their families to deliver improved services.	D.5.B.1	In the context of a new model of parenting supports, adopt quality standards to underpin public funding of parenting supports in order to put in place a more strategic, consistent and sustainable basis for this work with a transparent framework for allocating resources.	DCEDIY

APPENDIX B – EU CHILD GUARANTEE ACTIONS

The EU Child Guarantee seeks to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing a minimum standard of access to key services to all children in the European Union. The Guarantee also aims to promote equal opportunity for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and to break cycles of intergenerational disadvantage. It calls on Member States to ensure children in need have access to the following:

- free early childhood education and care;
- free education, including school-based activities;
- free healthcare;
- healthy nutrition, including a healthy meal each school day; and
- adequate housing.

Ireland's EU Child Guarantee National Action Plan identifies a number of critical barriers to access services and supports for children and families. These critical barriers are then broken down into a number of measurable actions, which together will aim to enact meaningful improvements in the lives of children experiencing social exclusion. The effective implementation of the EU Child Guarantee will involve the active input of all government departments and agencies, working together to address these barriers.

One of the recommendations made under the EU Child Guarantee relates to reporting. Ireland will report on its progress in the implementation of its National Action Plan to the EU Commission every two years. The first of these reports will be due in March 2024. This report will primarily cover activities carried out and measures implemented since the adoption of the EU Child Guarantee Recommendation. An update will be given on each policy measure contained in Ireland's plan, with numbers of children in need who have been reached and benefited from the respective measure, as well as the impact of these measures on the children in need.

Young Ireland, the national policy framework for children and young people 2023-2028, will inform the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee, and ensure it is collaborative, integrated and impactful. The implementation and monitoring of the National Action Plan will be incorporated into the policy framework's governance and monitoring structures, under a broader child and youth focused umbrella. This will allow these actions to also be considered in the wider social context, and can help to improve service delivery in areas not explicitly covered by the EU Child Guarantee.

Ireland's EU Child Guarantee National Action Plan can be found here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/95dcc-irelands-eu-child-guarantee-national-action-plan/>



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