



Rialtas na hÉireann
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Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028 Blueprint

Prepared by the Department of
Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
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A New Blueprint

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020, concluded at the end of 2020. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is currently developing a new policy framework for children and young people to cover the period from 2023 to 2028.

The proposed purpose and structure of the new policy framework is set out below. This blueprint of the policy framework is informed by numerous consultations to date, including an open, public consultation which was conducted early this year and earlier Government consultations with children and young people.

Purpose

The new policy framework is intended to inform cross-government work for children and young people over the period 2023-2028. The framework strives to place children and young people at the centre of policy, while also addressing the most pressing issues for children and young people, both now and over the lifetime of the framework. Furthermore, the framework will:

- Provide a platform to fully realise the rights of children and young people in Ireland, so that all partners can work effectively together to ensure all children and young people can be happy and thrive.
- Create an enabling environment where the needs of children and young people are a central part of everyone's agenda
- Spotlight areas requiring coordinated focus in order to address the challenges being faced by children and young people in Ireland, and generate momentum for change
- Identify the five national outcomes to be achieved for all children and young people, and recognise that improving the outcomes for certain cohorts needs ongoing concerted effort.

1. Vision & Principles

Our vision is of an Ireland which fully respects and realises the rights of children and young people, supporting them to lead fulfilling lives.

In order to realise this vision, the development of the new policy framework is guided by four principles which are linked to the general principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Ireland ratified in 1992.

It will also incorporate internationally-recognised efforts in working to realise the rights of children and young people (aged 0-24). We know that realising the rights of children and young people up to age 18 is particularly important, both to ensure they lead fulfilling lives growing up, but also to ensure positive outcomes into adulthood. However, we also recognise that those aged 18-24 have unique needs, which must be addressed.¹

Equality

- Children and young people have rights, and Government policy for children and young people must recognise these rights, promoting equal opportunities for all children and young people. Government has a special responsibility to recognise and address disadvantage experienced by children and young people through the use of the best available data and evidence, and to promote evidence-based practices for all those working with children and young people.

UNCRC General Principle

- All the rights guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child must be available to all children without discrimination of any kind (Article 2).

¹ The Council of Europe's Recommendation on Young People's Access to Rights (2016) addressed this need, calling on member states to adopt a human rights-based approach to ensuring young people's access to rights. The Council Resolution on the new EU Youth Strategy supported this argument, stating that "European Youth Policy and all actions undertaken within the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 should be firmly anchored in the international system of human rights". While distinct from the UNCRC, the resolution rightly affirmed that actions to support young people should begin by recognising them as rights-holders.

Support for Children & Young People

The best interests of children and young people must be a primary consideration in all Government actions concerning children and young people. Services available to children and young people must be high-quality, appropriately timed, and focused on realising positive outcomes for children and young people. Parents and families must be supported as the primary carers of children and young people.

UNCRC General Principle

- The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (Article 3).

Delivering for Children and Young People

- The wellbeing of children and young people is a core measure of our success as a society, and Government must support children and young people to live happy, fulfilled lives to the maximum extent possible. It has a duty to use resources to deliver services and supports for children and young people efficiently. Policy for children and young people must include clear implementation, monitoring and accountability mechanisms, with effective structures for cross-sectoral working, to ensure children and young people have the support they need.

UNCRC General Principle

- Every child has the right to life, survival and development (Article 6).

Respect for the Views of Children & Young People

Children and young people are experts in their own lives and wellbeing. Policy and decision makers must consider and take into account the views of children and young people in all matters affecting them, promote the free expression of children and young people's views, and provide appropriate opportunities for children and young people to be heard. Particular

care must be taken to ensure the views of particularly vulnerable cohorts of children and young people, including those at key transition points in their lives, are respected and taken into account.

UNCRC General Principle

- The child's views must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting him or her (Article 12).

2. 5 National Outcomes

The new policy framework will retain the 5 National Outcomes from *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, which set out what we want for all children and young people to have a fulfilling life and achieve their potential. By realising the vision and principles of the framework in practice, we will achieve these 5 National Outcomes.

These 5 National Outcomes are that children and young people have/are:

- Active and Healthy
 - *This means...*
 - *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
 - *This means...*
 - *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
 - *This means...*
 - *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**
 - *This means...*
 - *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**
 - *This means...*
 - *They are aware of their rights, and are civically socially and environmentally engaged off-line 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*

3. A Platform for the Rights of Children and Young People

The new Policy Framework will be the cross-government platform to realise the rights of children and young people in Ireland. We want to ensure everyone understands the rights of children and young people, and those working with and for children and young people can respond to their needs, and support the realisation of their rights.

Communication

The new Policy Framework will incorporate a strong communications component to ensure the rights of children and young people are central to all Government policy development and implementation. The campaign will promote the development of a collaborative culture based on a shared cross-society agenda to put children and young people first.

As part of the implementation of the new Policy Framework, consideration will be given to how communication with the public can add value, and what all of society can do to improve the lives of children and young people. Separately, the framework will be communicated across Government, to ensure it is widely understood, and that everyone

working in this area knows how their work should meet the needs of children and young people.

Implementation

The new policy framework will be embedded in the operations of Government Departments, State Agencies and our partners in service delivery, to facilitate effective engagement with children and young people's rights and responding to their needs. It will address identified barriers to coordinated, effective and efficient policy implementation to support improved outcomes for children and young people.

Technical support in developing the implementation structures, as well as effective monitoring and reporting, will be provided by the OECD under the EU Technical Support Instrument. Under this process, separate consultations on the implementation structures and processes will be conducted.

4. An Enabling Environment for Children and Young People

The new policy framework will focus on system-level actions which enable an environment where children and young people's rights and needs are central considerations.

Commitments will focus on the UNCRC common implementation measures² including:

- Piloting child and youth impact assessments and exploring mechanisms requiring presentation to Government of formal impact analysis statements
- Conducting a legislative review of compliance with the UNCRC, with a view to identifying priorities for reform
- Piloting the introduction of child and youth budgeting and reporting to government on annual expenditure on children and young people
- Further development and dissemination of sufficient and reliable data on children and young people, disaggregated to enable identification of discrimination and/or disparities in the realisation of rights
- Review of data sharing between bodies working to improve outcomes for children and young people, to facilitate a holistic approach to the protection of their rights and wellbeing
- Development of a cross-government funded Children and Young People's Research Programme

² UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNCRC Common Implementation Measures CRC/GC/2003/5 (2003).

- Further development of participation of children and young people in decision-making across government, including interviewing children and young people and supporting them as researchers and building capacity across government to fully incorporate the participation of children and youth into policymaking and implementation of the *Participation Framework*
- Developing training and capacity-building for all those involved in the implementation process and for those working with and for children and young people
- Examination of workforce development needs across this sector and development of actions to support workforce development.

5. Spotlights on Challenges

The new policy framework will focus on the areas of most significant difficulty for children and young people, especially those who are vulnerable. The new framework will identify areas which require action across Government, and focus 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 removing barriers and addressing challenges to children and young people’s rights. This requires concerted effort over a specified period of time to generate momentum for change.

An initial list of Spotlights will be approved by Government, based on:

- The need for a coordinated approach and actions across Government;
- Significant areas of concern for children and young people identified in published data, and evidence from published sources;
- Feedback from consultations with children, young people and other stakeholders, as well as reports on areas where action is needed.

Areas under consideration for Spotlights include Child and Youth Poverty and Mental Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People (including play and recreation).

6. Support Children and Young People to Achieve 5 National Outcomes

In the lifetime of the new policy framework, all actions Government take for children and young people should help to realise one or more of the 5 National Outcomes. The new policy framework will highlight actions to address the forthcoming UNCRC concluding observations, to align closely with a children and young people's rights agenda. A small number of new actions that may be identified by government departments and committed to under the successor framework will be highlighted under each outcome area.

The framework will recognise that there is already significant action taking place across Government to improve the lives of children and young people. A parallel reference document will set out the current actions and priorities for departments and state agencies over the lifetime of the framework under each of the 5 National Outcomes.