



Tenth Annual Report

January – December 2006

May 2007



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Overview of 2006

2006 was a busy and exciting year for the Alliance. There were three priority areas of work – the UN Committee monitoring and reporting process; the Social Partnership negotiations; and the development of a new Strategic Plan. In addition, the Alliance continued to work within the CADIC Coalition, the End Child Poverty Coalition and the Irish Youth Justice Alliance.

Much was achieved during 2006, the Alliance presented its Shadow Report and a Children's Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and importantly the concerns and recommendations of these reports were reflected in the Committee's *Concluding Observations*. Children were given a specific chapter within the new Social Partnership agreement and a series of commitments were identified. The Alliance finalised a new five year Strategic Plan and successfully engaged with two funders to ensure the successful implementation of this Plan. The Government announced its intention to hold a referendum to strengthen the rights of children within the Constitution and invited the Alliance to consult with non-governmental organisations to feed into the formulation by Government of wording for a proposed amendment.

Vision

The Alliance's Vision is one whose sentiment it shares with many of its member organisations – that:

Ireland will be one of the best places in the world to be a child

Mission

To realise the rights of children in Ireland through securing the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Alliance will have succeeded in its Mission, when there is:

An Ireland that has given full effect to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which will mean that children's rights are:

- Integrated into our mindsets
- Protected by our laws
- Reflected in our policies
- Evidenced in wider society

Structures

The membership of the Alliance is made up of a diverse range of groups including child welfare agencies and service providers, child protection groups, youth organisations, human rights organisations, family support groups, disability organisations, Traveller organisations, parent representative bodies, trade unions and professional organisations. At the Alliance Annual General Meeting, held in May each year, Directors are elected from among Alliance member organisations in order to oversee the functions of the Alliance. The Board of Directors meets on a monthly basis.

1. Administration

1.1 Board Members

At the tenth Annual General Meeting of the Children’s Rights Alliance, held on 9 May 2006, the following members of the Board of Directors were elected. The Board met on multiple occasions during 2006; and the Alliance extends its thanks to the members of the Board of Directors for their work during 2006 and for their continuing involvement and support.

Chairperson	Dr. Nóirín Hayes	School of Social Science and Legal Studies, DIT
Vice-Chairperson	Liam O’ Dwyer	Irish Youth Foundation
Secretary	Margaret Burns	Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice
Treasurer	Michael McLoughlin	Youth Work Ireland
Director	Mary O’Connor	Children in Hospital Ireland
Director	Fr. Peter McVerry	Arrupe Society
Director	Norah Gibbons	Barnardos
Director	Grace Kelly *	ISPCC
Director	Aine Lynch**	ISPCC
Director	Candy Murphy	One Family

* Grace Kelly stepped down from the Board in September 2006.

** Aine Lynch was co-opted onto the Board in October 2006.

1.2 Staff

There were changes to the Alliance staffing during 2006, with the Alliance operating below full capacity for parts of the year. In light of these obstacles, the achievements made during 2006 are particularly noteworthy.

Chief Executive	Jillian van Turnhout		Full time
Deputy Chief Executive	Maria Corbett		Full time
Policy Officer	Stacey Gutkowski	Until July	Full time
PA to Chief Executive	Kirsty Callander	From April	Full time
Administrator	Ann Quinn	Until September	2 Days per week
	Ciara Murphy		1 Day per week

The Alliance also housed two programme coordinators for Coalitions the Alliance is a part of:

End Child Poverty Coalition	Jo Harding	Until Sept.	Full time
CADIC	Kerry O’Leary	Until Dec.	Full time

2006 saw some changes to the Alliance staff. Stacey Gutkowski left the Alliance in July; Ann Quinn and Jo Harding finished employment in September. Kerry O’Leary finished employment in December. Kerry has continued in her role as Programme Coordinator with CADIC and is now housed in Integrating Ireland.

Thanks are due to Karyn Deegan, a Librarian studies student from UCD, who reorganised the Alliance library.

1.3 Membership

The consultation process for the development of the Shadow Report led to a strengthening of the Alliance's relationship with its member organisations and the enhancement of participation of member organisations in the Alliance's work and policy development. The Alliance had a number of new member applications which brought its membership to over 80 member organisations, and adds to the diversification of its membership base.

1.4 Funding

Throughout the year, the Alliance operated with an extremely tight cash flow. Although the balances on some of its bank accounts were healthy; most of this funding was committed to specific projects and activities. Intensive work was dedicated to producing a five year Strategic Plan and to engaging with two potential funders. The Alliance completed its Strategic Plan in August and secured agreement of financial support to implement the Plan from the ONE Foundation in October and from the Atlantic Philanthropies in December.

During 2006, the Alliance received funding from the following sources:

- ONE Foundation (Development of Five Year Strategic Plan)
- Atlantic Philanthropies (Shadow Report and Children's Report; CADIC)
- Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (National Anti Poverty Network and Federations and Networks grants)
- Irish Youth Foundation (End Child Poverty Coalition; Shadow Report)
- Office of the Minister for Children (Children's delegation to UNCRC, Geneva, June 2006)
- Geoffrey Shannon (Children's delegation to UNCRC, Geneva, September 2006)
- Membership fees

2. Strategic Plan

2.1 Strategic Plan 2005-2007

During 2006 the Alliance operated under a Strategic Plan from June 2005 to January 2007. This Plan had six components, progress in relation to each of these is detailed in this report:

- Preparation of the Shadow Report
- Raising Awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Participation in Social Partnership
- Ending Child Poverty
- Youth Justice
- CADIC Coalition

2.2 Strategic Plan 2007-2011

Following a period of intensive work, in August the Alliance finalised a new five year Strategic Plan which will come into operation on January 1 2007 and run until 2011. The summary of the Strategic Plan is set out below:

AIM 1: Bringing about a shared vision that will realise and protect children's rights in Ireland

The Alliance will have realised this Aim when: The Government, government departments, political parties, statutory agencies and other key bodies frame and implement policies in relation to children on the basis of a rights-based approach.

Targets 2007–2011

During the period of this Plan, the Alliance's targets are that:

- The Government, key government departments and statutory agencies will adopt a rights-based approach to children's issues in their strategy statements, policies and practices.
- Political parties have adopted policies on children, and used a rights-based approach, in their election manifestos and policy statements.
- The instruments of Social Partnership adopt a rights-based approach.
- The Alliance's member organisations are active agents in promoting its shared vision.
- Other NGOs understand the benefits of rights-based approach.

Plans 2007–2011

During the period of this Plan, the Alliance is committed to the following initiatives:

- Organise biennial international symposium
- Demonstrate the need for a rights-based National Children's Strategy
- Build international relationships and networks
- Create knowledge bank of rights-based approaches to children's issues
- Toolkit for key influencers
- 'Patrons'

AIM 2: Securing legislative and policy changes to give meaningful effect to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Alliance will have realised this Aim when: Policy positions advocated by the Alliance are reflected in legislative change, national strategy documents and Government policy.

Targets 2007– 2011

During the period of this Plan, the Alliance's targets are that:

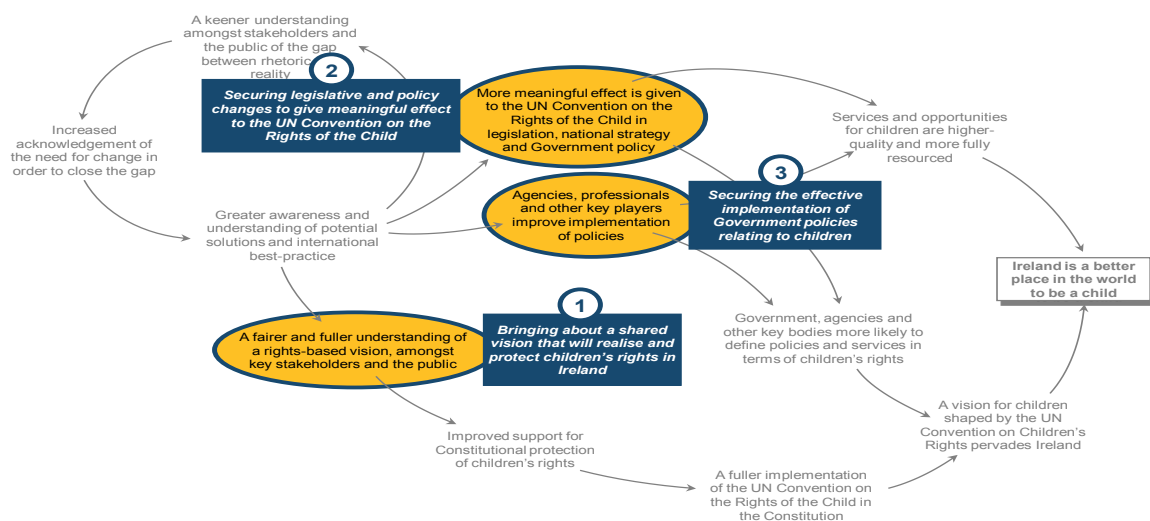
- The Government will give a commitment to implement the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child following its examination of Ireland's Second Report in September 2006.
- The Programme for Government following the next general election will include commitments to policies and services that will enhance the lives of children.
- The Alliance will have developed comprehensive policy proposals and secured significant policy change by Government in four specific areas.
- The National Children's Strategy 2010–2020 will include explicit commitments in relation to the policy areas affecting children that are of key concern to the Alliance.
- The National Action Plan by the Irish Government under the proposed EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child will contain commitments advocated by the Alliance.

Plans 2007–2011

During the period of this Plan, the Alliance is committed to the following initiatives:

- Conference on recommendations of UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
- Advocacy in Relation to Recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
- Development of EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child
- Engagement with political parties
- Campaigns strategy
- Involvement of members
- Policy development in key areas
- National Children's Strategy 2010–2020
- Strengthening the evidence base

Theory of Change / Action - Linked to Aims



AIM 3: Securing the effective implementation of Government policies relating to children

The Alliance will have realised this Aim when: In the priority policy areas selected, there is clear evidence of substantial progress towards the implementation of the commitments made by Government.

Targets 2007– 2011

This will mean in effect:

- The Alliance will be recognised as an independent, expert and valued commentator among policy-makers, politicians, media, key stakeholders and other key influencers.
- The Alliance will be in a strong position to effectively highlight shortfalls in policy implementation, gaps and duplication in implementation systems and contradictions in policies and statements.
- The Office of the Minister for Children will recognise the Alliance as a key player in monitoring policy implementation.
- The Alliance will support the development of a culture of transparency, accountability and openness by Government in relation to policy affecting children.
- The Alliance will encourage an expectation that all new policies are accompanied by clear implementation plans and designated resources.

Plans 2007–2011

During the period of this Plan, the Alliance is committed to the following initiatives:

- Audit of Government strategy, policy statements and legislative provisions
- Develop programme of work for each priority issue
- Social Partnership
- Building relationships with the Office of the Minister for Children and key government departments
- Publish reports on progress in implementation
- Communications
- Annual Budget of Government

3. The Shadow Report and UN Process

3.1 Overview

Throughout 2006 the Alliance devoted significant time and energy to engaging in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child review of Ireland's periodic State report on its progress in relation to children's rights. The objective of this activity was to promote State action on children's rights in advance of the State hearing and to influence the Committee's recommendations contained in the *Concluding Observations* and promote their implementation. The Alliance hoped that, through this process, it could once again influence the trajectory of public policy and hold the Government accountable for its international obligations to children.

Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992. As a State Party to the Convention the Government is required to submit an assessment of its progress in implementing the provisions of the Convention every five years. In 2005 the State submitted its National Report to the UN Committee. Under Article 44 of the Convention, NGOs are invited to submit alternative or "shadow" reports in response to the State's Report.

a) Shadow Report - *From Rhetoric to Rights: Second Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child*

The preparation of the Shadow Report was the largest policy drafting process for the Alliance in the nine years since the previous Shadow Report, *Small Voices: Vital Rights* which was produced in 1997. It enabled the Alliance to comment on a wide range of policy areas beyond the particular expertise of Alliance staff. Its development included an extensive consultation process, involving member organisations, individuals and Board members, and entailed as many as fifty-four drafts. Subgroups were formed in relation to specific topics – for example, education – to bring together representatives of member organisations with similar concerns.

b) Children's Report - *Our Voices, Our Realities: A Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child by Children Living in Ireland*

The Alliance collaborated with 13 member organisations to complete 17 consultation workshops with 132 children aged 1-17 years. Children from a wide range of backgrounds participated in the report, including children using homeless services, children with disabilities and experience of hospital care, separated children seeking asylum, young Travellers and children living in care. The children were supported to express their views and ideas in different ways: in writing, through artwork and photography and, in the case of one group of children, through a short film that they made themselves. The children were asked to identify good and bad aspects of being a child living in Ireland today as well as changes that could improve their lives. A Reference Group (made up of 7 children aged 12-17 years) was formed. This Group chose a selection of the children's written and visual work to be included in the report in the form of a scrapbook; and wrote a reflective comment as part of the report's introduction.

The Children's Report is seen to have been a real success story. It is a unique report, one of the first of its kind in the world. Unlike other children's reports it facilitated the children's to have their voice heard without filtering it through adult interpretation. The report received high praise from the UN Committee and others. It is a substantial, stand-alone report, which allows children to give their own emphasis and perspective on issues of concern to them. The participation of the children in both the Pre-sessional and State hearings was a powerful reminder of the ultimate goal behind the process – to make children's lives better.

3.2 Key Activities

Following the consultation process with member organisations and a 'Think-in' meeting which took place in 2005, the Alliance finalised its reports to the UN Committee. An editorial committee, comprising Board members and staff, oversaw decisions on amendments proposed by member organisations to the draft circulated to them in late 2005. The Committee also agreed the recommendations within the body of the text and the key recommendations to be listed in the front of the report. This was a critical time in the development of the report as strategic decisions were taken as to what material remained in the final version and the emphasis given to an issue.

Between January and May 2006, substantial time was invested in finalising and editing the printed version of the Shadow Report to ensure a high level of readability and clarity and to ensure its policy content, recommendations, statistics and references were accurate and up-to-date. An external editor was engaged to edit the document; substantial staff time was required to address the issues raised by the editor.

1 March: The Alliance formally submitted to the UN Committee *From Rhetoric to Rights: Second Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and Our Voices, Our Realities: a Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child by Children Living in Ireland*.

19 April: At the invitation of the Ombudsman for Children two members of the UN Committee visited Ireland (Lucy Smith of Norway, Rapporteur for Ireland and Brent Parfitt of Canada, an international expertise on offices of Ombudsmen for Children). The Ombudsman invited the Alliance to meet with the UN Committee members. The Alliance raised priority areas of concern with the UN Committee: the status of children in the Constitution; child protection, family support, ethnic minority children and child poverty.

19 April: The Children's Reference Group had a separate and private meeting with the UN Committee members during their Irish visit; in which they raising issues identified in the Children's Report.

25 April: Had a very productive and lengthy meeting with the Minister for Children and a senior official from the Office of Minister for Children to discuss the key concerns and recommendations arising from the report.

1 June: The Shadow Report, *From Rhetoric to Rights*, was desk launched to create momentum in the lead up to the Pre-sessional hearing.

7 June: Made an oral presentation at the Pre-sessional hearing concentrating on three priority areas – the status of children in the Constitution, child protection and ethnic minority children. Presentations were also made by the Ombudsman and the Irish Human Rights Commission and then a question and answers session took place. The Children's Reference Group also meet with the UN Committee in a separate private meeting. The children presented their report to the Committee members, each made a short oral presentation and then engaged in a question and answer discussion. The children also attended part of the Pre-sessional hearing but chose not to speak at the hearing.

29 June: The Children's Report, *Our Voices: Our Realities* was launched in the Ark Cultural Centre. A video of the Reference Group's trip to Geneva and the video created by the ArkLink Fatima Mansions Film Club were shown at the launch. The launch was well attended by over 90 adults and children.

August: The Alliance submitted additional written materials to the UN Committee members to highlight certain key issues and to respond to the State's response to the Committee's *List of Issues*.

20 September: Attended the State hearing for Ireland. The Alliance delegation informally lobbied members of the UN Committee and the State delegation, on the day prior to the hearing and during the hearing. Substantial media work was undertaken. Following encouragement from the Alliance two print journalists (Irish Times, Irish Examiner) and one TV crew (RTE News) travelled to Geneva to cover the hearing.

29 September: The Committee issued its *Concluding Observations*.

From June to October: Distributed the Shadow Report, the Children's Report and *Concluding Observations* to all member organisations, media contacts, all TDs and Senators, state bodies and other organisations

3.3 Strategic Focus

The Alliance was satisfied that the content of the media coverage during the hearings was in line with its strategic objectives. Furthermore, during the State hearing the UN Committee raised all of the issues that the Alliance had identified as a priority. The Alliance used to its advantage the coverage of the court decision that the statutory rape law was unconstitutional as a hook to raise publicity about the Shadow Report's recommendations on the need for constitutional reform and of the forthcoming UN hearings.

Most importantly, the UN Committee took on board the concerns and recommendations of the Alliance when compiling their *Concluding Observations*, which mirror the recommendations raised in the Shadow Report and the concerns raised in the Children's Report. This is a significant achievement and is central to the success of NGO involvement in the UN process. The Alliance will use (and promote the use of) the *Concluding Observations* to advocate for change over the coming five years. The *Concluding Observations* will form the basis of the Committee's next examination of the Irish State in 2009.

3.4 Constitutional Reform

Throughout the UN process the Alliance attempted to build up a case for amending the Constitution to strengthen children's rights. The need for constitutional change was identified in the Shadow Report as the key reform needed to enable Ireland to implement the Convention in full. In April, the need for constitutional reform was raised with the UN Committee members during their visit to Ireland. Also in April the issue was discussed with the Minister for Children in a meeting which focused on the key concerns and recommendations arising from the Shadow Report. The Alliance invited Geoffrey Shannon to address the AGM held in May on the need for constitutional reform. During June the Alliance used media opportunities surrounding the launch of the Shadow Report and the pre-sessional hearing to raise the need for constitutional change (some of this was undertaken within the context of the statutory rape decision).

On 7 June at the pre-sessional hearing the Alliance identified constitutional change as one of its three priority areas in its presentation to the UN Committee. Geoffrey Shannon attended the hearing as part of the Alliance delegation. During September, the Alliance undertook informal lobbying of the UN Committee and the State delegation on the need for constitutional reform.

On 20 September 2006, during the State hearing in Geneva, the Minister for Children, Brian Lenihan TD, informed the UN Committee that he had “embarked on an examination, on an article by article basis, of the provisions of the Constitution as they impact on children.”

On 29 September, the UN Committee issued their Concluding Observations which stated that:

... the Committee regrets that some of the concerns expressed and recommendations made [in the 1998 Concluding Observations] have not yet been fully addressed, in particular those related [to] the status of the child as a rights-holder.... The Committee urges the State party to make every effort to address the recommendations issued in the concluding observations on the initial report which have not yet been fully implemented..

The Committee expresses regret that the Convention has not been incorporated into domestic law as recommended by the Committee in its previous concluding observations. The Committee encourages the State party to take further action to incorporate the Convention into domestic law.

In light of article 12 of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the State party: Strengthen its efforts to ensure, including through Constitutional provisions, that children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them and to have those views given due weight in particular in families, schools and other educational institutions, the health sector and in communities.

On 3 November 2006, the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD, announced that the Government intended to hold a referendum to amend the Constitution so as “to put the rights of children in a central place in our Constitution. In that way, the Irish people can show the value we attach, in the words of the 1916 proclamation, to cherishing all the children of the nation equally.”

The Taoiseach requested the Minister for Children, Brian Lenihan TD, to initiate a consultation process. Minister Lenihan invited the Children’s Rights Alliance to undertake consultation with the non-governmental sector to inform the Government’s formulation of wording for a constitutional amendment.

A consultation was carried out by the Alliance during November and December; this involved discussions with individuals and organisations with expertise on children’s rights; the preparation of a Briefing Paper on children’s rights in the Constitution; a consultative meeting with members of the Alliance; a consultative meeting for other NGOs and interested individuals; and an invitation to Alliance members and other organisations to submit written comments.

4. Raising Awareness of the UN Convention

4.1 European Communication on Children's Rights

In July 2006, the European Commission published a Communication *Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child*. The Communication outlines seven specific objectives and is intended to set a framework for concrete actions to allow the implementation of the rights of the child in internal and external European Union policy.

In addition to helping the European Union and its Member States to fulfil their obligations vis-à-vis the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a call for national action plans included in the Communication will provide the Alliance with a new tool to leverage action by the Irish Government on children's rights.

The Commission consults the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee ('EESC') and the Committee of the Regions for their Opinions on the Communication. Each institution produces a written opinion or report.

The Alliance's Chief Executive, Jillian van Turnhout was appointed Rapporteur for the Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee ('EESC'). She met with Patrick Trousson, Coordinator of the Rights of the Child, Directorate General for Justice, Freedom and Security on 6 September. The EESC submitted its written Opinion to the European Commission in December 2006.

The Alliance's Deputy Chief Executive, Maria Corbett, acted as an external expert in the drawing up of the EESC Opinion. In addition, Maria was appointed as an external expert to the Rapporteur for the Committee of the Regions ('CoR'), Maria Corrigan, an Irish representative on the CoR. The CoR opinion is due to be finalised in early 2007. Maria Corbett attended various meetings of the two Committees in Brussels and Lithuania to discuss draft Opinions on the Commission's Communication.

4.2 European Children's Rights Competition

The Alliance was invited to be the Irish partner organisation in a European Commission project, "European Union and the Rights of the Child" poster competition open to 10-18 year olds in the 25 member states. Due to the Alliance's heavy workload, the Alliance approached the ISPC who kindly agreed to undertake the project in partnership with the Alliance. Member organisations were invited by email to participate in the project within two age categories.

The Director of the European Commission Representation in Ireland, Martin Territt, Minister for Children, Brian Lenihan, T.D. and Emily Logan, Ombudsman for Children attended the awards ceremony. The ceremony took place on 9 May as part of the Europe Day festivities sponsored by the European Commission's Representation in Ireland. The winners from Co Monaghan and Co Mayo. The prize for the two winning teams was a trip to Brussels on 18 May to attend an EU-wide awards ceremony and a lunch debate with Franco Frattini, Vice-President of the European Commission.

4.3 Media Profile

The Alliance received media coverage at critical points during 2006 - the launch of Shadow Report, the pre-session hearing, the launch of the Children's report and the State hearing. This media coverage heightened public awareness of children's rights, the UN Committee process and where Ireland is failing children. Media coverage of the hearings was critical to the success and overall impact of the UN process and the related State response.

In addition to the UN process, the Alliance received coverage on the EU Children's Rights Competition, the Afghan hunger strike children, the statutory rape crisis, the Alliance submission to Joint Committee on Child Protection, the ruling in the Baby Ann case and the announcement by the Taoiseach in relation to the Government's intention to hold a referendum on children's rights.

The Alliance also had a profile on national television, including RTE Six-one and Nine PM TV news, Questions and Answers and Primetime shows. In addition, the Alliance had a profile on both national radio, including Newstalk breakfast, lunchtime and George Hook shows and RTE Pat Kenny radio show; and local radio.

One of the children who participated in the Children's Reference Group appeared on the News2Day RTE Two television programme to talk about his meeting with the UN Committee in Geneva.

The Alliance has not had in-house communications expertise from January 2006 onwards, following the departure of the Communications and Education Officer at the end of 2005. During the pre-sessional hearing in June, the Alliance was kindly assisted by the Communications Officer of the National Youth Council of Ireland. During the State hearing in September, the Alliance contracted Q4PR to assist the Alliance's communications work. Staff and Board Members of the Alliance undertook a two day media training course with Carr Communications.

The Alliance issued the following Press Releases:

- 24 April: "Children's Rights Group Call on the Government to Adopt Child Impact Assessment in Residency Decisions"
- 9 May: "Mayo and Monaghan Come Tops in EU Child Rights Poster Competition"
- 18 May: "Hunger Striker Under 18's Have Rights"
- 19 May: "HSE Must Act Now to Ensure Afghan Children Do Not Die"
- 1 June: "Statutory Rape Gap Symptom of Wider Government Inaction"
- 1 June: Launch of the Shadow Report – "Ten Years of Rhetoric but Still No Rights For Children"
- 7 June: Pre-sessional hearing – "UN To Be Told of Breaches to Children's Rights in Ireland" & "Breaches of Child Rights in Ireland Highlighted to UN"
- 29 June: "Our Voices, Our Realities: Children tell UN about growing up in Ireland"
- 20 Sept: UN State hearing – "Children's Rights Alliance Calls on Government to Speedily Implement Change in Constitutional Status for Children"
- 29 Sept: "Children's Rights Alliance Welcomes UN Committee Recommendation to Provide for the Status of the Child as a Rights Holder"
- 25 Oct: "Jillian van Turnhout elected Vice President - European Economic and Social Committee"
- 3 Nov: "Children's Rights Alliance Welcomes Government Decision for Referendum on Children's Rights"
- 13 Nov: "Baby Ann Judgment is a clear example of why we need a Referendum on Children's Rights"
- 30 Nov: "Children's Rights Alliance Welcomes Oireachtas Child Protection Report as an Important Step Towards Greater Protection for Children"
- 6 Dec: "A Budget of Baby Steps will not be enough to carry children out of Poverty".

The Alliance received significant newspaper coverage in national and local papers

5. Participation in Social Partnership

The Social Partnership negotiations continued through the first half of 2006, with the new agreement being published in June. During the negotiations the Alliance advocated for the inclusion of the priorities as agreed by the members last May and by the Board. This work involved a series of meetings and written submissions.

Towards 2016: Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015 adopted a 'lifecycle' approach to social issues, with 'children' as one of the four specific population groups in relation to whom specific commitments have been set out. This framework followed the National Economic and Social Council (NESCC) Development Welfare State model.

For the first time in a social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, includes an acknowledgement of an international human rights convention; it states "Ireland has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the child and is committed to its implementation in our laws and policies".

The Alliance staff and Board members have engaged in various processes including the Community and Voluntary Pillar meetings; plenary meetings; bi-lateral and break-out meetings with specific Government Departments and other working groups.

The Alliance circulated to members an information document in relation to the new agreement and its commitments on children. The Alliance wrote and emailed all member organisations to recommend acceptance of this agreement to our members – with non-communication from members being taken to mean agreement. Following the approval of the Board the Alliance communicated its ratification of the agreement to the Department of the Taoiseach.

On behalf of the Alliance Board member, Norah Gibbons, Barnardos represented the Community and Voluntary Pillar members on the Working Group on Alcohol established under the special initiatives of Sustaining Progress.

On behalf of the Alliance, Fiona Crowley of Amnesty International was appointed as an alternative to the NESF Project Team on Mental Health.

6. Ending Child Poverty

EU SILC Figures

New official figures for child poverty from the EU SILC survey were released by the Central Statistics Office in December 2005. The Alliance drew up an analysis of these figures comparing figures for 2003 and 2004 in relation to both consistent and relative child poverty.

Towards 2016

Child poverty was a priority issue for the Alliance within Social Partnership. The new Social Partnership Agreement, *Towards 2016*, includes a commitment to progress, as a priority, further work aimed at assisting children in families on low incomes. This could include enhancing existing provisions or the introduction of new or reformed mechanisms. Child income supports which avoid employment disincentives will be reviewed by the Department of Social and Family Affairs as a priority and this work, which will be informed by the NESC study on a second tier child income support, will be completed within one year.

End Child Poverty Coalition

The End Child Poverty Coalition is comprised of seven organisations working co-operatively and actively to influence policy to end child poverty. The Irish Youth Foundation gave core funding to support the Coalition's work.

Budget - 7th December.

ECPC engaged in advocating in relation to Budget 2007, through the submission of a series of submissions to relevant Departments in relation to the Book of Estimates; the publication and distribution to all elected officials of a Pre-Budget Submission and the undertaking of media work in response to the Budget.

The Programme Coordinator met with the Campaigns Officer from the UK End Child Poverty organisation in January. This provided an opportunity to share practices and research how similar organisations carry out successful campaigns and work programmes.

In June the Coalition issued a paper on the Second Tier Child Income Support Payment. The paper aims to briefly set out the background, current thinking and opportunities for promoting a new second tier of Child Income Support.

The ECPC Steering Group held a Strategic Planning Workshop in January and a Work Plan Session in February. These workshops reviewed the goals, aims and objectives of the Coalition's and to map out future work plan. The financial situation and funding needs of the Coalition was also discussed.

The Programme Coordinator left the post in September. Given the current funding position it was not possible to recruit a replacement Programme Coordinator. To respond this change, the Steering Group established up two sub groups. The Funding and Development Group and Policy Group are both an advisory rather than decision making in nature and will consist of at least four persons nominated by members of the ECPC. The two groups will feed into the Steering Committee.

7. Youth Justice

Youth Justice – Criminal Justice Bill 2004

The Alliance coordinated the response of the Irish Youth Justice Alliance (IYJA) to the Criminal Justice Bill 2004.

During 2006 three submissions were made in relation to this Bill:

- March: Irish Youth Justice Alliance submission on the proposed changes to the Children Act, 2001 under the Criminal Justice Bill
- March: Oral Submission by the Irish Youth Justice Alliance to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality and Women's Rights
- May: Irish Youth Justice Alliance submission on Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights

Dr. Ursula Kilkelly of University College Cork kindly offered her legal expertise in the drafting of a series of submissions on behalf of the IYJA. The submissions highlighted concerns about changes to the Children Act, 2001 contained in the Criminal Justice Bill, 2004. These included the introduction ASBOs - to apply to those over 12 years, the expansion of the diversion programme to include anti social behaviour, raising the age of criminal responsibility (making 10 years the age for serious offences), and a requirement that the court have regard to the child's educational needs when deciding the length of detention. Sixteen non-governmental organisations and eight individuals signed up to the submission.

The IYJA delegation which made an oral presentation to the Oireachtas Committee on 28 March included the Jillian van Turnhout and Maria Corbett (Children's Rights Alliance, Dr. Ursula Kilkelly, Catherine Ghent (solicitor); Louise Cadwell (Catholic Youth Care); and Tanya Ward (Irish Council for Civil Liberties). Press coverage was received in the Irish Times and Examiner.

The Bill was passed in July with the effect that the age of criminal responsibility was raised from seven to twelve years, as per Part 5 of the Children Act, 2001. However, it simultaneously reduced the age of criminal responsibility from twelve to ten years for children who commit serious offences; and abolished the *doli incapax* rule which in effect provided for an age of criminal responsibility of fourteen years.

Youth Justice Strategy Conference

The Irish Youth Justice Alliance was invited to speak at the Youth Justice Strategy conference on 26 January. The conference brought together over 200 participants from both statutory and non statutory bodies. The Alliance Chief Executive, Jillian van Turnhout gave the presentation on behalf of the IYJA.

European Committee for the Prevention of Torture

The Deputy Chief Executive and Board member, Peter McVerry had a confidential meeting with the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture in relation to children in detention. The meeting proceeded the Committee's unannounced visit to Irish prisons and Garda stations. The Alliance raised its concerns about the continued detention of children in adult prisons, in particular in St Patrick's Institution.

8. CADIC Coalition

The CADIC Coalition (formerly the Coalition Against the Deportation of Irish Children) was established in July 2003 in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling in the Lobe and Osayande cases of January 2003. Its remit is narrowly focused round the rights of a specific group of families comprised of Irish children, their migrant parents and other close family members.

CADIC held a facilitated strategic planning day in January. The Alliance Chief Executive was appointed to the CADIC Management Committee and participated actively in CADIC throughout 2006.

Child Impact Assessment Report

In 2005, the Alliance on behalf of the CADIC Coalition commissioned Carmel Corrigan to undertake a study on the Child Impact Assessments in relation to the CADIC families. The report, *All Our Children: Child Impact Assessment for Irish Children of Migrant Parents*, was launched by the Alliance on 24 April. The report urges the government to conduct child impact assessments in relation to residency decisions affecting Irish children of migrant parents. The report examines the rights of Irish children whose migrant parents, and family members, have been refused leave to remain in Ireland. It is estimated that approximately 500 Irish children could potentially be removed from the State if their parents are deported.

A model template was drawn up as part of the report, which could be applied to the CADIC families. It is a comprehensive and transparent checklist, designed to ensure the protection of the rights of these Irish citizen children.

Following the report's publication, CADIC sought to meet with the Minister for Children and the Ombudsman for Children to discuss how to further the recommendations of the report and to seek support for the Child Impact Assessments template. A meeting took place in October with the Minister for Children and staff of the Office of the Minister for Children, and an informal meeting took place with staff of the Ombudsman for Children.

CADIC Evaluation

Anthony Finn and Pauline Conroy were contracted to undertake an evaluation of CADIC which was part of the funding contact with Atlantic Philanthropies. The evaluation included a Mapping Exercise and an assessment of the resources and capacity of coalition member.

Legal Work

A Strategic Litigation Group, comprising of leading practitioners in the area of immigration law, was established to assist CADIC's work. In addition, CADIC ran a training course for members of CADIC on how to handle the legal process and issued an Information sheet for Parents of Irish Citizen Children.

In November, the High Court found that the State had breached the rights of the citizen children when it did not take their rights into account when making decisions about their migrant parents entitlement to remain in Ireland under the IBC scheme. The State has appealed this ruling to the Supreme Court.

CADIC continued to advocate for the introduction of a clear and transparent renewal process for IBC/05 residency holders and sought to meet with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform about the renewal criteria.

9. Other Policy and Representational Work

9.1 Policy Submissions

In addition to the work discussed above, the Alliance made the following three submissions:

- April: Submission to the Review of Children First Guidelines by the Office of Minister for Children
- June: Submission to the Department of Health and Children Regarding the Proposed Health Information and Quality Authority and Office of the Chief Inspector of Social Services
- August: Submission to the Joint Committee on Child Protection

9.2 Collaborative Bodies

During 2006, the Alliance directly participated on or supported the following bodies' work:

National Children's Advisory Council (NCAC)

The National Children's Advisory Council, of which the Alliance has been a member since its inception, has an independent advisory role in relation to the implementation of the National Children's Strategy, reporting to the Minister for Children. It includes 30 representatives of the statutory agencies, voluntary sector, research community, parents and young people. The Alliance actively participated in the Council's mid-term review of the National Children's Strategy which was submitted to the Minister in early 2006.

Consortium for Separated Children Seeking Asylum

The Alliance is a founding member of the Consortium for Separated Children Seeking Asylum. The Consortium is an initiative of the Irish Refugee Council and brings together the IRC, Barnardos, the ISPC and Alliance.

HSE Care Group

The Alliance is a member of the Health Service Executive Care Group which brings together the HSE, Barnardos, the ISPC, the Irish Association of Young People in Care, the National Youth Council of Ireland and the Alliance.

Eurochild

The Alliance continues to be a member of Eurochild - a network of organisations and individuals working in and across Europe to improve the quality of life of children and young people. Eurochild's work is underpinned by the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

9.3 Representational Work

The Alliance represented the children's sector on multiple occasions in interactions with the Government, elected representatives and in the media. The Alliance responds to invites which offer an opportunity to promote the UN Convention and children's rights, these include:

- *April:* On behalf of the EESC (European Economic and Social Committee) the Chief Executive attended a Council of Europe Conference "Building a Europe for and with Children" in Monaco.
- *September:* Delivered a 3 hour workshop to 50 MA students in Social Work in UCD with Jennifer Gargan of IAYPIC.

- October: Chief Executive chaired the morning session and was part of the questions and answers panel of the Young Minds, Children's Right to Mental Health Conference.
- November: Chief Executive facilitated a Questions and Answers session at Dáil na nÓg between the participants and the Minister for Children.
- Jillian attended a roundtable on Stereotyping of Young People held by the Equality Authority and NYCI.

9.4 Chief Executive's Role in the EESC

Jillian van Turnhout, Chief Executive of the Alliance was elected as Vice President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) with particular responsibility for the Committee's Communication Group on 25 October 2006. This is the first time since 1982 that Ireland holds a presidency position; Tomas Roseingrave was President of the EESC from 1980 to 1982.

Jillian has been a member of the EESC since 1998 when she was nominated by the Community and Voluntary Pillar on behalf of the National Youth Council of Ireland to the EESC and was appointed by Government. She was reappointed in 2002. In 2006 she was nominated by the Children's Rights Alliance through the Community and Voluntary Pillar and was duly appointed. Her work in the EESC to date has comprised, among other things, opinions on the situation of youth policy, children's rights, the future of Europe and Communicating Europe.

The European Economic and Social Committee (www.eesc.europa.eu) represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. It is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the Community decision-making process. The Committee has 317 members, who are appointed by the Council of Ministers.

The EESC's presidency rotates among its three groups (employers, employees and various interests). The President and the two Vice Presidents are elected for two years. For the period 2006-2008, the President elected is Dimitrios Dimitriadis (Group 1, Employers, Greece); the Vice Presidents are Alexander Michael Graf von Schwerin (Group II, Employees, Germany) and Jillian van Turnhout (Group III, Various Interests, Ireland).