



## **Outline of Commitments in relation to Children in the new national agreement “Towards 2016”**

20 June 2006

The Children's Rights Alliance, as a designated social partner and a member of the Community and Voluntary Pillar was engaged in a five-month negotiation process which culminated on June 14 with the presentation by Government of the text of the new national agreement, provisionally entitled “Towards 2016”. The full text of the agreement can be downloaded from <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/>.

The new agreement sets out a framework for 10 years. It is divided into two parts:

1. Social and macroeconomic developments
2. Pay, the workplace and employments rights.

Part 1 is structured in line with the “life-cycle” approach developed in the National Economic and Social Council report, *The Developmental Welfare State*. This new approach proposes the development of a range of social services, income supports and innovative measures.

Part 1 comprises four chapters:

- Children
- Working age people (including young adults 18-35)
- Older people
- People challenged in their personal autonomy (ie. people with disabilities)

### **Summary of the commitments contained in the Lifecycle Stage chapter on ‘Children’**

#### **Vision:**

- Reiteration of the National Children's Strategy vision
- Ireland has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and is committed to its implementation in our laws and policies.

#### **Long-term goals for children**

Every child should:

- grow up in a family with access to sufficient resources, supports and services, to nurture and care for the child, and foster the child's development and full and equal participation in society.
- be able to access childcare services which are appropriate to the circumstances and needs of their children.
- leave primary school literate and numerate.
- complete a senior cycle or equivalent programme, (including ICT) appropriate to their capacity and interests.

- have access to world-class health, personal social services and suitable accommodation.
- have access to quality play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood.
- have access to appropriate participation in local and national decision-making.

### **Priority Actions in the first phase (27 months ie two and a half years)**

#### **1. *Early Childhood Development and Care***

Develop an infrastructure to provide quality, affordable childcare and to work towards increasing the supply of childcare places (of all types) by 100,000 over a ten-year period, through a combination of the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) 2006-2010, appropriate successor programme(s) and other providers. This will ensure substantial progress towards meeting the Barcelona targets of making childcare available to 90% of children aged between 3 and the mandatory school age and 33% of children aged under 3 years by 2010.

- Create 50,000 new childcare places (including 10,000 pre-school places and 5,000 after-school places, as part of the National Childcare Strategy).
- Develop a National Childcare Training Strategy to provide 17,000 childcare training places during 2006-2010.
- Target the early childhood education needs of children from areas of acute disadvantage through DEIS (180 urban/town primary school communities)
- Deliver integrated care and education to children in disadvantaged communities through education related professional support and training; and a curriculum and quality framework for early childhood education.
- Publish the strengthened revised Pre School regulations, provide training for inspectors across the HSE, facilitate a national standardised inspection service and ensure that standardised inspection reports are publicly available.
- Support and encourage school facilities being made available for after-school childcare provision as a key addition to the utilisation, development and support of local community facilities.
- Review of the NCIP prior to its conclusion.
- Extend the early childhood education component of the DEIS programme (to encompass the remaining 140 urban/town primary school under the School Support Programme)

#### **2. *Improving education outcomes for Children***

- Set targets at national and individual school level to tackle literacy and numeracy problems; additional literacy supports, under DEIS, will also be targeted at junior cycle students.
- Additional 100 posts by 2009 for the National Educational Welfare Board and the National Educational Psychological Service.
- Additional 1,000 places by 2009 for second chance education measures (ie. Youthreach) and create opportunities for recognition of learning through the national framework of qualifications.
- Establish protocols to ensure co-operation and mutual support among those working to improve attendance and retention in schools.
- Keep under regular review legislative and other provisions in relation to school admission with a view to fostering an inclusive school environment.

- Future provision of schools will reflect the increasingly diverse nature of pupil enrolment in response to the local demand and in conformity with the provisions of the Education Act, 1998 and with established criteria and procedures for recognising new schools.
- An extra 550 language support teachers by 2009 at both primary and second-level and reform the limit of 2 additional teachers per school.
- Reduce the pupil/teacher ratio at primary level to 28:1 in 2006/2007 and 27:1 in 2007/08.
- These measures will ensure progress towards the Lisbon target of reducing early school-leaving to 10% by 2010.
- The knowledge society and active citizenship (post-primary level)
  - Strengthen the technical and vocational dimensions of curricula and it will continue to be a clear objective of the school building and modernisation programme that there should be adequate laboratory and other specialist room provision for all schools teaching science and technology.
  - Implement an ongoing programme of curricular reform building on the existing work (eg the review of mathematics and languages, the new syllabi in the technology subjects, and the reconfiguration of subjects proposed as part of senior cycle reforms).
- Develop special educational needs services in the framework of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act.
- Continue support of actions to promote anti-racism and the participation of international children and young people, minority groups and Travellers in education.
- Provide further resources to progress implementation of the National Youth Work Development Plan and the Youth Work Act, 2001; and consider the need for a further plan post the 2008 review.
- *Transport*
  - One seat per child travelling on a school bus and all buses participating in the school transport service will be fitted with safety belts. Following a pilot, consideration will also be given to rolling out nationally the Warning Flashing Light System on school buses.
  - Develop the pilot phase of the 'Safer Routes to School' scheme with a view to rolling out it out nationally.
- Build on the 'broadband for schools' initiative.

### **3. *Improving health outcomes for Children***

- Deliver a significant number of child and adolescent community mental health teams (CMHTs) within the context of a 7-10 year target of 1 CMHT per 100,000 of the population by 2008, subject to sufficient resources being made available, and two CMHTs per 100,000 of the population by 2013.
- Intensify efforts to achieve the WHO target of 95% immunisation for children and actively targeting areas where take-up rates are below this level.
- Develop a new strategic Health Promotion policy by end 2007 which will address the lifestyle factors undermining the health of young people.
- Launch a National Nutrition Policy to address Children's Food Poverty and Obesity.
- Develop a national database to monitor prevalence trends of growth, overweight and obesity.
- Develop the School Meals Programme which will receive €2m in additional funding in 2006.
- Monitor prevalence trends of smoking and substance use.

- Carry out a review of secondary care paediatric services outside Dublin.

#### **4. *Promoting Recreation, Sport, Arts and Culture in the lives of our children***

- Increase support for sports infrastructure and sporting organisations, and promote sport in education settings.
- Increase by 3% the numbers of children taking part in sport for 2006 to 2008, implement the complete national roll-out of the Local Sports Partnership network and the Buntús programme, introduce the Lifelong Involvement in Sport and Physical Activity (LISPA) child centred model.
- Publish a National Recreation Policy to complement the National Play Policy. The OMC will work with Departments to create a more integrated strategic approach to meeting prioritised needs at local level consistent with the National Recreation Policy.
- Continue to encourage participation by children in arts and cultural activities.

#### **5. *Income support***

- Progress towards the existing NAPS target for those relying on social welfare payments.
- Progressing, 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.
- Focusing on children in lone parent households and larger families, informed by the Government discussion paper on supports for lone parents, and a review of the re-focusing of the family income supplement in favour of larger families with low earnings.

#### **6. *Children and their Families***

- Put in place enhanced policies to support families in a changing society and in particular to ensure that policies are designed to promote family formation and family life.
- Develop and deliver Family Support Initiatives to further develop and strengthen child welfare and protection services as part of national policy for child support.
- Continue to enhance maternity leave entitlements, in line with the measures announced in Budget 2006. The level of provision of maternity/paternity leave will be reviewed again before end 2008.
- Strengthen services under the Teen Parent Support Initiative.
- Undertake a study of the extent to which children undertake inappropriate care roles, and based on the outcome, develop a programme of in-home supports for children.
- Accelerate implementation of the Children Act 2001, strengthen national management of High Support Units, Special Residential Services and associated services in the HSE to complement the new Irish Youth Justice Service.
- Establish the Social Services Inspectorate on a statutory basis.

- Implement the Youth Homelessness Strategy (YHS). The OMC will undertake a review of progress and on this basis a future programme of action will be developed.
- Closer links will be developed at national and local level between the Youth Homeless Forum and the Adult Homeless Forum to ensure continuum of care.

### **Innovative Measures**

1. ***Establishment of the New Irish Youth Justice Service*** to facilitate reform and provide the leadership necessary to implement the key remaining provisions of the Children Act 2001
2. ***Integrated services and interventions for children at local level*** - A cross-departmental team chaired by the OMC is developing an initiative to test models of best practice which promote integrated, locally-led, strategic planning for children's services. The objective of this initiative is to secure better developmental outcomes for disadvantaged children through more effective integration of existing services and interventions at local level.
3. ***Children's and Young People's Participation*** - The OMC will establish a Comhairle Na nÓg Implementation Group; continue to undertake specific participation projects and to ensure that the inclusion of hard-to-reach children in participation structures and projects.

### **Governance Framework**

- Establish an Implementation Group chaired by the OMC involving relevant Departments, the HSE, representatives of local authorities, the education sector etc, link to the HSE's Expert Advisory Group on Children.
- Establish multi-agency Children's Committee within each City/County Development Boards, chaired by the HSE, to achieve coordinated and integrated services.
- Develop a second ten-year National Children's Strategy informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The Office for Social Inclusion will work closely with the OMC to promote the social inclusion agenda in relation to children and their families and to identify and drive strategic responses in this area.

### **Research and Data**

- The OMC will continue to undertake research and data development to assist good policy formulation and the findings from other national studies and tools will assist in monitoring the impact of services and programmes in terms of child outcomes, including children at risk and needing preventative services, and in planning and evaluating policies, programmes and resource allocations.
- Develop a new National Data Strategy to support the planning and delivery of policy and services in relation to ECCE and school age childcare, to identify additional key areas where data is required to inform policy and, in the longer term, to evaluate both the impact of investment on the quality of life experienced by children and where specific targeting of resources is most needed.

**Summary of the commitments contained in the Chapter 2  
Enhancing Ireland's competitive advantage in a changing world economy and  
building sustainable social and economic development.**

Education and Training

- Enhance early education provision for children from disadvantaged communities and for those with special needs.
- Substantially reduce literacy/numeracy problems among children, particularly in schools serving disadvantaged communities, and the adult population.
- Encourage children to be active agents in their own learning and to engage in collaborative active learning.
- Strengthen the technical and vocational dimensions of curricula and to embed key skills such as learning to learn and ICT, to develop higher order thinking skills, to diversify and strengthen language learning, to modernise the technology subjects, and to increase the take up of the physical sciences at senior level.

Specific short-term commitments within the first phase timeframe include:

- Roll out of measures under the DEIS initiative for educational inclusion
- Further develop measures to combat early school leaving and enhance attendance, educational progression, retention and attainment at primary and second-level
- Increased provision of services for those with special educational needs
- Increased provision for migrants at both primary and second-level
- Further development of second-chance educational measures for vulnerable groups
- Development of a National Skills Strategy which will map out the skills needs of the economy to 2020, with a particular emphasis on qualifications up to level 7 of the National Framework of Qualifications (ordinary degree level).
- Strengthen and develop baseline data/information sources.
- All children will have the opportunity to become ICT literate by completion of second level; there will be a serious drive to encourage more children to complete second level.
- Increased focus on integration of services and partnership working at national, regional and local level.
- Address the continuing fall in the number of people studying science and engineering in order to ensure skills for a modern economy are met.
- Falling quality in Mathematics needs to be addressed for a knowledge economy