

Directors' Report 2021



**CHILDREN'S
RIGHTS
ALLIANCE**

Our vision is
that Ireland will
be one of the
best places in
the world to
be a child.

Membership List of Organisations/Bodies at the end of 2021

- Accompaniment Support Service for Children (A.S.S.C.)
- Alcohol Action Ireland
- Amnesty International Ireland
- An Cosán
- Aoibhneas
- AslAm
- Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI)
- ATD Fourth World – Ireland Ltd
- Atheist Ireland
- Barnardos
- Barretstown Camp
- Bedford Row Family Project
- BeLonG To Youth Services
- Blossom Ireland
- Catholic Guides of Ireland
- Child Law Project
- Childhood Development Initiative
- Childminding Ireland
- Children in Hospital Ireland
- Children's Books Ireland
- Children's Grief Centre
- Clarecare
- COPE Galway
- Cork Life Centre
- Crann Centre
- Crosscare
- CyberSafeKids
- Cycle Against Suicide
- Dalkey School Project National School
- Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service
- Dental Health Foundation of Ireland
- Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, UCC
- Disability Federation of Ireland
- Doras
- Down Syndrome Ireland
- Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
- Dyslexia Association of Ireland
- Dyspraxia/DCD Ireland
- Early Childhood Ireland
- Educate Together
- EPIC
- Equality for Children
- Extern Ireland
- FamiliBase
- Féach
- Focus Ireland
- Foróige
- Gaelscoileanna Teo
- Galway Traveller Movement
- Good Shepherd Cork
- Immigrant Council of Ireland
- Inclusion Ireland
- Institute of Guidance Counsellors
- Irish Aftercare Network
- Irish Association for Infant Mental Health
- Irish Association of Social Workers
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
- Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL)
- Irish Foster Care Association
- Irish Girl Guides
- Irish Heart Foundation
- Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO)
- Irish Penal Reform Trust
- Irish Primary Principals' Network
- Irish Refugee Council
- Irish Second Level Students' Union (ISSU)
- Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
- Irish Traveller Movement
- Irish Youth Foundation
- Jack and Jill Children's Foundation
- Jigsaw
- Katharine Howard Foundation
- Kids' Own Publishing Partnership
- Kinship Care
- Leap Ireland
- Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG
- LGBT Ireland
- Mecpaths
- Mental Health Reform
- Mercy Law Resource Centre
- Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
- Mothers' Union
- My Mind
- My Project Minding You
- Museum of Childhood Project
- Music Generation
- New Directions
- National Childhood Network
- National Council for the Blind of Ireland
- National Forum of Family Resource Centres
- National Parents Council Post Primary
- National Parents Council Primary
- National Youth Council of Ireland
- Novas
- One Family
- One in Four
- Parents Plus
- Pavee Point
- Peter McVerry Trust
- Prevention and Early Intervention Network
- Psychological Society of Ireland
- Rainbow Club Cork
- Rainbows Ireland
- Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)
- Realt Beag/Ballyfermot Star
- Respond Housing
- SAFE Ireland
- Saoirse Housing Association
- SAOL Beag Children's Centre
- Scouting Ireland
- School of Education UCD
- Sexual Violence Centre Cork
- SIPTU
- Simon Communities of Ireland
- Social Care Ireland
- Society of St. Vincent de Paul
- SPHE Network
- SpunOut.ie
- St. Nicholas Montessori College
- St. Nicholas Montessori Teachers' Association
- St. Patrick's Mental Health Services
- TASC
- Teachers' Union of Ireland
- Terenure College Rugby Football Club
- Transgender Equality Network Ireland
- The Anne Sullivan Foundation
- The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children
- The Irish Red Cross
- The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway
- Traveller Visibility Group Ltd
- Treoir
- UNICEF Ireland
- Women's Aid
- Youngballymun
- Young Social Innovators
- Youth Advocate Programme Ireland (YAP)
- Youth Work Ireland

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Directors and Other Information

▶ Chair	Tom Maher
▶ Treasurer	Orla Cunningham
▶ Directors	Tom Maher
	Katie Mannion (resigned 6 July 2021)
	Ciairín de Buis (resigned 21 December 2021)
	June Tinsley
	Colm Bryson
	Orla Cunningham
	Catherine Joyce
	Michelle Griffin (resigned 29 October 2021)
	Nita Mishra
	Karen Hannify (appointed 25 February 2021)
	Moninne Griffith (appointed 6 July 2021)
▶ Charity Number	CHY 11541
▶ Company Number	316758
▶ Charity Registered Number	20031909
▶ Registered Office	7 Red Cow Lane, Smithfield, Dublin 7
▶ Company Secretary	Katie Mannion (resigned 6 July 2021)
	Moninne Griffith (appointed 6 July 2021)
▶ Auditors	Nexia Smith & Williamson (Ireland) Limited, Chartered Accountants & Statutory Audit Firm, Paramount Court, Corrig Road, Sandyford Business Park, D18 R9C7
▶ Bankers	Bank of Ireland, Lower Baggot Street, Dublin 2
	Allied Irish Bank, 7/12 Dame Street, Dublin 2
▶ Solicitors	Shannon & O'Connor Solicitors, 26 Upper Pembroke Street, Dublin 2

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Chairperson's Statement

For the year ended
31 December 2021



2021 was no less of a challenge in terms of how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted negatively on children's lives.

At the Children's Rights Alliance, our members continued to share their experiences of the pandemic's impact on the ground and to find ways to make life better for children.

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Chair's Foreword

2021 was no less of a challenge in terms of how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted negatively on children's lives. Continued school closures, child protection and mental health issues, as well as ongoing poverty for families remained deeply concerning. Certain groups continued to be impacted more severely including children with disabilities, refugee/migrant children and Traveller/Roma children. The Alliance worked hard to minimise this impact, bringing our members together to find solutions and to push for change.

At the Children's Rights Alliance, our members continued to share their experiences of the pandemic's impact on the ground and to find ways to make life better for children. I truly believe that Alliance's work shaped the national vernacular so that children who had once been sidelined in Government's decision-making, were finally prioritised. This undoubtedly helped to reduce the impact of the pandemic on children. We established the Children's Futures campaign group to push for change on issues of national policy in relation to Covid-19 and child poverty, working with 12 members as part of its Steering Group.

We continued to facilitate many opportunities for members to talk to key decision-makers and government on child protection, welfare and other pressing issues. We brought together our members for regular Tusla Dialogue briefings, which is a unique collaborative opportunity with Bernard Gloster, Chief Executive of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency examining key children's issues.

Children and young people themselves spoke at Alliance events throughout the year, having their voices heard on the national stage and making a strong case for change. Our Report Card launch, online safety campaign and series of events on education in September were highlights where young people put forward their views with conviction and passion.

There is no doubt that Covid-19 was the backdrop of our work in 2021, including our Annual Report Card 2021. This publication graded the Government on one full year in office, looking at their commitments to children in the Programme for Government. There were immense challenges, not least the pandemic, and this stymied some government action, resulting in 8 D's, 7 C's and just 1 B. Still, important new commitments were made, including pathways for undocumented children to receive status and long-awaited reform of the family law system.

We began a major public affairs campaign on online safety in 2021, #123OnlineSafety, calling on the Government to do the right thing to protect children in the online world, the new child protection frontier of our time. It was a highly successful campaign bringing together a group of 16 members to seek change in the new online safety bill. Many of our asks have been achieved with promises secured for an Online Safety Commissioner, a place to go when children's rights are breached as well as, it is hoped, an official complaints mechanism.

In other work, we pushed for the publication of guidelines on the use of reduced timetables in schools. This practice is when a child's school hours are decreased, something that should only ever happen as a last resort. This is another great victory for children's rights.

During the summer, our CEO Tanya Ward was invited to join the Oversight Board on the roll out of the Government's White Paper on Direct Provision, an important role to ensure that children's rights are central to future reform in this area. She continued in her role as Chair of the National Advisory Council on the roll out of Ireland's children's strategy. It is in this

post, that the Alliance has continued to come up with innovative solutions for Government on child poverty, in particular. This complements our work on Ireland's roll out of the European Child Guarantee, an important commitment that the State has signed up to, aiming to combat poverty and social exclusion.

We continued our work preparing for Ireland's fourth examination on its children's rights record in 2023 by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The dates for examination were delayed into 2022 and work started on planning the Alliance's draft report. This UN process is such a valuable opportunity to place an international spotlight on serious children's rights issues and we look forward to focusing on this.

In 2021, we prioritised reviewing the organisation's strategic direction and the adoption of a new Strategic Plan that will respond to Covid-19. This has been adapted in 2022 to ensure that Ireland's response to the arrival of thousands of children from Ukraine is the best it can so their needs and rights are met in their new home in Ireland.

And now to a number of thanks – first and foremost, on behalf of the Board and staff, I would like to thank the 140+ members of the Alliance. Our members are our lifeblood and are central to all our work. We look to them for information, guidance and advice, and their contribution is immense. During 2021, we grew our membership from 119 to 139 members, which is the highest number on record.

2021 was perhaps our most successful year ever in terms of funding, with important new and multi-annual funding streams secured for the future. I wish to thank all funders and donors for their continued support. We could not do our work without their support, and we are extremely grateful. I would like to thank my Board colleagues for their hard work and commitment throughout the year.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the Chief Executive for all her great work, and the Children's Rights Alliance staff for their indefatigable commitment and enthusiasm in making Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child.

Tom Maher
Chairperson



Photo by Ben Wicks (www.unsplash.com)

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Directors' Report

For the year ended
31 December 2021

The Directors present their annual report and audited financial statements of the Children's Rights Alliance "the company" or "the charity" for the year ended 31 December 2021.

The charity is a registered charity and hence the report and results are presented in a form which complies with the requirements of the Companies Act 2014 and FRS 102. Although not obliged to comply with the Charities SORP, the charity has implemented its recommendations where relevant in these accounts. The main activities of the charity are charitable.

The content of the Directors' Report is set out in the following headings:

- Objectives/activities, achievements and performance
- Financial review
- Structure, governance and management
- Reference and administrative details
- Exemptions from disclosures
- Funds held as custodian trustee on behalf of others

► Objectives, Activities, Achievements and Performance

Governing Document

The Children's Rights Alliance is a company limited by guarantee and incorporated in the Republic of Ireland under the Companies Act 2014. The company does not have a share capital and consequently the liability of the members is limited, subject to an undertaking by each member to contribute to the net assets or liabilities of the company on winding up such amounts as may be required not exceeding one Euro.

The company was set up under a Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the charitable company and is governed by a Constitution and is managed by a Board of Directors. The objectives of the Children's Rights Alliance are as follows:



To act as a charity for the benefit of children in Ireland regardless of race, religious belief, gender, family status, sexual orientation, disability, social and economic status, membership of the Traveller Community.



To promote awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Ireland.



To disseminate information and views on the implications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.



To provide and assist in the provision of public education on matters relating to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.



To support and enhance the teaching of a children's rights perspective to all relevant professionals and in all relevant subject areas.



To promote the relief of poverty among children in Ireland and to help raise funds for any such relief or for charitable purpose.



To advance the education (including academic, social and physical training) of children within Ireland.



To advance the study of, promote research in, and organise study conferences, courses and seminars relating to, children and their rights within Ireland and throughout the world.

The Children's Rights Alliance is a registered charity (CHY 11541) and in 2020 complied with its obligations to submit annual returns on its core activities to the Charities Regulator.

Mission

The Mission of the Children's Rights Alliance is to realise the rights of children in Ireland through securing the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Children's Rights 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**

Values

A core set of values guides all aspects of the Children's Rights Alliance work which should:

Reflect concern for the rights and needs of all children, based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Facilitate the active participation of member organisations in the development and implementation of its objectives and policies.

Consult with children and young people when appropriate.

Foster positive working relationships with other organisations, both statutory and non-statutory, in pursuance of its aims and objectives.

Foster positive working relationships with the media.

Reflect an ongoing strategic and cost-effective approach.

Ensure openness and transparency.

Incorporate regular monitoring and evaluation of its work.

Ensure dynamic and flexible responses to changes in the environment regarding children's rights.

Priority Issues for 2017-2021

We identified four priority issues for the lifetime of the plan which were selected reflecting the interests of our members, gaps in the protection of children's rights, current opportunities for change, financial constraints and where the value and expertise of the Children's Rights Alliance is needed. We then embedded these within our six strategic objectives. The four priority issues include:

1

Child poverty rates are a significant socio-economic rights issue for children. The rates of consistent child poverty doubled from 6% in 2008 to 11.5% in 2015. A strong, united voice across society is needed for concerted action and radical rethinking of how we address child poverty which makes this a priority for this plan. This is core work for the Alliance and child poverty can be addressed across the strategic objectives for this period. It will be addressed specifically through strategic Objective 2, ensuring the Government implements a 'whole of government approach' with concrete actions and plans to reduce the numbers of children living in consistent poverty.

2

Early Years reform is a priority for this plan because the timing is right to put a push on policy development and investment in the early years. The driver from a children's rights perspective is to ensure that law reform and policy is not solely motivated by labour activation measures but that it is about the best interests of the child. It also provides leverage for the development of universal services, early intervention and prevention, re-orientating national budgeting approaches, investing in services and educational reform in order to achieve better outcomes for children (see Objective 3).

3

Access to justice for children and young people is essential for the protection and promotion of children's rights. With the securing of the children's rights referendum, the reform of the Guardian ad Litem system and the recognition of the need for child friendly courts, now is the time to focus a concentrated effort on this critical area for realising rights. This work will be progressed through both the core areas of the organisation's work – monitoring and influencing policy and legislation and specifically through a body of funded work under strategic Objective 4.

4

The rights of **refugee children** to protection, survival and development are seriously at risk in Europe and in Ireland through the direct provision system. As a very vulnerable group, with no political weight, refugee children need a spotlight to be placed on their experiences and lives and pressure to be built within Government and in the Oireachtas to address the inhumane direct provision system and provide a reception approach that respects their rights. This work will be progressed under strategic Objective 5, placing a spotlight on grave violations of children's rights which is central to the mission of the Children's Rights Alliance. Other grave violations, once identified, will be progressed under this strategic objective, organisational capacity allowing.

Priority Objectives for 2017-2021

The six strategic objectives set out below have been developed with the aim of progressing the realisation of children's rights and ensuring a measurable improvement in the State's response to each of the Alliance's priority issues.

1

To **secure** changes in law to give meaningful effect to children's rights.

2

To **shape** national policy to give meaningful effect to children's rights and drive momentum across the State to meet its obligations to children and young people.

3

To **drive** home the need to invest in children early, and **build** political support for greater access to quality services to ensure that children's rights are fulfilled.

4

To **promote** access to child-friendly justice in civil, criminal and administrative proceedings.

5

To put a **spotlight** on serious children's rights violations, in particular the rights of children seeking international protection and in Direct Provision.

6

To continue to **build** a strong membership and ensure that the Children's Rights Alliance has the people, systems, structures, procedures and resources in place to deliver on our strategic objectives.

These should set us on a path towards the achievement of our +10 years long-term outcomes, which are ensuring that:



Achieving our long-term outcomes would mean that:

- Orange rounded rectangle:** All children and young people enjoy their rights on an equal basis and without discrimination including those who are vulnerable due to family background, age, race, disability or any other reason (Articles 2, 23, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).
- Green rounded rectangle:** All children and young people enjoy the best possible health and are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and ill-treatment (Articles 19, 24, 34, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).
- Blue rounded rectangle:** All children and young people can access high-quality education that enables them to develop their personality, talents and abilities to the fullest extent possible (Articles 28, 29, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).
- Orange rounded rectangle:** All children enjoy an adequate standard of living (Article 27, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).
- Green rounded rectangle:** All children and young people can access remedies when their rights are violated (Article 19, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).
- Blue rounded rectangle:** All children and young people in conflict with the law are treated with dignity and their rights are respected (Article 40, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

▶ Activities, Achievements, Performance

Priority Area 1: Child Poverty

Ireland's child poverty rates are mainly due to unemployment caused by successive recessions, the nature of precarious work and the high cost of rent and childcare. Historically, the Government used income supplements, including Child Benefit, to address child poverty. However, countries that use a combination of income supplements and investments in services are more likely to have lower child poverty rates. The Alliance's Strategic Plan commits to address Ireland's child poverty rates specifically by supporting the implementation of a 'whole of Government approach' with concrete actions and plans to reduce the numbers of children living in consistent poverty.



#ChildrensFuturesIRL Public Events

As part of the campaign launch we published a legal opinion written by leading human rights barrister, Alan DP Brady and his associate James Rooney, BL. The opinion indicated that the Government was in breach of children's constitutional rights to an education, in particular, where learning at home was not an option.

Following on from this, on 19 February 2021, we organised a legal webinar which focused on the right to education. These important interventions received national media coverage on RTE News and in The Irish Times.

In March, the campaign needed to amplify the call for reopening schools. We held a second webinar with Dr Niall Muldoon, the Ombudsman for Children and Dr Mary Horgan, President of the Royal College of Physicians and member of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE).



▶ Case Study: Addressing Food Poverty

Working with the Community Foundation of Ireland, the Alliance ran a joint convening to address food poverty. We prepared a policy paper on the causes and solutions and ran a consultation which was informed by stakeholders. This paper was tabled at the first meeting of the cross-government Working Group on Food Poverty established by Minister for State with responsibility for Social Inclusion, Joe O'Brien TD. The Alliance was invited to join the Group which met on four occasions in 2021 and focused on two pieces of work. The first was a mapping exercise to establish what government initiatives currently exist to address food poverty. The second involved the development of a proposal to commission case study research on a small number of geographic areas on the prevalence and drivers of food poverty alongside a mapping exercise of the actors and service providers in these areas. It is envisaged that the outcome of this research will inform the realisation of the commitment contained in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025.

Annual Milestone:
The Alliance supports the development of national preparatory actions for Ireland to play its role in the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee in Ireland

The **European Union Child Guarantee** aims to improve the lives of children experiencing poverty and disadvantage, by ensuring they have access to free healthcare, education, early childhood education and care, nutritious meals and decent housing. The Child Guarantee was adopted on 14 June 2021. The Child Guarantee presents an opportunity for the Government to leverage EU funds to tackle child poverty.

In 2021, the Children's Rights Alliance, wrote a paper for the National Advisory Council for Children and Young People, joined a European Taskforce, presented to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children on Child Poverty and attended meetings of the Food Poverty Working Group in the Department of Rural and Community Development. The Alliance also organised an online event on 24 May to promote awareness of the Child Guarantee and we submitted a consultation paper on behalf of the Alliance as well. Another major undertaking in 2021 was the Alliance's decision to support the National Advisory Council for Children and Young People to prepare a paper on the development of a wider national child poverty action plan. That paper has been published and is available [here](#).



Annual Milestone:
The Annual Budget includes measures to address child poverty (welfare payments, school meals, investment in early years, funding for key support services to minimise the use of reduced hours, online safety measures and increased investment in the professionalisation of the early years' sector)

In 2021, once again Covid-19 was the prevailing backdrop to our budget work. Our [pre-Budget Submission](#) identified key areas for increased government funding in order to tackle the ongoing impact of the pandemic on children's lives including social welfare increases for the most disadvantaged, increased funding for Tusla, measures to address educational disadvantage and increased resourcing to the Gardai to combat online crimes. In the run up to Budget day, the Alliance facilitated the workshop on children and families at the Social Inclusion Forum and participated in the annual National Economic Dialogue. As Secretariat to the Community and Voluntary Pillar we also chaired and took part in the annual meeting with the Minister for Finance and Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Despite Budget always being a crowded and competitive space in terms of media coverage, our campaign resulted in 40 separate mentions in total. We monitored all departmental and cabinet announcements and took part in the DSP post-budget forum. A cross-departmental analysis of changes introduced impacting on children and young people was produced and published on our [website](#).

While our [press release](#) commented that Budget 2022 did not go far enough to reduce the numbers of children living in poverty, it is a good start. The Budget delivered an additional €4m allocation to the hot school meals programme, a €10 increase in the Back-to-School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, a record €716m investment in the early years sector and an additional €10.5m for Garda operations including for the Garda National Protective Services Bureau.


On the 4 January we issued a call for early years settings and schools to open for the most vulnerable children and children of frontline workers. In February, we launched the Children's Futures campaign which united key leading voices in the sector to ensure that the pandemic did not have a disproportionate impact on children and young people, particularly those already vulnerable.

The Steering Group of the Children's Futures campaign included AsIAM, Inclusion Ireland, Barnardos, ISPC, National Parents Council Primary, Down Syndrome Ireland, Pavee Point, Children's Books Ireland, Dyslexia Association of Ireland, Foróige, SpunOut.ie, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, UNICEF Ireland and Museum of Childhood Ireland. The campaign held 10 weekly meetings in the first three months of the year and published a [policy document](#) with key asks to government.

Our advocacy focused on engagements with key decision-makers including the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the Minister for Education and the Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion. The collective action of the Children's Futures campaign group was also seen in the media, with members appearing on [Reboot Public Podcast](#).

Our work paid off. The Government kept early years' services open for children living in poverty and used a broad and generous definition. There was also a phased reopening in February with all schools open by 12 April.

During the summer months, we continued to highlight the importance of keeping educational settings and supports open and accessible to children and young people for the return to school in August/September. One key impact was the announcements by Minister for Education Norma Foley of the creation of a multi-million Euro 'catch-up' fund to address the learning loss during Covid-19. The campaign also sought to bring attention to the wider issue of educational disadvantage and how this was exacerbated by the pandemic and public health measures. In September, we held two events on [educational disadvantage](#) and on [wellbeing in the school community](#).


 **Annual Milestone:**
Ensure that the measures introduced due to Covid-19 do not disproportionately impact on children and ensure that their basic needs are met

In 2021, Ireland grappled with the Covid-19 pandemic, with several surges in cases and multiple lockdowns in response over the course of the year. The pandemic was causing untold damage to children, young people and their families across the country, across all aspects of their lives from accessing education and learning, to socialisation and personal development, and access to healthcare.



Future Focus

Building on its successful No Child 2020 initiative with The Irish Times, the Children's Rights Alliance will launch a new campaign with its members to end child poverty. Supported by the Community Foundation of Ireland and the Katharine Howard Foundation, our campaign will involve the publication of an annual Child Poverty Monitor that will track the underlying causes and identify best practice solutions and an End Child Poverty week to build the case for investing in children.

 **Annual Milestone:**
The Alliance shapes the implementation of the Guidelines on Reduced Hours so that they respect and protect a child's right to education including ensuring that the Annual Budget provides for funding for key support services to minimise the use of reduced hours

Reduced timetables are where, by arrangement with the school authorities, a student arrives to school after the usual starting time or leaves before the end of the school day. The practice disproportionately affects children with disabilities, children whose behaviour is difficult to manage and Traveller children. We have heard from our phoneline of children as young as five being placed on a reduced timetable.

We held a National Conference in September focused on Ending the Misuse of Reduced Timetables in Ireland and the Future of Alternative Education with a keynote address by Minister of State for Special Education, Josepha Madigan, TD. Speakers included representatives from As I Am, Cork Life Centre, Educate Together, Irish Traveller Movement, iScoil, NUIG and TU Dublin. A recording is available [here](#). Two days after our event, on 16 September the Department of Education published [The Use of Reduced School days: Guidelines for schools on recording and notification of the use of Reduced School days](#). The Guidelines are very clear that the practice should 'only be used in circumstances where it is absolutely necessary. It is significant that the Guidelines explicitly state that they should not be used as a way to manage behaviour or to sanction a child. Requiring they be used as a temporary measure only, with parental consent, and used in conjunction with written plans to reintegrate the child will go some way to ensuring that a child returns to a full school day as soon as possible. Importantly, for the first time we'll have concrete data on how widespread the practice is – as schools will now need to report its use to Tusla. This will help us identify if schools are overusing or misusing the measure.

We received extensive media coverage including the Irish Independent, The Irish Times, Irish Examiner, Kildare Focus, KFM Radio, Classic Hits and a news bulletin soundbite featured on 24 radio stations. Overall, the event itself secured 48 pieces of coverage.

 **Annual Milestone:**
The Report Card tracks 16 key areas which will make the most impact for children and young people (implementing 2.2) – education, health, justice, minority ethnic children

Report Card is our unique tool that grades the Government's performance on children's rights in key areas such as housing, health, education, poverty, equality, early years and education. In 2021, the Government was awarded an overall 'C-' grade for its performance on children's rights issues – down from a 'C+' in 2020. There were immense challenges for sure, chief amongst them the global pandemic and this certainly stymied some government action. This played out in the grades with the new government securing a report card with 8 Ds, 7 Cs and just 1 B. The lowest grades were awarded to 'Reduced Timetables' and 'Child Safety Online', which both received 'D-' grades. Despite the challenging circumstances of Covid-19 some important new commitments were made, including pathways for undocumented children and on the long-awaited reform of the family law system. We acknowledged this important progress.

For the second year in a row, in 2021 we produced a digital version [Report Card 2021](#) which was launched online on 23 February with over 300 RSVPs. Speaking at the launch we were delighted to have Judge Catherine McGuinness, CEO of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Noeline Blackwell and Director of Cork Life of Centre, Don O'Leary. We also worked with the Cork Life Centre and SpunOut.ie to feature young people's voices for the launch and supporting media and digital output. Four young people recorded video testimonies sharing their experience of the issues covered in Report Card and insight on the impact of Covid-19.

Media coverage was very positive, securing 34 pieces of coverage and two critical interviews which helped to increase the reach of the Report Card throughout the day in news bulletins: (Tanya Ward, Chief Executive interviewed on [Morning Ireland](#) and Saoirse Brady, Head of Legal, Policy and Public Affairs interviewed on [Newstalk Breakfast](#)). The total audience reached was 4.4 million. Media coverage also included responses from opposition parties: Labour and Social Democrats.

In terms of advocacy work, meetings took place with the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD and Minister of State for Special Education, Josepha Madigan TD and Sinn Féin Spokesperson on

Children/Chair of Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children, Kathleen Funchion TD. Further meetings on Report Card recommendations were held with Heather Humphries TD, Minister for Social Protection and Minister of State for Public Health, Wellbeing and Drugs Strategy Frank Feighan TD. A briefing on the White Paper on Direct Provision was held with Roderic O’Gorman TD, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, integration and Youth. Thanks to an invitation from the Committee Chair, the Alliance presented to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education on mental health and school bullying on foot of Report Card 2021 engagement.



► **Case Study: 5-year-old Connor* Dublin, 2018-2019**

Facebook Watch

Summary

Five-year-old Connor was put on a shortened day by his school just five months after starting junior infants. Preceding this decision, he had been removed from class multiple times and supervised by the Principal in her office.

The school said this was because of his ‘behavioural issues’ (none of which had previously materialised - nor have done so since). The school also mentioned that he had additional difficulties such as ‘colouring outside the lines’. His parents have never sought to minimise his school specific behaviour; they accept that he had some behavioural issues in school and failed to always comply with his teacher’s instructions.

The school unilaterally imposed a shortened day on Connor (8.50am-11.15am). With both parents increasingly unhappy with the school’s handling of the situation, and knowing his behaviour was unprecedented, they formally appealed this decision under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998. The Appeals Committee found in their favour, agreeing that the school had effectively suspended Connor and that he should return to a full day.

However, the parents decided to move both Connor and his older brother to another school. Both are thriving. To date, Connor has not been diagnosed with any behavioural issues. Following an eye exam, Connor has been found to be profoundly long-sighted.

► **Spotlight**

The Alliance convenes members to input in Ireland’s forthcoming report for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and develops a civil society report in response to the ‘List of Issues’ and in consultation with members

When a country signs and ratifies the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) it is required to submit periodic reports to the [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) outlining its progress in fulfilling and upholding children’s rights. Young people and civil society organisations also submit reports to help inform the UN Committee and the Committee formally meets with all parties before issuing Concluding Observations.

Ireland’s progress under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child will be reviewed using the [Simplified Reporting Procedure](#). The procedure includes a new first step where the Committee on the Rights of the Child issues a List of Issues to the State prior to the Government submitting their report. The Alliance had submitted an initial ‘[List of Issues](#)’ submission in 2020 and the UN Committee issued its [List of Questions](#) to the Irish Government. The Government then answers these questions in their State Report.

During 2021, the Alliance was invited by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability and Youth to assist with its consultation event in relation to its Report for the UN Committee which took place on 2 June with almost 100 members signing up to attend. [The State Report to the Committee](#) was published in late 2021. The State will be examined in January 2023. The Alliance response is available [here](#). We also held an event on 17 November 2021 on incorporation of the Convention with Professor Ursula Kilkelly and Professor Laura Lundy to discuss their book ‘*Incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*’, the first comprehensive analysis of global progress towards giving legal effect to the Convention in national law. There were over 100 attendees for the [panel session](#).

UNCRC Review Process to Date (February 2022)

NGO submissions to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for the List of Issues Prior to Reporting (June 2020)

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child issues the List of Issues (series of questions) to the State (October 2020)

State Report submitted to the Committee answering the questions in the List of Issues (February 2022)

UNCRC Review Process - next steps (2022)

Children’s Report to the UN Committee, being co-ordinated by the Ombudsman for Children’s Office (15 August 2022)

Parallel Report Children’s Rights Alliance and members submission to the UN Committee (15 August 2022)

Pre-Session Hearing Closed door meeting with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (September 2022)

The State will be examined in January 2023.

► Spotlight

Ensure an Online Safety Commissioner is established with appropriate powers as part of the new Media Commission and that online safety legislation is underpinned by children's rights

In 2021, the Children's Rights Alliance launched a [national campaign](#) focusing on online safety in the aftermath of Covid-19. The campaign built a broad coalition of support, with the help of an advisory group of 18 of our members (Alcohol Action Ireland, Barretstown, Barnardos, BeLonG To, CyberSafeKids, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Foróige, Irish Heart Foundation, ISPCC, National Youth Council of Ireland, One in Four, Psychological Society of Ireland, Rape Crisis Network Ireland, Safe Ireland, Scouting Ireland, SpunOut.ie, Women's Aid and Young Social Innovators), for solutions that will make children and young people safer online.

Campaign Asks

The campaign is calling for three key measures:

1. the establishment of an online safety commissioner with robust powers,
2. ensuring the commissioner has an educational remit, and
3. the establishment of an individual complaints mechanism (this being a way in which the public can raise a complaint with the Commissioner when something goes wrong online) in the Online Safety and Media Regulation (OSMR) Bill.

Campaign Impact

Over the course of work on the OSMR Bill, the campaign coalition held 20 advocacy and campaign meetings in 2021 including key champions on the Media Committee, as well as Justice, Education and Children's spokespeople.

The sustained advocacy helped widen the debate on the OSMR Bill and bring children and young people's issues into the fold. From the beginning of the campaign, we noted a fundamental shift in the narrative around the OSMR Bill with

children and young people's safety online significantly more prominent in the discussion.

A core concern and difficulty in the rollout of the campaign was the omission of an individual complaints mechanism in the General Scheme of the OSMR Bill. In July, we held a high-profile media event chaired by former Senator Jillian van Turnhout, focusing on this particular ask. The audience reach was over 9.1million with a total of 70 items of coverage across national and local broadcast, print and online media. The total reach of the campaign hashtag on the day of the launch was an audience of 4.2 million, over double the visibility of our flagship Report Card launches. The campaign (#123OnlineSafety) was the number one trending topic within five minutes and the Bill (#OSMRBill) was trending number two.

The campaign played an instrumental role in placing a spotlight on children and young people's rights online. The Joint Oireachtas Committee's report following pre-legislative scrutiny on the OSMR Bill not only reflected the key campaign asks, but also demonstrated thoughtful consideration for children and young people and how they engage with the online world, which was warmly welcomed by the campaign. One key success of the campaign was the importance it could place on the pre-legislative work being carried out by the Committee and the need for publication of the Bill to wait until Committee work was completed. This also enabled us as a coalition to build momentum behind our key campaign asks.

August was a critical time to progress two key commitments of the campaign; the draft amendments to the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill and the public polling research. We engaged with The Bar of Ireland's Voluntary Assistance Scheme and worked with Emile Burke-Murphy BL to draft amendments to the General Scheme of the Bill as it stands and our main concerns regarding the proposed complaints mechanism. We also commissioned Language to undertake the public polling research with research agency, Opinions. The fieldwork was carried out in September and the findings revealed huge public support for the campaign's asks and for Ireland to take a leading role at a European level when it came to the regulation of big tech. Launching the finding in October, Tanya Ward was [interviewed on RTE This Week](#), as was the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, Youth, Roderic O Gorman TD.

The campaign included a key Budget ask— increased investment in the Gardaí National Protection Services

to enable them to carry out investigative work in relation to online safety for children and young people. This was another key success of the campaign with the Department of Justice announcing an increase of €10.5 million to the Garda National Protective Services Bureau. It is also worth noting that Minister Catherine Martin also announced secured funding of €5.5 million in Budget 2022 for the establishment of the Media Commission including an Online Safety Commissioner.

In November, we held a [national online safety conference](#) which aimed to profile the voice of young people as well inviting an international speaker to widen the discourse on the issue of online safety and the role the Irish Government can play. Leanda Barrington-Leach, Head of EU Affairs at [5Rights Foundation](#) delivered the keynote address. The event was chaired by Board Chair Tom Maher and included inputs from Denise Charlton (CEO, Community Foundation for Ireland) and Deputy Niamh Smyth (Chair of the Media Committee) as well as youth speakers representing the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Foróige, National Youth Council of Ireland, SpunOut.ie and Young Social Innovators. Once again, the campaign hashtag #123OnlineSafety was the number one trending topic online.

The campaign work will continue into 2022 as the OSMR Bill is published and progresses through the Houses of the Oireachtas. The next focus point will be to ensure the development of online safety codes is done in the best interest of children and young people.

► Spotlight

Ensure the voices of children and young people are heard to increase understanding, awareness and enhance north/south relations on the impact of Brexit on children's rights on the island of Ireland

Given the impact of Brexit, the consequent economic shock and the emerging national dialogue on the future of the island of Ireland, there is a real need for organisations representing the interests of children and young people to come together to build relationships, solidarity and to become an influential lobby group to ensure that children's rights are respected and protected going forward.

With the support of the Community Foundation of Ireland and the Social Change Initiative, the Alliance launched a joint project with the Children's Law Centre in Belfast with three strands:

- Commission research on the impact that the Withdrawal Agreement, the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol and subsequent political agreements and associated legislation will have on children's rights. This research is being carried out by Professor Helen Stalford and Professor Michael Dougan of the University of Liverpool.
- Organise a whole-island consultation with child and youth representatives and youth reference groups on what principles should underpin the Irish Government's work on a shared island consensus and other initiatives associated with any proposed constitutional change, as well as what type of actions would need to be put in place to guarantee children and/or youth involvement. These consultations were facilitated by Mo Sykes.
- Build North/South relationships by organising a series of one-to-one meetings with child/youth representatives to understand what matters to them in responding to Brexit-related issues and explore their concerns or interest in working on an all-Ireland basis.

The project is guided by a high-level advisory group for the project comprising Avila Kilmurray (Social Change Initiative), Conor Houston (Houston Solutions and Citizens for Change), Fergus Finlay, Mary Cunningham (National Youth Council of Ireland), Seán Campbell (Foróige), Ciairín De Buis (Alliance Vice Chair), Chris Quinn (NI Youth Forum), Debbie Watters (Alternatives NI) and held several meetings of the advisory group and formed a communications subgroup.

Priority Area 2: Early Years

In 2021, the Children's Rights Alliance kept its focus on the need for a children's rights-based approach to major developments taking place in early years.

The **Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality** was established in July 2019 to consider gender equality and make recommendations to the Oireachtas to advance gender equality. The Children's Rights Alliance was invited alongside the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) to present to the Assembly on the topic of childcare. Advocating before the Assembly provided a major opportunity to shape national policy on early years. Both the NWCI and the Alliance advocated strongly for the creation of a public model of childcare. This is because international evidence shows that public models of childcare (which are prevalent throughout Europe) provide the best outcomes for children. The Citizens' Assembly then recommended that Ireland should over the next decade move to a publicly funded, accessible and regulated model of quality, affordable early years and out of hours care.

This is an important recommendation from the Citizens' Assembly but the Government has yet to directly respond to the recommendation. An Oireachtas Committee was established in 2022 to consider all the recommendations contained in the Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality. The implementation of this recommendation will be the focus of the Alliance's advocacy going forward.



Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality Final Report, 21 June 2021

Childcare Recommendation 8: Ireland should:
(a) Over the next decade move to a publicly funded, accessible and regulated model of quality, affordable early years and out of hours childcare. (b) Increase the State share of GDP spent on childcare, from the current 0.37% of GDP to at least 1% by no later than 2030 in line with the UNICEF target.

In 2021, the Government's principal focus was implementing two major initiatives to address funding of the early years sector and workforce development. The **Expert Funding Model Group** was set up to examine the allocation of public funding to 'deliver services that align with national policy objectives, resourcing quality provision and requiring affordability for participation in the new model'. The Alliance took part in the funding model stakeholder group and consultations.

The Expert Group published its final report in December 2021. It recommends providing a core grant to providers in exchange for: following a new fee management system, implementing quality improvement measures/recommendations from the Workforce Development Plan and relevant practice frameworks. The model does not replace the existing predominantly for-profit early years' model and was not intended to. Instead, the recommendations are aimed at increasing quality, controlling market prices and providing core funding.

Early years' services are essential to help children develop on an equitable footing and to achieve their full potential in later life. The introduction of a new model to address socio-economic inequalities was an important aspect of the Alliance's advocacy work in 2021. The Funding Model Report recommends that additional funding for services is linked to the development of an identification model which sees more funding being given based on aggregate deprivation scores of home addresses of children attending the service. It is intended that the higher targeted funding will enable services to provide more consistent and higher-quality interactions with children and their families.

In 2021, the Government also published a **Workforce Development Plan** that aims to ensure the appropriate number of early years staff are available at all levels and to set targets for a graduate-led workforce. The Alliance had an opportunity to present to the Workforce Development Steering Group (February 2021) and take part in stakeholder consultations. The implementation of the recommendations will be critical as one of the major factors impacting on children's experience in early years' is the high staff turnover (25 per cent annually), poor pay/conditions and the lack of a fully qualified workforce. Going forward, the Alliance will need to continue to keep the focus on better pay and conditions and on the development and retention of a qualified workforce. This is in the face of some advocates who are seeking to employ carers with no early years education qualifications to enter the workforce to deal with

labour shortages. This would be a major step back and detrimental for children.

In 2021, the Alliance was also invited to join the Steering Group for the National Action Plan for Childminding following the Government's publication of the National Action Plan on Childminding. Children receiving care and education services in childminders' homes have a right to the same high quality that they have in centre-based settings for example, creches. Again, this is an opportunity to ensure that children get access to equitable care.

The Alliance also acted as the National Coordinator of a Europe-wide early childhood development campaign called First Years, First Priority in 2021. This was a key vehicle through which our work on early years milestones was realised in 2021. The overall aim of this campaign is to influence policies, plans and funding to increase investment in Early Childhood Development (ECD) and highlight the importance of ECD on a national and European level by building an evidence base across the nine countries involved in the campaign (Bulgaria, Hungary, France, Finland, Ireland, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Romania). The Alliance focused on the need for a dedicated child health workforce and a publicly funded Early Childhood Education and Care system.



Future Focus

In 2022, the Alliance will continue to advocate for the rights for children in their early years. We will commission two pieces of research as part of the Europe-wide campaign being co-led by Eurochild on Early Childhood Development. The first paper will focus on a public funding model for early childhood education and care and the second, on public health nursing. We will continue to be a voice for children and represent children's rights on government structures including the Early Years Forum and the Working Group on the Child Minding Action Plan.

Priority Area 3: Access to Justice Initiative

Access to justice is essential for the protection and promotion of children's rights including through the Constitutional amendment on children (Article 42A). It is especially important for protection from discrimination, violence, abuse and exploitation. When faced with the justice system, children are thrown into an intimidating adult world which they cannot understand and are most vulnerable when they come in contact with it as a victim, witness or defendant or when judicial or administrative interventions are required for their custody or protection. The Children's Rights Alliance Strategic Plan sets out to "promote access to child-friendly justice in civil, criminal and administrative proceedings." The Strategic Plan aims to achieve the following outcomes: (1) Children, parents, caregivers and second-tier advice givers are informed about children's rights and entitlements and remedies available when they are violated; (2) children have a right to be heard and express views in civil, administrative and criminal proceedings either directly in their own right or indirectly through an appropriate representative.; (3) professionals in the legal system having direct contact with children are trained in communicating with them at all ages and stages of development and (4) children have access to free legal advice, and representation where necessary, either through statutory or NGO sources.

Access to justice has a strong focus in the Children's Rights Alliance's Strategic Plan. Over the years, the Alliance established a standalone helpline (01 902 0494) and email help@childrensrights.ie to provide legal information to a wide range of people who may need information and guidance. The Alliance commenced providing free legal advice clinics in 2018 by contracting services to an independent provider.

Annual Milestone:
The Family Courts Bill includes provisions which reflect the child-friendly justice principles (voice of the child is adequately heard, family friendly facilities, streamlining of processes)

The Programme for Government committed to reforming the family law courts. This is being progressed by the introduction of a family courts bill to create a new family law legal structure and the establishment of a Family Justice Oversight Group (FJOG) which has been tasked with identifying ways to modernise and improve family justice and people's experience of the system.

In 2021, we attended a briefing held by the Department of Justice as part of the work of the Family Justice Oversight Group. We were invited to make a submission to the Family Justice Oversight Group on how to incorporate the voice of the child in proceedings, reform of the legal aid system, making the system more child friendly and supports needed for families in the justice system.

We also made a submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice on the General Scheme of the Family Courts Bill with additional recommendations made as part of this submission including the introduction of a child court liaison officer, specialist training for professionals engaged in the court system and supports for families. Prior to drafting the submission, we held a briefing with Prof. Geoffrey Shannon for our members. The second half of the event was a consultation with the 24 members in attendance. For both consultations, we sent a draft to all member organisations for feedback before submitting them.

In June, we were invited to join the Advisory Group to the Family Justice Oversight Group set up by the Department of Justice. The Advisory Group was tasked with considering and discussing topics/issues that the Family Justice Oversight Group have referred, that were identified through its discussions and its consideration of issues arising from the consultation process. The Group also supports and advises the Family Justice Oversight Group during its work to develop a high-level vision for the development of a national family justice system. The first piece of work was developing client journeys to feed into the process and a separate children's journey was

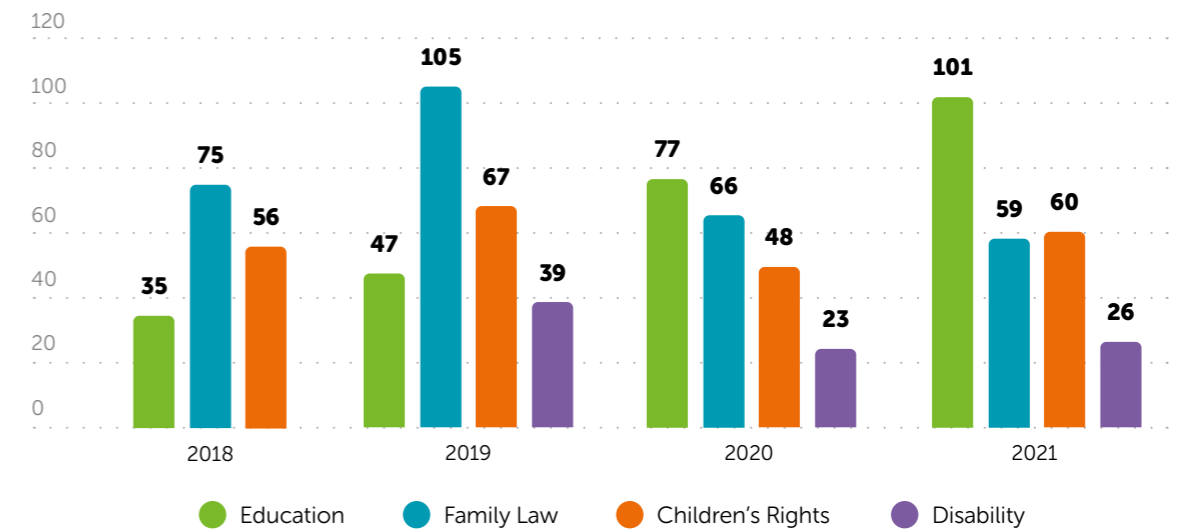
developed on our recommendations. The work of the Advisory Group will consider the role of alternative dispute resolution.

We look forward to the Joint Oireachtas Committee completing their hearings on the Bill and the FJOG publish their report in 2022 when the full impact of our work will become clear.

Annual Milestone:
Children and families helped through our legal information helpline in a timely fashion (1,000 contacts in 2021) and 40 children and families helped with the legal advice clinics with a view to developing specialised clinics

In 2021, the Helpline dealt with over 410 cases and engaged in 637 contacts. While we did not meet our target, this represented an increase of almost 100 cases from 2020. We have learned from 2021 that in order to meet our targets we will need to engage in ongoing promotion of the helpline throughout the year. The highest number of contacts we received were related to education (101 cases – 24 per cent) followed by other (65 cases – 16 per cent), children's rights (60 cases - 15 per cent) and family law (59 cases – 14 per cent). The Alliance fell short of reaching the 2021 milestone but overall made an improvement in the Helpline's volume of cases and contacts in 2021. This was influenced by reduced capacity in terms of staff on the phone line. In November 2021, a dedicated Legal Information Officer was appointed, to specifically support the running of the Helpline and legal clinics. In 2021, most contacts to the service were made via email - the Helpline received twice as many email contacts as it did phone calls. The Alliance is conducting a review of the Helpline as part of work related to the Alliance's new strategic plan and is examining new ways to provide information via the Helpline service.

Emerging Trends 2018-2021



Case Study: Covid-19 Cert

Damien* contacted the Helpline as his teenage son was refused entry to a fast-food restaurant as he was asked to provide ID alongside his EU Digital Covid Cert. Due to his age, Damien's son did not have an ID and was prevented from entering the restaurant. Damien was unsure as to what sort of ID children were supposed to carry with their EU Digital Covid Cert and wanted to know what was required by the government guidelines. Damien was informed that the [Guidelines for Reopening Restaurants and Cafés](#) states that unaccompanied minors must show Proof of Immunity for entry to indoor dining, but does not mention ID. Given that the Guidance doesn't say whether unaccompanied minors need to show ID and Proof of Immunity for entry to restaurants, Damien was informed that it was unclear whether restaurants can refuse entry for failure to show ID and that his remedies were limited. One potential remedy may have been legal action, but unfortunately most people are unable to take this step, due to the significant costs involved.

For the second year in a row, education was the most common query received on the Helpline. Overall, in 2021, the Helpline saw a 31 per cent increase in cases related to education. A large volume of education queries concerned school closures, Covid-19 measures in schools and in particular, the introduction of face masks in primary schools.

Several issues presented to the Helpline prompted an advocacy and policy response from the Alliance, such as the introduction of face masks for primary school children aged nine and over. In November 2021, the Alliance issued a statement calling for the face mask mandate to include exceptions for children with conditions such as autism and learning issues and health issues, such as asthma. The Alliance asked the government to advise schools to ensure they take account of each child's needs in accessing their right to an education. The Government guidance on the use of face coverings in primary schools was later published. This guidance provided for exemptions from the wearing of facemasks for children who have difficulty breathing or other relevant medical conditions, are unable to remove a face mask/visor without assistance and those who have special needs and may feel upset or uncomfortable wearing a face mask/visor.

Aligned to this, the most common type of education query was categorised as "Other", covering queries related to face coverings in schools. The introduction of face masks for primary school age children prompted a very strong response from parents and led to a spike in education cases in November and December. When the measure was first announced, there was confusion among parents as to the available exemptions to the requirement and there were concerns that children would be refused entry to school if they were not wearing a face mask. A number of parents and educators also had questions regarding whether a doctor's certificate was mandatory for an exemption. Some parents wished to assess their options in relation to home tuition, considering the measure. These calls and emails to the Helpline indicated that while government guidance was in place regarding face masks, it was not being consistently applied in schools.

Who is contacting the Helpline?

In 2021, we were frequently contacted by parents and other individuals seeking information on how to make a complaint to a school. An example of this occurred where a parent wished to make a complaint as his child had been prevented from accessing the bathroom during class time. This parent was brought through the school's complaints procedure and how to make a complaint to the school's Board of Management. The parent was also informed about the availability of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children's complaints mechanism. As the complaint could give rise to issues of discrimination on gender or disability grounds, the parent was also provided with information on how to make a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission under the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018.

The majority (241 cases) of contacts to the Helpline were from parents and guardians. Parents and guardians sought the support of the Helpline on a wide range of issues including education, health, disability, family law, housing, immigration, early years services, children in care and child protection. Almost a quarter of adults contacting the Helpline were not parents and fell into the 'other' category which includes foster carers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, family friends, legal professionals, and public representatives.

In 2021, the Helpline received 20 queries from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). These cases covered a variety of concerns, including requests for information on access proceedings, immigration, the legal age to consent to medical examination, difficulties serving legal papers in family law proceedings and questions regarding obligations under the Children First Act 2015.

In 2021 we received 35 queries directly from children and young people, more than double the number in previous years (16 in 2020). Several young people contacted the Helpline to share the findings of Leaving Certificate projects completed in the area of online safety and smartphone ownership and to seek feedback on these projects. Many contacting the Helpline were seeking information on legal ages, such as when they could trade financial products. Others contacted the Helpline looking for information on family law matters and how to deal with issues at school. The Helpline also provided an avenue for some senior cycle students to raise their concerns in relation to the Leaving Certificate during what was the height of the pandemic.

In 2021, we continued to offer our legal clinics online, owing to the pandemic and its associated public health restrictions. Concerns related to disability, education and children in care were the most common issues presented to our legal advice clinics. During this time, Gareth Noble held 16 legal clinics with families, guardians and foster carers referred through our Helpline. In July 2021, the Alliance's new pro bono partnership with Eversheds Sutherland was announced. The partnership, for the provision of online legal clinics, was facilitated by PILA (Public Interest Law Alliance), a project of FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres). From July to December 2021, 9 legal clinics were held. A total of 25 legal clinics were provided, an increase of 6 clinics from 2020. It was difficult to meet our target for 2021 as our pro-bono partnership only came into effect in July. The online format of the clinics has worked very well in terms of making them more accessible to families from across the country. For people who cannot access the internet we can offer a telephone call appointment. Having a pro-bono partner in place will give us the capacity to meet our targets for 2022.



► Case Study: Responding to the concerns of young people on the Helpline

Access

Julian* (16), contacted the Helpline because his father was planning on seeking access with him. Julian's mother had not allowed his father access, so Julian's father was going to court to try to get access. Julian wanted to know what his rights were in the situation. Julian was informed of his right to be heard by the court in the access hearing and the different ways in which the court can hear his voice during the hearing, for example through an expert report under section 32 of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964. Julian was also provided with the details for ISPCC Childline for support as he continues along the court process.

Leaving Certificate 2021

In January 2021 Conor*, a Leaving Certificate student, got in touch with the Helpline looking for information on how he could make his views known regarding the 2021 Leaving Cert. Conor highlighted the impact of the uncertainty regarding the 2021 exams on his mental health and on the mental wellbeing of young people across the country. Conor described potential plans for a traditional, in person Leaving Cert as "soul destroying".

Conor was informed that he can have his voice heard by contacting the Department of Education and Minister for Education Norma Foley TD, as well as his local TDs and public representatives. Conor was also provided with the contact details for the Irish Second Level Students Union (ISSU) who were working on a response to the issue and was informed that his comments would be passed onto the Children's Rights Alliance's Legal and Policy team. Contact details for the ISSU are contained in the Alliance's [Know Your Rights](#) guide on page 181, as is information on how to make a complaint, on page 14.



In 2021 we were funded for a second year by Tusla to deliver Know Your Rights workshops for its Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Programme around the country. The workshop is based on our Know Your Rights guide on children's rights. A special focus was placed on the right of the child to be heard and children's rights in education, family law and the rights of children with disabilities as this came up in the needs assessments conducted beforehand. We also focused on how staff can adopt a children's rights-based practice in their work.

Six three-hour workshops with over 100 participants in attendance were delivered over zoom. As part of the training programme with Tusla, they commissioned a print run of 1,000 copies of our Know Your Rights Guide to be disseminated to staff in 2021. Feedback was very positive, and participants said it would be helpful in their day-to-day work in supporting and advocating for families. We have received a similar level of funding from Tusla to roll out more workshops in 2022. During this third year of training, we will introduce new levels of workshops (beginner and intermediate) so that we can both train new staff and develop and build upon the learning of those who have taken part in the workshops before. By the end of year three the training will have reached over 300 staff in Tusla.



Future Focus

In 2022, the Alliance will continue to run our specialist legal information helpline and support and train other organisations providing information and advice to children and young people. We will also roll out a Ukrainian and Russian translation of our Know Your Rights Guide. For the first time, we will organise a conference tailored for second-tier advice givers on effective approaches in delivering children's rights advice and embed this within a Know Your Rights promotion week.

Annual Milestone: Baseline study commissioned and produced establishing what children know about their rights

In 2021 we received funding under the IHREC Equality Scheme to contract a researcher to lead a participatory research project with children and young people to establish baseline data on what children know about their rights and best practice examples of how-to educate them. To advise on the roll out of the project we established an advisory group comprising of experts in the area including representatives from the Ombudsman for Children's Office, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, UNICEF Ireland, Foróige, SpunOut.ie and Youth Work Ireland.

Dr Gabriela Martínez Sainz, Ad Astra Fellow, Assistant Professor, Director of MSc in Education, Children & Youth, School of Education, University College Dublin and Jessica Daminelli, Research and Evaluation Consultant, Doctoral researcher in Children and Youth Studies, University College Dublin were contracted to carry out the work.

We recruited seven young people from our member organisations to take part in the project as youth researchers. The young people recruited for the research come from a variety of backgrounds and efforts were made to recruit some from especially vulnerable backgrounds. Eight workshops were held online in 2021 with the young people and in 2022 the research with the recommendations of the young people will be published.



Priority Area 4: Child Refugees

The Children's Rights Alliance identified the treatment of child refugees and asylum seekers as its foremost initial spotlight issue for the current strategic plan. In particular the Alliance Strategic Plan 2017-2021 set out to ensure that: reception conditions and accommodation for children, young people and their families seeking protection respects their rights; (2) increase welfare payments for children in the protection process to €29.80; (3) the international protection system adopts child friendly justice principles; (4) the Government prioritises children and public support for child refugees is increased and (5) government services for incoming refugees are organised and delivered in a family-friendly way and that the needs of refugee children are addressed.

Over the course of the Strategic Plan 2017-2021, the Alliance has delivered on several goals, including securing increases in the weekly payment for children (the payment reached €29.80 in 2019) and advocating for the introduction of new national standards for reception accommodation that provide for own-door accommodation for families. The latter was particularly important to address the institutionalisation of children and families in certain congregated settings

Annual Milestone: Tusla commits to adopting a specific family support plan for addressing the needs of refugee families

In January 2022, there were 45 International Protection (Direct Provision) accommodation centres nationwide and 24 emergency accommodation centres. At the beginning of 2022, more than one in four residents in these centres was a child. There were 1,822 children living with one or both parents. In 2019, the Children's Rights Alliance published Safe Haven Needs of Refugee Children Arriving in Ireland through the Irish Refugee Protection Programme: An Exploratory Study. One of the key recommendations in this report was the need for tailored family support programmes to be developed for refugee parents to support them in adjusting to parenting in a new context. While the Safe Haven report focused on families in the Emergency Reception Orientation Centres, it would be beneficial to apply this recommendation to families living in the Direct Provision system.

In 2021, the Children's Rights Alliance and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency sought to contract a consultant to conduct research into current family support practices (both onsite and in the community) with a view to identifying needs, exploring what is currently working well and recommending a model to support the particular needs of families living in the international protection accommodation system. The tendering process had to be postponed until 2022 due to challenges in securing tenderers and the cyber-attack on the HSE which impacted Tusla.

► **Spotlight:**

White Paper to End Direct Provision

2021 was one of the most significant in terms of public policy developments for child refugees as the Government published the [White Paper to End Direct Provision](#). This was on foot of a commitment in the Programme for Government and built on the work of the [Catherine Day Group](#). The Alliance prepared two policy papers to influence the White Paper.

The first was based on a consultation with 15 Alliance members and a second paper outlined the case for a child income supplement akin to Child Benefit for child refugees. The Alliance also lobbied the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman TD, and officials in the same Department.

The White Paper was published in February 2021, and it was welcomed by the Children’s Rights Alliance as a watershed moment in terms of our treatment of people seeking protection in Ireland. The White Paper commits to the following key commitments many which the Alliance sought:

White Paper Commitments for Children, Young People and Families

Thematic Area	Commitment	Why is this important?
Waiting Times	Reduce the length of time spent in initial reception accommodation (Phase One).	Prolonged delays have a negative effect on the mental health of children and families and delay access to services including school.
Housing	Move to own-door, family-appropriate accommodation in the community (Phase 2). Homes will be situated within the community, with supports to encourage interconnectedness.	Providing families with their own-door accommodation creates a far more child- and family-friendly system.
Inspections	A clear commitment that HIQA will conduct inspections of accommodation centres. HIQA will monitor existing Centres against agreed standards during the transitional period and HIQA’s expertise will be sought to develop a robust inspections system for the new model.	HIQA has built up many years of expertise and a national reputation as the go-to in inspecting services and centres in other realms like disability and older people’s services.
Child Benefit	Children in the protection process will be treated equally to other children living in Ireland who get a Child Benefit payment every month.	Up-to-now children in the protection process are not treated the same as all other children in Ireland in terms of having access to this payment. This payment is a critical measure to avoid child poverty.
Child Protection, parenting and child development	Emphasis on child welfare and child protection. Also, focus on parenting supports and child development services. The key areas of Health, Education and Local Authority provision will be included in the plan so that all of these inputs are aligned to best effect for children, young people and their families.	We know that there is a risk that children in the international protection system are more likely to end up in the child protection system, for a variety of reasons. Ensuring that support is available from key state agencies is critical for families to parent their children. This requires a wraparound approach as it utilised for other families in the state.

Children and Young People’s Services Committees (CYPSCs)	These committees are county-level committees that bring together the main statutory, community and voluntary providers of services to children and young people. They will have a specific role to ensure children’s needs remain a priority and to address any disconnect that children and young people feel from the community that they live in.	These committees bring together the key players in communities for the benefit of children. They put children first and ensure that the right players can work together to address children’s needs at a local level.
Tusla, the Child and Family Agency	Dedicated funding for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. The plan will harness the input of Tusla services in the key areas of provision, to include Prevention, Partnership and Family Support, Educational Support Services. Tusla will play an important role in supporting children to access school places.	This will help families that need support to parent their children and to access education services.
Vulnerability Assessments	Vulnerability Assessments will be carried out to determine accommodation and service needs and help define suitable supported pathways for the most vulnerable. Recognition that some families who have experienced conflict or trauma may need additional support.	Those in the international protection system are likely to have experienced multiple and/or severe trauma. We know that those in the system experience far higher levels of mental health difficulties than the rest of the community. Assessing individuals on their particular vulnerabilities is vital. Getting the right support early on will allow children and parents to access all other areas of their life and reach their potential.
Staff training	All staff working with International Protection applicants will receive cultural sensitivity training to develop their cultural competence. They will receive equality and human rights training as well as training on engaging with people who have experienced trauma or torture.	It is critical that the staff working with those in the international protection system understand the different cultural needs of the communities they are serving. It is also critical that there is sensitivity towards those who have experienced trauma.

The Children’s Rights Alliance hosted a webinar with the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’ Gorman TD in May 2021 to promote awareness of the *White Paper’s* recommendations to our stakeholders and we plan to focus on the implementation of the *White Paper* in the next Strategic Plan. In July 2021, the Chief Executive, Tanya Ward was appointed by the Minister to the Programme Board that will provide guidance, expertise and oversee the implementation of the *White Paper*.

Members of the Programme Board include a former resident of Direct Provision, independent experts, non-governmental organisations working in the fields of reception and integration, key Government Departments and the Housing Agency. The Board’s inaugural meeting took place on 29 July 2021.



Future Focus

In 2022, the context for implementing the *White Paper* has changed due to the Russian Federation's military offensive against Ukraine which was launched on 24 February 2022. It has triggered one of the fastest-growing refugee emergencies in history, and the largest since World War II according to the UNHCR. According to the UNHCR, an estimated 90 per cent of the refugees from Ukraine are women and children. Ireland removed the requirement for visas to Ireland and by the end of May had welcomed approximately 33,000 refugees.

The Irish Government's opening of its borders for Ukrainian refugees has been commendable. At the same time, it has worked at an extraordinary rate to find emergency accommodation for newly arrived refugees. However, the approach is not sustainable as

emergency accommodation can quickly become a new direct provision system. Another major challenge with such a large movement of children is the increased risk of human trafficking and exploitation.

Alongside the movement of Ukrainian refugees, Ireland has also witnessed a significant increase in persons seeking international protection – over 11,000 people applied for international protection by the end of May 2022. Going forward the Alliance intends to focus on advocating for appropriate reception accommodation for Ukrainian refugees with a special focus on child protection/trafficking concerns and on education. We will also continue to advocate for the recommendations in the *White Paper* to be implemented for the wider refugee population.

► People, Systems, Structures and Resources

Organisational Development

In 2021, the Children's Rights Alliance set out to ensure that it is well-managed and conformed to all governance and legal requirements. The detail of governance/membership activities is covered in 'Structure, Governance and Management'. Throughout 2021 the Alliance kept a focus on health and safety measures and supported staff to work from home.

The Alliance also put aside reserves to replace the heating system, flooring and furniture to support the staff's return to the office. The Alliance continued to prioritise staff wellbeing in the year by providing training sessions and providing staff members with direct coaching by Neil O'Brien from Time to Fly.

Management and Staffing

The Children's Rights Alliance retained a dedicated and high performing team in 2021 which includes a: Chief Executive; Head of Legal, Policy and Public Affairs, Legal and Policy Manager, Social Policy Analyst; Senior Research and Policy Officer (from May); Legal and Policy Assistant (from November); Legal Information Officer (from June) Head of Communications and Development, Senior Communications Officer – this person acted as Campaign Lead for our online safety campaign from March 2021, Membership Officer; Head of Governance and Finance, Office and Finance Manager (until May 2021) and Administrative Assistant (from November).

At the end of 2021, one staff member had 13 years' service; one staff member had 10 years' service; one staff member had nine years' service; one had eight years' service; one staff member had over three years' service, two staff members had over two years' service. Four new staff joined the team during the year.

The Strategic Plan sets out to ensure that 'the team is supported and effective, its performance is managed and linked to organisational objectives, and its leadership outward looking and strategic'. In implementing this Strategic Goal, the Alliance ensures that individual staff performance is monitored and evaluated using an organisational performance and development review. Staff are allocated tasks in their annual appraisal based on actions from the annual work plan which the Board approves. Staff are then required to prepare monthly individual plans and report on progress in their monthly staff supervision meetings with their line-manager. Staff are also monitored in a bi-annual/final appraisal and are required to complete project updates against project plans, and to complete quarterly reports on progress against the annual work plan. The structure and process for the Chief Executive's annual appraisal is agreed with the Remuneration Committee, conducted by the Chair, and reported as completed annually to the Board.



Photo by Katie Moun (www.unsplash.com)

Communications

In 2021, the Alliance continued to balance the need to support members and profile emerging issues due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic with its own communication objectives. The Alliance continued to prioritise supporting communications on the information helpline. This year, work began on the development of the Alliance's new website which has been on hold since the outbreak of the pandemic. The website will be an essential communication tool for the Alliance and will be launched in 2022.

The Alliance issued 36 press releases in 2021, an increase from previous years (21 in 2020, 20 in 2019, 22 in 2018).

In 2021, a new provider was contracted for media monitoring and this resulted in a marked difference in how the Alliance tracks and analyses its presence in the media. In previous years, we noted that media mentions (272 in 2020, 205 in 2019 and 265 in 2018) did not accurately capture all broadcast mentions. While we now have a more accurate sense of the Alliance's presence in the media, it does have an impact on the comparative analysis normally conducted each year. The media mentions totalled 847 in 2021.

In 2020, Radio accounted for 26 per cent of our media coverage (70/272). The radio coverage was well balanced between national and local. Print Media (newspaper/magazine) accounted for over half of the total media coverage in the year (57 per cent) and with an equal balance of national and local outlets (56 per cent/46 per cent respectively). In 2021, Radio accounted for two thirds of all media coverage for the Alliance (increased to 66 per cent), with Local Radio reach particularly high (85 per cent of broadcast coverage).

Young people more exposed than ever to online exploitation, says CRA



Children's Rights Alliance CEO Tanya Ward. Picture: Maxwallisphotography.ie
TUE, 23 FEB, 2021 - 04:35
NOEL BAKER
The Children's Rights Alliance has called on the Government to appoint an online safety commissioner after warning that young people are more exposed than ever to online exploitation, grooming, cyber-bullying, and harmful content, with little trust in tech companies to remedy the situation.



Newspaper Print /Online accounted for just over a third of media coverage (34 per cent), with National Outlets making up the majority of this (60 per cent).

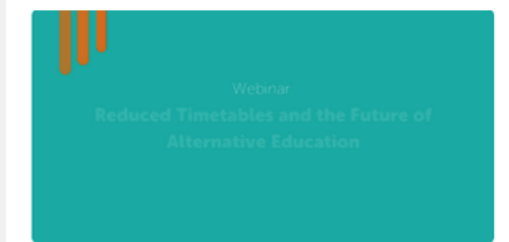
In 2021, the focus on our campaign work comes through when we analyse the media over the course of the year. In Quarter 2, our #123OnlineSafety campaign was responsible for almost 50 per cent of the media coverage alone. This is reflected again in Quarter 4, centering on our national conference and reaction to the imminent publication of the Online Safety and Media Regulation (OSMR) Bill. A similar pattern is seen on our campaign work on Education including our *Children's Futures Campaign* and *Reduced Timetables* campaign.

The Alliance's focus on its social media platforms was to sustain the high engagement with members and our wider audience that was built through the pandemic. Once again, we set ourselves a target of increasing our presence on social media by 10 per cent. On Twitter, the Alliance attracted 1,360 new followers, an increase of 7 per cent. However, profile visits continued to increase despite the stall on new followers and the Alliance hit a milestone target of securing 20,000+ followers (ending the year on 20,054), making the Alliance one of the largest networks in the sector.

Our webinar on Reduced Timetables and the Future of Alternative Education is only a week away

Speakers include @AdamPHarris, @BrianFitzsimo13, Bernard Joyce @itmtrav, @emernowlan, @macsocgw, & Deborah Brennan @WeAreTUDublin @InclusionIre

Sign up here: bit.ly/3zG6FVi
pic.twitter.com/rBu79gbmWe



1 10 18

Top media Tweet earned 10.1K impressions

"We need a radical overhaul of the education system": read our press release ahead of our cross-party political panel on the #FutureOfEducation starting at 11.20am today: bit.ly/3hgy89E Questions from young people @dyspraxialRL @itmtrav @YAPIreland @NCBI_sightloss pic.twitter.com/KyKxVEPI8k



9 15

Building a Strong Membership

The diversity and growth of our membership gives the Alliance our mandate, credibility and unique opportunity to speak on behalf of all children in Ireland and to advocate for their rights. The positive changes that we have made over the last 26 years has been both informed and supported by our members. At the end of 2021, the Alliance membership included 139 full members (not-for-profit organisations), 55 individuals and one associate member. The Alliance experienced its biggest year of membership growth in its history with an additional 23 not for profit organisations and 9 individuals joining our register of members in 2021. Three organisations left the membership in 2021 due to a change of strategic direction. 2021 marked the end of our last Strategic Plan (2017-2021). In that time our membership has increased from 114 to 139 organisational members and from 30 to 55 individual members, our most members to date.

In 2021, the Alliance focused on supporting and maintaining our high standards in engagement with new and current members. Over the year, we have continued to provide weekly and quarterly member resources and facilitated a wide range of online briefings, member meetings, consultations and working groups. Alliance members are working at the coalface with children, young people and families, which helps us to identify problems, develop solutions and bring about change. Throughout a challenging 2021, the ongoing impact of Covid-19 was keenly felt by many working in the community and voluntary sector. Alliance members played a vital role this year in providing a spotlight on these key issues and informing the Alliance's strategic leadership decisions, particularly around educational disadvantage, child protection, online safety and more.



32
Weekly Oireachtas Monitors



10
Policy submissions



4
Children's Rights Now newsletters



2
Campaign coalitions established

Testimonial:

“The MRCI is a national organisation working to promote justice, empowerment and equality for migrants and their families. Since 2001 MRCI has been working with migrants in sectors of the economy where issues of low pay, discrimination and exploitation are rife. MRCI combines frontline services, policy, advocacy, and campaigning with migrant workers to secure rights. Over the last 20 years we have developed expertise and analysis on issues where workers' rights meet immigration in Ireland. The most common sectors of employment of the migrant workers we engage with are low pay jobs in agri-food, care and domestic work, cleaning, restaurants, retail, hospitality and fisheries.

MRCI is a proud member of the Children's Rights Alliance. Our most recent success, the Regularisation Scheme for Undocumented People, could not have been won without the support from CRA and member organisations. CRA have long been a stalwart advocate for the rights of children and young people with precarious immigration status, in particular undocumented children and young people. Their unyielding support and allyship for the Young, Paperless and Powerful and Justice for the Undocumented campaign has made a huge difference to ongoing efforts.”

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland

Membership Communications and Events

Feb 2021: Member briefing with Special Rapporteur on Child Protection, Prof. Conor O'Mahony.

May 2021: Member briefing with Minister Roderic O'Gorman TD on the White Paper to End Direct Provision.

Sept. 2021: Consultation on Reduced Timetables and Alternative Education.

Feb 2021: Update from Tusla on the impact Covid-19 with CEO Bernard Gloster, Director of Services + Integration, Kate Duggan and Director of Commissioning, Eifion Williams.

May 2021: Online national conference on tackling Child Poverty in Ireland using the European Child Guarantee with Minister of State of the Dept. of Rural and Community Development, Joe O'Brien TD.

Sept. 2021: Consultation on Educational Disadvantage.

Sept. 2021: Member consultation meeting on well being in the school community.

Feb 2021: Member briefing on Family Court Reform with Prof. Geoffrey Shannon, Patron of the Children's Rights Alliance, Solicitor and Child Law Expert.

June 2021: Civil Society consultation with Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth stakeholders on the state report on Ireland's progress under the UNCRC.

Nov. 2021: Member's Roundtable on Reduced Timetables.

Nov. 2021: Joint Children's Rights Alliance and UCC briefing on incorporating the UNCRC into national law with Prof. Ursula Kilkelly and Prof. Laura Lundy.

Feb 2021: Webinar with James Rooney BL and Alan Brady BL on children's right to an adequate education from a constitutional and human rights perspective.

July 2021: Children's Rights Alliance A.G.M.

Nov. 2021: The 1,2,3 of Online Safety National Conference.

Feb 2021: Launch of Report Card 2021.

July 2021: Political panel discussion on the 'Future of Education' with Gary Gannon TD (Social Democrats), Donnchadh O'Laoghaire TD (Sinn Féin), Senator Pauline Reilly (The Green Party), Aodhán Ó'Riordáin TD (Labour) and Senator Mary Seery-Kearney (Fine Gael).

Dec. 2021: Member briefing with Prof. Conor O'Mahony on children's rights and best interests in the context of donor assisted human reproduction and surrogacy.

Mar 2021: Children's Futures Campaign webinar update with the Ombudsman for Children, Dr. Niall Muldoon and Prof. Mary Horgan, President of the Royal College of Physicians Ireland.

July 2021: High profile #123OnlineSafety event focused on the campaign ask of an individual complaints mechanism.

Dec. 2021: Members updated on Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth work with Dr. Fergal Lynch, Secretary General.

April 2021: Briefing with the Office of the Ombudsman for Children with Dr. Carmel Corrigan, on their plans to develop a Children's Report to the UNCRC.

July 2021: Launch of the Children's Rights Alliance Helpline Report 2020.

Dec. 2021: Seminar on Child Protection and Welfare Data.

April 2021: Alliance team briefing to members on the annual work plan and campaign updates.

Dec. 2021: Catherine McGuinness seminar with the Bar of Ireland.

Fundraising

Fundraising is the responsibility of the Directors, and they are charged with ensuring the short-term and long-term viability of the Alliance. The organisation has formally adopted and adheres to the Charities Regulator's Guidelines for Charitable Organisations on Fundraising from the Public.

In 2021, the Alliance set out to retain its current funding and secure additional core funders. An independent audit of the organisation's sustainability and fundraising operations in Q1 2021 was carried out in order to reassess the fundraising work. In June 2021, the Alliance also organised training for the staff with the Charities Institute on best practice in fundraising in line with the Charities Regulator Authority.

Funding from government sources grew slightly with a total of €328,956 (up from €312,598 in 2020) from four sources: the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth for core work (€180,000); the Department of Rural and Community Development/Pobal SSNO Scheme (€89,982); the Department of Rural and Community Development for Social Partnership work (€18,840). Funding from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency grew from €16,576 in 2020 to €40,134.

Funding income from philanthropic sources was €283,981 in 2021, down from €539,340 in 2020. This deduction is predominantly because the Alliance raised €175,134 in 2020 for a once-off emergency Covid-19 food provision project.

The Community Foundation for Ireland supported us on a number of projects including our online safety campaign via RTE Does Comic Relief (€133,243), our child refugee project (€150,000 over three years) and a new child poverty monitor (€90,000 over three years).

Training income went from €16,576 in 2020 to €15,901 in 2021 due to a contractual agreement with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to deliver children's rights training to its staff.

► Financial Review

The financial outcome for 2021 is set out in the statement of financial activities. You can read our full Financial Statements [here](#).

Results	31 Dec 2021	31 Dec 2020
Net (Deficit)/ Surplus for the financial year	(54,166)	183,130
Incoming Resources	768,553	970,224
Resources Expended	822,719	787,094

The net deficit for 2021 of €54,166 is split between an unrestricted surplus of €19,504 and a restricted deficit of €73,670.

The unrestricted net surplus related to additional income received and reduced unrestricted expenditure due to Covid -19 in the year 2021 which was not anticipated. The Children's Rights Alliance received additional income from donations and membership fees and experienced a reduction in general overheads due to Covid-19.

Unrestricted funds are funds for the use at the discretion of the Board in furtherance of the strategic plan.

The restricted net deficit relates to funding that was received in 2020 and the associated expenditure for the funding happened in 2021.



Photo by Scott Webb (www.unsplash.com)

Statement of Financial Activities

Income and Endowments from:	Unrestricted fund 2021 ▶ €	Restricted fund 2021 ▶ €	Total Funds 2021 ▶ €	Total Funds 2020 ▶ €
Income and Endowments from:				
Donations and fundraising income	82,988	-	82,988	64,029
Charitable activities	-	328,956	328,956	312,598
Other funding	20,300	293,981	314,281	550,540
Investment income	42,328	-	42,328	43,057
Total Income	145,616	622,937	768,553	970,224
Expenditure on:				
Raising funds	19	47,731	47,750	78,312
Charitable activities	126,093	648,876	774,969	708,782
Total Expenditure	126,112	696,607	822,719	787,094
Net movement in funds	19,504	(73,670)	(54,166)	183,130
Reconciliation of funds:				
Total funds brought forward	723,499	287,333	1,010,832	827,702
Net movement in funds	19,504	(73,670)	(54,166)	183,130
Total funds carried forward	743,003	213,663	956,666	1,010,832

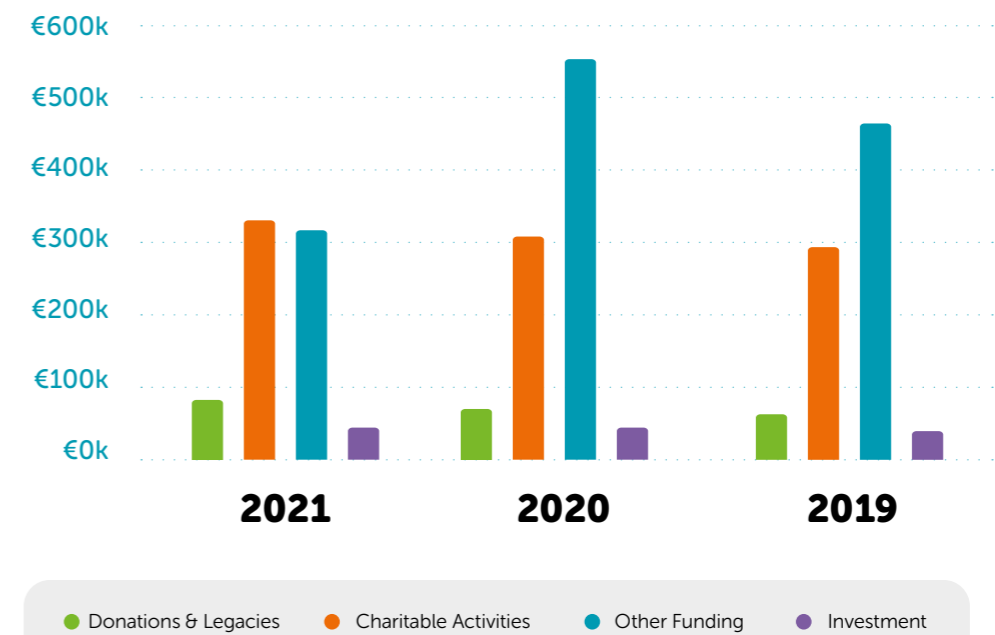
Restricted funds represent income received that can only be used for particular purpose as set out in the funding agreements. If, during the year, the funds received are not fully utilised the balance is represented in the restricted reserve at the year-end (see note 21 in the financial statements). The accounting treatment for this is dictated by FRS 102 SORP.

The Children's Rights Alliance is financed by a mix of donations and legacies, charitable activities (government grants), other funding (philanthropic) and income from investments.

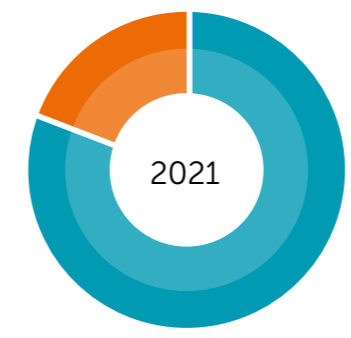
In 2021, the Alliance continued to implement its strategy to diversify its funding base to ensure that it remained independent, sustainable and able to deliver its core objectives. The Alliance continued to focus on the generation of additional core sources of funding rather than pursuing small grants.

Income

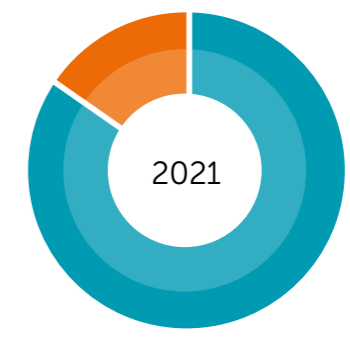
In 2021, the Children's Rights Alliance received a total of €622,937 (2020: 862,938) in restricted income which represents 81% of the total income. The reduction in restricted income is mainly due to Covid-19 Response - Food Poverty Scheme (€187,650) and Tomar Trust (€188,462) funds completing in 2020.



Income



Expenditure



There were two principal sources of restricted income during 2021: Government grants (52%) and philanthropic sources (47%).

Government Grants

Government sources included the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government – Pobal and Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and Tusla. (Note 4 Income - to the financial statements)

Philanthropic Sources

Philanthropic funding continues to be an important source of funding for the charity and helps ensure its independence.

In 2021, the Children's Rights Alliance received a total of €145,616 (2020: €107,286) in unrestricted income which represents 18% of the total income. There are two principal sources of unrestricted income in the year 2021: Donations and legacies (57%) and income from investments (29%).

Donations and Legacies

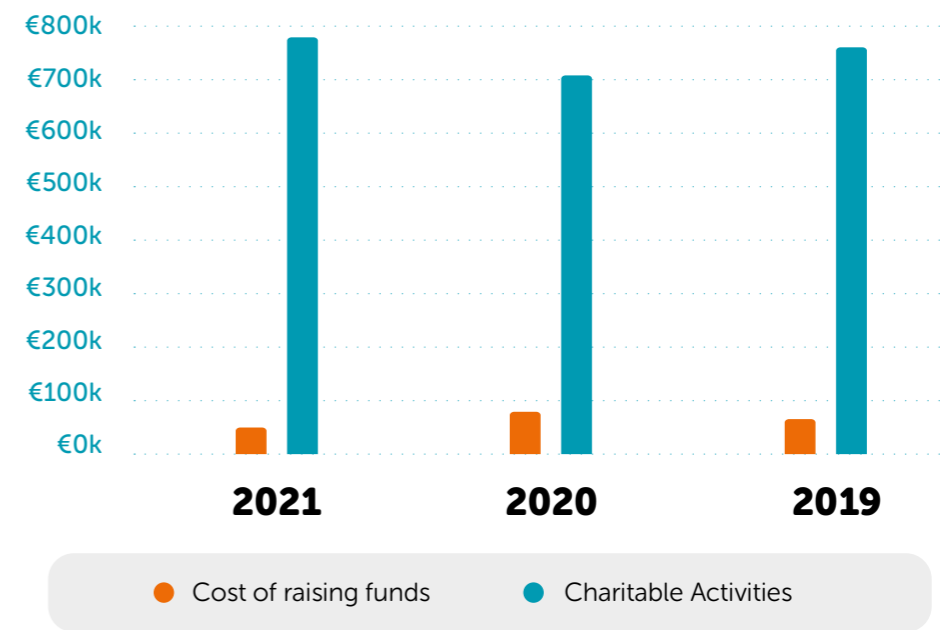
Donations and Legacies included membership income (€72,045) and donations-in-kind (€10,943). Membership income has increased by 14 per cent from 2020 this is due to an increase in uptake of membership for the Alliance in 2021. Donations-in-kind has increased by 89 per cent from 2020.

Income from Investments

Income from investments relates to rental income and management fees (€42,310), no material increases from 2020. The Alliance achieved full rental occupancy in the year 2021.

Expenditure

In 2021, total expenditure was €822,719 (2020: €787,096). The charitable activities expenditure in 2021 of €774,969 (2020: €708,875) increased by 8% in the year. The increase in expenditure relates to spending on project funds for which income was received in the previous year.



Included in cost of raising funds and charitable activities are staff costs of €518,208 in 2021 (2019: €461,909) which represent 61 per cent (2020: 58 per cent) of the overall expenditure for the Alliance. The increase in the staff costs of 3 per cent in the year 2021 relates to increase in project staffing.

The Directors have a reasonable expectation that the company has adequate resources to continue

its operational activities for the foreseeable future, being a twelve-month period from the date of the approval of the financial statements. Accordingly, the Directors have continued to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in preparing the annual financial statements.

We would like to pay tribute to the generosity of our funders and members for the continued belief and support in the work of the Children's Rights Alliance.

Policy for Holding Reserves

The Children's Rights Alliance Board has put a reserve policy in place to ensure that the charity's core activities could continue during a period of unforeseen difficulty. This takes account of the cost of making staff redundant in an emergency situation, risks associated with variances in planned income versus expenditure and the charity's contractual commitments. The Alliance must carry a minimum of six months operating costs in a readily realisable form. The reserve threshold is advised by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee in line with the Annual Budget and is approved by the board. The reserve is held in a 30-day deposit account, prize bonds and current account and the Committee reviews the interest rate bi-annually to ensure the highest return on savings.

The Chief Executive and the Treasurer monitor the reserve on a quarterly basis by reviewing the management accounts. The reserve policy is constantly under review.

At the end of the year, the Alliance's total funds were €956,666 of which €213,663 were restricted and €743,003 were unrestricted. Given that the overall expenditure in the year 2021 amount to €822,719, this meant that the Alliance exceeded the six-month policy reserve by €331,643. The reason that the Alliance exceeds the policy is due to the continuing dependency on discretionary income from year to year. It is anticipated that the Alliance will use 3.5% of the excess reserve in 2022 to upgrade facilities and heating in the offices for building users.

BALANCE SHEET	2021 ▶ €	2020 ▶ €
Fixed Assets		
Tangible Assets	290,705	301,347
Investments	50,000	50,000
Current Assets		
Debtors	236,482	157,272
Cash at bank and in hand	885,757	885,757
	1,462,944	1,343,194
Creditors within 1 year	346,270	287,371
Total assets less current liabilities	1,116,674	1,055,823
Creditors after 1 year	160,008	44,991
Total net Assets	956,666	1,010,832
Charity Funds		
Restricted Funds	213,663	287,333
Unrestricted Funds	743,003	723,499
Total Funds	956,666	1,010,832

Policy for Investments

The Children's Rights Alliance's policy for investments is to retain its cash reserve in low-risk vehicles. During the year 2021 the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee continued to review the investment policy of purchasing prize bonds. It is anticipated that a further €50,000 will be purchased in 2022.

Apportionment

In 2021, the Children's Rights Alliance continued to use the budgeting template that allows clear apportionment of income against activities and related expenditure. In addition, the Alliance's systems allow for grant income to be apportioned against funded costs.

Principal Risk and Uncertainties

The Children's Rights Alliance uses its Risk Register to monitor and mitigate risk arising across the full range of its activities. The Risk Register is reviewed on an annual basis by the Financial, Audit and Risk Committee and approved by the board. The Alliance's risk register identifies risks under the following themes: Governance and Regulation, Business and Operational, Human, Financial and Reputational and Political.

The Directors are aware of the key risks to which the company is exposed, in particular those related to the operation and finances of the company and are satisfied that there are appropriate systems in place to address these risks.

In 2021, the three main risks were funding certainty, reputational if the Alliance cannot deliver for its full membership and, staffing levels if people are on leave.



Photo by Tanaphong Toochinda (www.unsplash.com)

► Structure, Governance and Management

Governance

The Strategic Plan commits the Children's Rights Alliance to ensuring that: 'Governance is maintained at the highest standards, from Board level, the organisation is legally compliant, strategic, protective of its independence, and invested in growing its reputation'. The Children's Rights Alliance is fully in compliance with Charities Regulator Governance Code and previously the Type C organisation which is defined by the Voluntary Governance Code for Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations in Ireland. The Board completed the Governance Compliance form for 2020 and complied with all sections of the Charities Governance Code in June 2021.

The Strategic Plan commits the Alliance to communicate effectively and to be transparent and accountable to its members, stakeholders and funders. On foot of this, the Alliance achieved Triple Lock Status from the Charities Institute Ireland. The Alliance's Governance Handbook sets out the organisation's governance policy, procedures and practices to ensure that the Alliance uses transparent decision-making to direct its resources and exercise power in an effective and accountable way. In Winter 2021, the Board conducted a skills audit and a Board effectiveness survey as part of the annual board governance.

The organisation finds implementing its governance commitments, charity obligations and legal compliance duties to be challenging given its size and the fact that fundraising for the administrative function is challenging. The Alliance does have a Head of Governance and Finance but finds other staff members are increasingly involved in supporting legal compliance.

Good Governance

In 2021, the Alliance was nominated in the Good Governance Award (Category 2, income between €250,000 and €1 million). The Good Governance Awards recognise, support and encourage adherence to good governance practice by non-profit organisations.

Directors

The Children's Rights Alliance is governed by a Board of Directors with a maximum number of 10 people. Six members are elected from the membership and four are appointed through co-option. All Board members work in a voluntary capacity and do not receive any remuneration or expenses.

Selection and Induction of Board Members

The Board of Directors of the Children's Rights Alliance is a body of elected or, in a minority of cases, appointed (co-opted) individuals (Board members) who jointly oversee and govern the activities of the organisation. The Children's Rights Alliance Board act on behalf of, and is subordinate to, the member organisations of the Children's Rights Alliance.

In line with the Articles of Association, the number of Directors shall not be less than three or more than ten. At every AGM, one third of elected Board members must retire under rotation arrangements prescribed therein. If the number of elected Board members is not divisible by three, then the nearest number to a third must retire. All Board members who retire by rotation are eligible for re-election if they wish to continue on the Board. However, Board members can only serve a total of three terms. The Board can also co-opt a Director onto the Board and co-opted Directors hold office only until the next AGM after which time they may either be reappointed or vacate the office.

Board induction occurs as soon as possible after an individual has been selected to join the Board. In all cases this is scheduled to take place before attendance at the first meeting. Induction is the responsibility of the Chairperson and the Chief Executive and involves a face-to-face training session covering, the role and aims of the Children's Rights Alliance, its governance structures, responsibilities, its core activities, history and successes. A new Director is also furnished with an induction pack with all key documents. A Board meeting is organised in June which also introduces new Board members to the organisation's legal

obligations, the organisation's policies and their review periods. Follow-up training is also organised for Board members to keep members up to date with changing obligations and where there is an identified need.

The Board of Directors met six times in 2021. Under the Board Rotation policy (see below), June Tinsley (nominated by National Council for the Blind of Ireland) and Katie Mannion (nominated by Irish Refugee Council) retired from Board on 6 July 2021 at the AGM. June Tinsley (nominated by National Council of the Blind of Ireland) and Moninne Griffith (nominated by the BeLong to Youth Service) were elected on the same day.

Board Profiles for 2021

- ▶ **Tom Maher** Tom is the Chair of the Children's Rights Alliance and is currently employed as the Director of Services at St. Patrick's Mental Health Services. This service comprises a mental health service that includes three Approved Centres (including a mental health service for Children and Adolescents), a network of community mental health clinics and a Wellness and Recovery Centre that includes extensive day services. Clinical activity includes 3,000 inpatient admissions per year, in excess of 15,000 community appointments and 15,000 day service attendances. The role includes responsibility for the development of and efficient delivery of all clinical services, clinical and corporate governance, service quality and negotiation of funding contracts with all health insurers. These services are delivered by approximately 360 clinicians including social work, nursing, medicine, clinical psychology, occupational therapy, psychotherapeutic staff and the associated administrative staff necessary for such delivery.
- ▶ **Ciairín de Buis** Ciairín is Vice Chair of the Children's Rights Alliance. Ciairín is currently an independent consultant, working with clients such as Dublin Rape Crisis Centre and the Open Doors Initiative. She was recently the interim CEO of Extern and was previously the CEO of Women for Election a non-partisan organisation inspiring and equipping more women to succeed in public life. Ciairín has worked in the area of children's rights having led Start Strong, a children's rights organisation focused on children's early years, and was previously a member of the *National Children's Advisory Council*, the *Expert Group on Early Years*, the *Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years* amongst others. She is a former board member of Sonas and was twice appointed by the Minister of Justice to serve on the Parole Board.
- ▶ **Colm Byrson** Colm is Treasurer of the Children's Rights Alliance. Colm joined the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee of the Alliance as an independent committee member in November 2015 and was then co-opted on to the Board and to the position of Treasurer in February 2018. Colm is a fellow of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (FCCA) and holds a Bachelor of Business & Legal Studies degree from UCD. He has been the Head of Finance at IPB Insurance since May 2012. He is involved with coaching of underage GAA and rugby teams and is also the Treasurer of the Belvedere College Past Pupils Union.
- ▶ **Katie Mannion** Katie Mannion is Company Secretary for the Children's Rights Alliance. She is currently Managing Solicitor of the Irish Refugee Council Independent Law Centre. She has a particular interest in child migration and representing children and young adults. She wrote 'Child Migration Matters', which was published by the Immigrant Council of Ireland in 2016, and coauthored a chapter on child migration in "Immigrants as Outsiders in the Two Irelands".
- ▶ **Orla Cunningham** Orla is a co-opted board member of the Children's Rights Alliance since March 2020. She worked with Bank of Ireland for c30 years and has held numerous leadership positions and managed multiple projects during her career which include Outsourcing, GDPR, IT change, Procurement, Operations Management, Facilities Management, Real Estate restructure, Training and COO Markets and Treasury. She holds a Bachelor of Business Studies degree from Trinity College and a CIPD diploma in Human Resource management from the National College of Ireland. She is also a Board member of Carmichael and Common Purpose Ireland.
- ▶ **Michelle Griffin** Michelle was first elected to the Board on 29 July 2020. Michelle is the Manager of Finglas Youth Service, a project of Crosscare and has over 15 years' experience in the non-profit sector. Michelle also worked in the Combat Poverty Agency on policy issues and research relating to poverty and social inclusion. She holds a Masters in Social Policy, a Certificate in Leadership & Management in Community Based Projects, and recently completed an MBA in Trinity College. Michelle has a keen interest in children's rights and particularly in the area of youth justice, poverty and young people's participation.

Board Profiles for 2021

- ▶ **Karen Hannify** Karen was co-opted to the Board on 25 February 2021. Karen is Director of Marketing, Communications and External Relations with Foróige. She joined the organisation in 2002, having previously worked in Public Relations Consultancy. As a member of Foróige's Senior Management Team, Karen is responsible for Internal and External Communications; Public Affairs; Brand Development; Reputation Management; Digital Media Management; Corporate Engagement and Relationship Management. Karen has served a number of terms on the Boards of both Léargas and the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), including a term as Vice-President of NYCI. She works closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, particularly the Youth Participation Unit, managing a number of their flagship events including Dáil na nÓg and the Comhairle na nÓg National Showcase. Karen holds a Masters Degree in Public Relations.
- ▶ **Catherine Joyce** Catherine was first elected to the Board on 29 July 2020. Catherine Joyce is a prominent Traveller and human rights activist. Catherine has advocated for Travellers' rights for over 35 years and is a former director of the Irish Traveller Movement. She has contributed to national and international forums on progressing Travellers' human, social and cultural rights. She is currently Manager of the Blanchardstown Traveller Development Group. Catherine was a recipient of a People of the Year Award in 1991. Catherine Joyce was prominent in Irish Travellers being formally recognised by then Taoiseach Enda Kenny establishing formal recognition for Travellers as a distinct ethnic group in 2017.
- ▶ **Nita Mishra** Nita was first elected to the Board on 29 July 2020. Dr Nita Mishra is a researcher on Social Inclusion in the Dept of Food Business & Development (UCC) and part time lecturer on International Development. She is the current Chair of Development Studies Association Ireland. Her research interests include feminist methodologies, gender, environment, NGOs, rights-based approaches, and right to food. Nita's poetry has been critically acclaimed as the future of Irish Feminism.
- ▶ **June Tinsley** June Tinsley has worked in the area of social policy for nearly twenty years. She has continuously tried to improve the laws, policies and services for those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable. She worked in the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed before moving to Barnardos. In Barnardos she championed children's rights, lobbying and campaigning for improvements in children's access to childcare, education, health, housing and child welfare and protection system. Now, working for the National Council for the Blind of Ireland, she is increasing awareness of the needs of people who are blind or visually impaired.
- ▶ **Moninne Griffith** Moninne leads BeLong To Youth Services, Ireland's national organisation for LGBT+ young people. As CEO, she is dedicated to supporting and empowering LGBTI+ young people. Moninne previously spent 8 years as Director of Marriage Equality, a single-issue organisation working for, and historically achieving, equality for same-sex couples in Ireland, and equality for many children in non-traditional families. Moninne was Chair of the Government's Gender Recognition Act Review Group and a member of their LGBTI+ Youth Strategy oversight committee. Moninne was a member of the Government's Taskforce on Youth Mental Health and is a former Chairperson of the National Women's Council of Ireland. She is passionate about Youth Mental Health and is a member of the Government's National Implementation Monitoring Committee for 'Sharing the Vision – a Mental Health Policy for Everyone', the DCEDIY's BOBF Advisory Council. Moninne worked as a solicitor in general practice for a decade and holds a Bachelor of Civil Law and a MA in Women's Studies from University College Dublin.

Unless otherwise stated the following have served as Directors for the entire period following either an election or co-option.

Board Members	Board meeting attendance for 2021
▶ Tom Maher (Chair)	6/6
▶ Ciairín de Buis (Vice Chair)	6/6 Retired on 21 December 2021
▶ Colm Bryson	6/6
▶ Katie Mannion	1/4 Retired on 6 July 2021
▶ Orla Cunningham (Treasurer)	6/6
▶ Michelle Griffin	4/5 Retired on 29 October 2022
▶ Catherine Joyce	0/6
▶ Nita Mishra	3/6
▶ June Tinsley	5/6
▶ Karen Hannify	4/4 Co-opted on 26 February 2021
▶ Moninne Griffith	1/2 Elected on 6 July 2021

The Board is supported by a committee structure which deals with specific aspects of the company's business. There were three standing committees in 2021. The Chief Executive was in attendance at all these Subcommittees except the Remuneration

Committee when her own remuneration, terms/ conditions and performance review were being discussed. The Head of Governance and Finance was present for the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and is Secretary to the Nominations Committee.

Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee

The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee is responsible for effective review and monitoring of financial risks; reliable management and financial reporting; ensuring compliance with laws and regulations; and maintenance of an effective and efficient audit.

Finance, Audit and Risk Committee	Attendance for 2021
▶ Colm Bryson	7/7
▶ Orla Cunningham [Treasurer]	7/7
▶ Katie Mannion	1/1 Retired from committee on 15 February 2021
▶ Susanna Lyons [independent]	6/7
▶ Ciairín de Buis (Vice Chair)	4/7

Remuneration Committee

The Remuneration Committee of the Alliance consists of the Office Holders of the Alliance Board of Directors. The Remuneration Committee is responsible for advising the Board on the remuneration policies for the Chief Executive/staff and reviews the Chief Executive appraisal.

Nominations Committee

Involving the Chair and Vice Chair, the Nominations Committee is responsible for advising the Board on policies and procedures for maintaining strong effective structures, succession planning for the Board and the selection of candidates for Board co-option. The Committee met on three occasions in 2021 and had full attendance.

Decision-Making

The Board has the following matters specifically reserved for its decision: Approval of the company's strategic plans, annual business plans and budgets; projects outside the scope of the strategic plan; significant acquisitions, disposals and assets of the company; major investments and capital projects, delegated authority levels, financial and risk management policies; oversight and approval of procurement contracts over €10,000; approval of all organisational policies including, governance, risk, staffing, financial, child safeguarding statement, data protection, health and safety; appointment/ removal of Committee chairs and members; final appointment and approval of the auditors; approval of annual reports and accounts; approval of new staff positions, appointment of senior staff, including the Chief Executive, and signature of employment contracts; appointment, remuneration and assessment performance of the Chief Executive; approval of changes to the membership, membership categories and rates; membership and endorsement of external campaigns or initiatives and litigation.

The Board delegates authority on certain duties and responsibilities to sign legal documents, contracts for services and funding contracts to the Chief Executive. The day-to-day management is also delegated to the Chief Executive and staff. This includes contributing to and the implementation of the strategic plan; leading, recruiting and managing the staff; managing the organisation and its finances effectively and efficiently; consulting and linking with members; representing the Children's Rights Alliance; contributing to national policy development affecting children and developing mechanisms for involving children and young people in the work of the organisation.

Reporting

The Chief Executive reports directly to the Board. Board meeting agendas are planned in advance between the Chair, the Head of Governance and Finance and the Chief Executive using a Board Planner Tool showing the full projected business of the Board spread throughout the year. A Board Report is prepared by the Chief Executive/Head of Governance and Finance and submitted to the Board one week in advance of meetings. Organisational information gathering systems have been established to ensure that Board reports contain accurate and relevant information. The Board Report follows a prescribed format with key standing items such as the Chief Executive report and the Finance, Audit and Risk Report. The Board papers report against performance objectives set by the Board and focuses on strategic developments and impacts, as well as on difficulties and risks.

The Board's Finance, Audit and Risk report is approved by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee in advance of meetings of the Board. This report summarises the overall organisational position and reports against a budget approved by the Board. Variances are calculated and explained. Trend analysis and projections are included together with a comparison against expenditure from the previous year. Key issues are identified with sufficient explanation.

Evaluation and Monitoring

The Alliance's evaluation framework monitors objectives, outputs and outcomes under the Strategic Plan 2017-2021. As part of this process, the Board sets annual milestones in an Annual Work Plan in line with the Strategic Plan and the team review progress against these milestones on a quarterly basis. This exercise is impact/outcome focused and captures whether planned activities are on-track, delayed or have been postponed or otherwise changed. Information from these quarterly reviews is used to generate Board reports and funder reports.

Legal Compliance

The Strategic Plan commits the Alliance to ensuring that the Children's Rights Alliance Board and management complies with relevant legal and regulatory requirements and that appropriate internal financial and risk management controls are in place. In 2021, the Alliance submitted its Annual Report to the Charities Regulator, its reports under the Lobbying Register and returns for the Companies Registration Officer on time. The organisation implemented recommendations from a Health and Safety audit in response to managing Covid-19 in the workplace and training was organised for staff on health and safety during Covid-19/working from home, the data protection and ergonomics.

Strategic Planning

The Board commissioned two external independent consultants (Dr Grainne Healy and Dr Kathy Walsh) to support the development of a new Strategic Plan covering March 2022 to end of 2025. The preparation of this work involved interviews with 10 external informants, online consultations with members (1), the staff (2) and the Board (3). Carrying out the Strategic Plan work was challenging with Covid-19 restrictions still in place as it meant that the Board and staff did not have an opportunity to meet in person. The Strategic Plan will be launched at the AGM on 30 June 2022. The content is covered in the section of this Annual Report.

Plans for the Future

New Strategic Plan

The development of a new Strategic Plan was a key focus for the Children's Rights Alliance in 2021 and we look forward to its implementation under our seven new strategic priorities.

These priorities should support us on the path towards the achievement of our +10 years long-term impacts. The full Strategic Plan 2022-2025 is available on the Children's Rights Alliance website.

- 1 Foster a culture of children and young people's rights.
- 2 Ensure all children and young people's rights are at the centre of law, policies and practice.
- 3 Understand the impact of Covid-19 and identify/promote best practice in responding to children's and young people's rights in times of emergency.
- 4 Reduce the numbers of children living in poverty and address social exclusion.
- 5 Ensure that educational reform respects children and young people's rights.
- 6 Build a national movement for children and young people's rights.
- 7 Ensure the Alliance has the people, systems and structures to deliver the Plan.

1. Foster a culture of children and young people's rights

In the next three years the Children's Rights Alliance aims to increase the number of children and young people aware of their rights and where to go if their rights are violated, through our Helpline and Legal Advice Clinics as well as the promotion of our Know Your Rights resources and rollout of specialised training. We will also foster a culture of children's rights through our existing political relationships, representative positions and political advocacy to promote participation rights in the next National Children and Young People's Framework and Participation Strategy, including the right to vote in local and European elections for 16 and 17 year-olds.

2. Ensure all children and young people's rights are at the centre of law, policies and practice

Over the next three years, the Children's Rights Alliance will monitor national and international developments, respond to serious threats to children's rights and use emerging opportunities to secure changes and pay particular attention to: poverty, education, child protection/welfare including online safety, disability, Travellers, refugees and the environment. We will place a spotlight on these key issues and vulnerable groups of children and young people through Ireland's 2022 examination under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the development of the successor to Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF 2). Our annual Report Card series will continue to track progress on key commitments in the Programme for Government for Children and Young People.

3. Understand the impact of Covid-19 and identify/promote best practice in responding to children's and young people's rights in times of emergency

Over the next three years, the Children's Rights Alliance will work with members to understand the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people and identify best practice in responding to children's needs during the pandemic and mainstream children's rights in decision-making in Europe. We will launch Building Children's Futures – Using Children's Rights to Recover from the Global Pandemic that will outline the needs of children and young people most disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and document decision-making during the pandemic with the view of making recommendations to enhance this going forward. The project aims to embed children's rights to ensure that officials and decision-makers at local level will have better knowledge on how to consult with children/young people and design solutions around their rights/needs.

4. Reduce the numbers of children living in poverty and address social exclusion

Over the next three years, the Children's Rights Alliance will build a dedicated team to work on child poverty/social exclusion and improved outcomes across the lifecycle for children and young people. As part of this work, we will establish a Child Poverty Members Steering Group with key influential leaders in the sector to guide our work in this space. Over the course of the plan, we will work to ensure that the new National Policy Framework on Children and Young People contains a specific focus on child poverty and a suite of actions, including the establishment of Child Poverty Reduction Unit. We will publish an annual Child Poverty Monitor to aid our pre-budget work and run an End Child Poverty week to place a focus on key child poverty measures across a number of issues such as childcare, food poverty, housing and education. The Alliance will also advocate for appropriate reception/accommodation for Ukrainian child refugees. We will also focus on child protection/trafficking concerns and on education. We will also advocate for key recommendations in the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision to be implemented.

5. Ensure that educational reform respects children and young people's rights

Over the next three years, the Children's Rights Alliance will run a campaign to influence the Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Education (CAFE) to build cross party consensus on what needs to change in the education system and advocate for children's rights-based reforms. We will run an advocacy campaign to secure recognition for the Alternative Education sector and create a forum for mainstream and alternative education providers to exchange evidence-based knowledge and experiences so as support all learners and address educational inequality head-on. We will continue to work on emerging issues including Reduced Hours, monitoring the rollout of the Guidelines to work towards the elimination of children being placed on reduced hours unnecessarily.

6. Build a national movement for children and young people's rights

Our members' voices are core to shaping our work to achieve our strategic objectives. To support the continued close engagement with our members, we will develop a comprehensive membership engagement strategy that encourages mobilisation and builds campaigns around law reform and public policy work, adding value to members' own organisational goals. We will facilitate opportunities for member engagement in our own work as well as on agreed themes and topics and work to be a uniting voice on key issues of concern for children and young people.

7. Ensure the Alliance has the people, systems and structures to deliver the Plan

Over the next three years, we will work to ensure that the Alliance is strategic, protective of its independence and complies with relevant governance and legal standards. We will also ensure that the team is supported, developed and effective. The Alliance will work to retain funding at current levels and ensure that it has sufficient financial, human and other resources to enable the delivery of the Strategic Plan.

Thank You!

A big thank you to our 140+ members for supporting us in everything we do.

Thank you also to the public for supporting our campaigns, projects and initiatives.

Thank you to all our funders and donors including: Community Foundation for Ireland; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department of Rural and Community Development; Enterprise Rent-a-Car; Eurochild; European Commission; Family Lawyers' Association of Ireland; Fidelis Foundation; Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission; Katharine Howard Foundation; Rethink Ireland; RTÉ Does Comic Relief; Social Change Initiative; Tara's Palace; The One Foundation; Pobal; Tomar Trust; Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; and The Bar of Ireland.

Special thanks also to those who provided pro bono support during 2021 including Prof. Geoffrey Shannon, Child Law Expert and Children's Rights Alliance Founding Patron, Eversheds Sutherland, Arthur Cox Solicitors, the Public Interest Law Alliance (PILA) and Mary Gaynor, proofreader.



CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ALLIANCE

Uniting Voices for Children

Founded in 1995, the Children's Rights Alliance unites over 140 members working together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. We change the lives of all children in Ireland by making sure that their rights are respected and protected in our laws, policies and services.

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