

Building a National Movement for Children and Young People

Children's Rights Alliance Three Year Strategic Plan

(March 2022-December 2025)

Summary for Members circulation for 2022 AGM

Introduction

Founded in 1995, 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 Children's Rights Alliance was granted its charity status based on 'relief of poverty'.

The objectives are 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.
- Promote awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Ireland.
- Disseminate information and views on the implications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Provide and assist in the provision of public education on matters relating to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Support and enhance the teaching of a children's rights perspective to all relevant professionals and in all relevant subject areas.
- Promote the relief of poverty among children in Ireland and to raise funds and to help raise funds for any such relief or for charitable purpose.
- Advance the education (including academic, social and physical training) of children within Ireland.
- 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 unites over 140 members who work to change the lives of all children and young people in Ireland by making sure their rights are respected and protected in laws, policies, and services.

2. Vision, mission and values

Our vision

Ireland is one of the best places in the world to be a child and young person.

Our mission

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

Our values shape how we work. Our values help us create focus, consistency and excellence. Key among these are:

Children's Rights Based Approach	A children's rights-based approach which recognises the indivisibility and inter-connectedness of children's rights. It also requires that all rights are underpinned by the four key principles of: 1) Non-discrimination. 2) The best interest of the child; 3) The right to life, survival, and resources; and 4) The right of the child to be heard in decisions affecting them. We are committed to the full realisation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
Inclusivity	No child or young person should be left behind and we will work inclusively to that end.
Collaboration	Our focus is on building relationships, seeking collaboration and teamwork. When we join forces with our allies and those whose actions affect children and young people, we go further for children and young people's rights, than we ever could alone.
Participation	We encourage and facilitate the active participation of our member organisations, as well as the participation of children and young people, as appropriate, in the development and achievement of our policies and objectives.
Transparency	We are committed to and demonstrate openness, transparency and good governance.
Integrity	We are honest, and we always try to do the right thing. Our research is evidence-based and well-considered while our solutions are focused and constructive.

3. How this Plan was developed

This Strategic Plan is the result of a process of reflection with Alliance members and our board of management, staff and wider stakeholders. The process involved consultations with the Board, staff and members. There was also engagement with external stakeholders with whom we work closely. In the process, the Children’s Rights Alliance vision and mission were reaffirmed, and here we set out the strategic goals for 2022 – 2024 in a clear framework for Alliance members, partners, funders, and other supporters. The process was led by our Board with support from our CEO and external facilitators.

4. Overview of Our Priorities and Long-Term Impacts

Table 1. Our Core Priorities

Priority 1: Foster a culture of children and young people’s rights.
Priority 2: Ensure all children and young people’s rights are at the centre of law, policies and practice.
Priority 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.
Priority 4: Reduce the numbers of children living in poverty and address social exclusion.
Priority 5: Ensure that educational reform respects children and young people’s rights.
Priority 6: Build a national movement for children and young people’s rights.
Priority 7: Ensure the Alliance has the people, systems and structures to deliver the Plan.

Long term impacts

These priorities should support us on the path towards the achievement of our +10 years long-term impacts, which are ensuring that:

- Ireland has a legislative and policy framework that respects and protects the rights of children and young people.
- Children and young people in Ireland know and can access their rights.
- The voice of the child informs policy legislation and practice.
- The State progressively realises socio-economic rights and invests in high quality services for children and young people, with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention.

Achieving our long-term outcomes would mean that 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).
- 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).
- 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).
- Enjoy an adequate standard of living (Article 27, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).
- Can access remedies when their rights are violated (Article 19, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child);
- In conflict with the law are treated with dignity and their rights are respected (Article 40, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

5. Our Priorities in detail

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

In the next three years the Children's Rights Alliance will:

- Ensure that our Know Your Rights guide is up-to-date, easily accessible and widely disseminated to children, young people, families and professionals working with children and advice givers.
- Continue to provide a specialist first stop helpline that provides legal information to children, young people, their parents and second tier advice givers and support other helpline service providers to identify legal issues and provide information in a child-friendly manner.
- Plug the gap in legal aid by working with pro bono partners, free legal advice clinics for children, young people and their families.
- Develop children's rights training for professionals working directly with children and young people in key sectors and organisations.
- 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 thus ensuring the voices of children and young people are central to key political and policy discussions and decisions that will directly impact them.

Impacts

- Increased numbers of children and young people are aware of their rights and know where to go if their rights are violated (including 500 children and young people informed about their rights through the Alliance helpline and free legal advice clinics).
- Children's rights are embedded in the work of professionals working directly with children and young people in key sectors.
- Professionals in the legal system better understand and practice child-friendly justice because of their increased capacity to better communicate with children and young people.
- Participation rights are embedded in the next National Children and Young People's Policy Framework.
- Support for the right to vote for 16 year and 17-year-olds increases.

Priority 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.
- Use Ireland's 2022 examination under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to put a spotlight on Ireland's children's rights record and to secure critical changes including on: poverty, education, child protection/welfare including online safety, disability, Travellers, refugees, and the environment.
- Ensure that the successor to Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF 2) and associated strategies deliver key changes for children and young people on: poverty, education, child protection/welfare including online safety, disability, Travellers, refugees and the environment.
- Produce an Annual Report Card Series that tracks progress on key commitments in the Programme for Government for Children and Young People.
- Establish and support three member working groups on:
 - Travellers and agree key outcomes/approaches to be achieved through the UNCRC process, BOBF 2, the Child Poverty Monitor and the Annual Report Card.
 - Disability and agree key outcomes/approaches to be achieved through the UNCRC process, BOBF 2, the Child Poverty Monitor and the Annual Report Card.
 - The Environment and agree key outcomes/approaches to be achieved through the UNCRC process, BOBF 2 and the Child Poverty Monitor.

Impacts

- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations and Recommendations for Ireland are shaped by the Alliance and its members.
- The priorities outlined in the next National Policy Framework for Children and Young People are influenced by the Alliance and its members.
- The Annual Report Card series continues to put pressure on Government to fulfil its commitments to children and young people and clear progress is made on these commitments.
- Legislation that directly impacts on the lives of children and young people adheres to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and incorporates its key principles ensuring that their best interests are considered and that their voice is heard.

Priority 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:

- Understand the impact of Covid-19 on activities and services for children and young people, particularly those that were disproportionately affected, and develop solutions to support the pandemic recovery.
- Understand how decisions about children's rights were made during the pandemic and determine the role of child/youth participation and local structures played.
- Identify best practice in responding to children's needs during the pandemic and mainstream children's rights in decision-making in Europe.

Impacts

- The needs of children and young people most disproportionately impacted by the pandemic will be clearly articulated.
- Child/youth networks across Europe and EU decision-makers/networks will have better knowledge on best practice in responding in emergency situations including on how to employ and bed down Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs).
- Best practice on child participation and on embedding rights will be identified and 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.
- The project will identify activities and services needed to address the impact of Covid-19 for children and young people. This can be addressed in follow-up government activities at a national and local level.
- The project will document decision-making on children's rights during the pandemic and will make recommendations on how to enhance it going forward. The capacity of participation structures will increase based on the findings.

Priority 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 2-3 person dedicated team to work on child poverty/social exclusion and improved outcomes across the lifecycle for children and young people.
- Establish a Child Poverty Members Steering Group with key influential leaders from the sector to guide and provide direction to the Children's Rights Alliance child poverty/social exclusion work.
- Ensure the next National Policy Framework on Children and Young People contains a specific focus on child poverty.
- Publish an annual Child Poverty Monitor to shine a spotlight on the key areas where children and young people continue to experience poverty including in accessing education, healthcare.
- Run an End Child Poverty Week in the run up to the Annual Budget to put a national focus on child poverty.
- Work to ensure that the Government implements an appropriate reception/accommodation response for Ukrainian refugees with a special focus on child protection/trafficking concerns and education.
- Work to ensure that the recommendations in the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision continue to be implemented.
- Commission/participate in strategic pieces of research to document the extent and nature of inequality and exclusion of certain groups of vulnerable children and young people.
- Participate in pilot projects to highlight and address inequalities.

Impacts

- The new National Policy Framework on Children and Young People (BOBF) will contain a specific focus on child poverty and included a suite of actions, including the establishment of a Child Poverty Reduction Implementation Unit, local child poverty plans and a specific target for early intervention and prevention/family support programmes.
- Early intervention and prevention are core principles embedded in the next BOBF and key universal services are rolled out (for example, public health nurses for children).
- Childcare is nearly free for families on low incomes and the State begins planning childcare to be available alongside education/training options.
- The Government rolls out the National Childcare Action Plan with key regulatory measures and education requirements for childminders.
- A new scheme with high level wraparounds (DEIS early years type programme) is introduced.
- Free schoolbooks are introduced in primary school settings.
- Every child is guaranteed a hot meal in their early years' setting.
- Qualified Child Increase (welfare payment) for children increases by 10%.
- There are increased investments in play, extracurricular activities and play/recreation infrastructure.
- The next Programme for Government adopts a key focus on child poverty, prevention and early intervention and commits to establishing a public early years' childcare system.
- Ensure that the reception system for refugees complies with human rights standards and all families with children live in own-door accommodation in the community.
- Ensure that parents in Direct Provision can access the Child Benefit type payment for each of their children.

- All children will receive a vulnerability assessment on arrival into the State to determine any particular needs they may have and ensure access to appropriate services.

Priority 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 consensus on what needs to change in the education system and advocate for children's rights-based reforms by: creating a campaign brand; organising a steering group of key stakeholders and influencers; conducting a desk audit of education to identify where the voice and rights of children need to be fully respected; organise consultations with young people through our members, produce a set of education solutions and disseminate widely for endorsement.
- 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 to support all learners and address educational inequality head-on.
- Support the rollout of Reduced Hours Guidelines and work towards the elimination of children being placed on reduced hours unnecessarily.
- Work to ensure that children receive better representation at the Educational Partners' table.
- Advocate for increased speech and language supports in early years.

Impacts

- Recommendations in the CAFE Report include paving the way for major educational reform and cross-party political support.
- Political party manifestos for the next General Election include commitments on educational reform.
- The next Programme for Government includes a Sláintecare type initiative aimed at achieving a major reform of the education system over the life of the Government.
- Alternative Education achieves recognition and government commits to a new policy setting out its parameters.
- A new scheme with high level wraparounds (DEIS early years type programme) is introduced.
- The law is amended to enable stakeholders representing children at the Educational Partners table.

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

Over the next three years, the Children's Rights Alliance will:

- Ensure our members' voice are core to shaping our work to achieve our strategic objectives and in implementing this Strategic Plan.
- Deliver a comprehensive membership engagement strategy that encourages mobilisation and builds campaigns around law reform and public policy work and adds value to members' own organisational goals.
- Ensure that confidence and trust in the Alliance reputation and excellence in standards is maintained.
- We will continue to develop a diverse membership, welcome new members and grow the membership in years 2 and 3 of the Strategic Plan.
- Develop a member Induction Pack and Charter for Members.
- Provide information supports and organise events to build members' capacity to implement a children's rights approach through their frontline services, in their advocacy, research and representational work. Include a special focus on groups working with vulnerable children and young people.
- Implement a members' communication plan with the goal of members understanding the Alliance's work, receiving relevant and timely information that meets their needs.
- Provide organisational support to members to come together to influence and shape national, regional and local policy developments for children and young people.
- Conduct annual member surveys to ensure the Alliance has appropriate supports and services to track member satisfaction.
- Publish regular content for and about the work of our members and the wider sector to keep members informed about best practice nationally and internationally.
- Devise new ways to promote the positive impacts our members make.
Provide capacity building training for the membership on agreed themes and topics.

Impacts

- Support for the Children's Rights Alliance among members is strong – in terms of participation, engagement and funding support.
- The membership grows by 10% by the end of the Plan.

Priority 7: Ensure the Alliance has the systems, people, resources and tools to deliver the Plan

Over the next three years, the Children's Rights Alliance will:

Governance

- Maintain full compliance with the Charities Governance Code, the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) for finance and activity reporting and any relevant guidelines from the Charities Regulator of Ireland.
- Ensure the Board meets regularly and operates effectively ensuring they have the relevant competencies to deliver on the organisation's objectives.
- Ensure compliance with relevant legal and regulatory requirement and that appropriate internal financial and risk management controls are in place (including oversight of the Annual Risk Register and delivering on unqualified audit opinion).
- Maintain the selection of high calibre board members and review the criteria for Board membership and update the Memo and Arts accordingly.
- Clarify and expand upon the schema for Board decision-making.

People

- Ensure the organisation keeps a focus on being a great place to work by: making sure that compensation is competitive; developing a new staff talent management and support approach; supporting professional development; promoting a positive work culture where staff are valued, listened to and supported with wellbeing activities and pathways for career development.

Systems:

- Maintain investment in ICT systems and ensure that they are effective and continue to uphold the information security and legal obligations under the GDPR.

Funding;

- Develop and implement a fundraising strategy designed to secure long-term financial sustainability with a mix of public and private funding.
- Ensure Alliance has funding in place that provides continuity at current levels and promotes organisational resilience and independence.

Communications

- Develop a Communications strategy destined to ensure the Alliance remains a leading voice on pressing issues for children and young people, a critical commentator on key political and legislative developments and a credible source for information about children's rights.
- Ensure that the Alliance effectively communicates and is transparent and accountable to its members, stakeholders and funders.
- Ensure campaign objectives align with organisational communications strategy.
- Grow social media presence by 10% each year to maintain market share of voice and high visibility and impact.

How we will implement our work

How we will work with children

- Advocate for child and youth participation rights in law, policy and practice and this work will be mainstreamed across all priority areas.
- Ensure that the voice and experience of children and young people are considered in information, policy and campaign outputs by drawing on existing research/consultations and commissioning research or carrying out consultations to capture the voice of children and young people in respect of specific themes where it does not exist.
- Document children and young people's experiences where there is a gap to generate the evidence necessary to feed into law reform, policy and services change.
- Ensure that children and young people involved in Children's Rights Alliance activities are safe and empowered to participate.
- Ensure children and young people can access our information helpline and free legal advice clinics with support.
- Consult with children and young people directly or with the support of Children's Rights Alliance members.
- Involve children and young people in Children's Rights Alliance advocacy, events and internal planning on initiatives.
- Provide a reduced membership fee for children and young people who want to be members of the Children's Rights Alliance.

How we will communicate our work

To Members:

- We will ensure our database contacts are up to date and have segmented lists for our communication outputs.
- All members will be provided with an induction pack which will outline the resources and benefits provided to member organisations.
- Our Strategic Plan and annual work plans will be communicated to members.
- Members will receive relevant and timely communication on our work which includes our weekly Oireachtas Monitor, newsletters, regular email communications on our meetings, events and membership participation opportunities.
- Our website will include a comprehensive membership page with information on events, training and updates on our work. We will launch a new website design and structure to ensure it continues to reflect the work we do and supports our membership engagement strategy.
- Monitoring and evaluation of our Strategic Plan will be communicated to members in an end of year analysis of yearly impacts and achievements.
- Our AGM will remain a key networking and information sharing event for members.
- Members will be surveyed to ensure satisfaction.

To Politicians:

- Oireachtas members will receive key updates through our email marketing system on our campaign work, public events, political briefings and key publication and research launches.
- Through the rollout of our advocacy strategy, we will seek further engagement through face to face or online briefing meetings with political stakeholders on key and emerging issues for children and young people.
- Social media will also continue to play a central role in maintaining our visibility and digital communications with Oireachtas members.

To Public:

- The Alliance will continue to maintain a strong public-facing communications presence with the Chief Executive as key spokesperson for the organisation with support from senior management to allow us to be as responsive and flexible as possible.
- Our social media will also continue to play a central role in engaging with the general public and we will continue to maintain a mailing list sign up page on our website for further public engagement.
- Through our Helpline service, we will respond to public queries, communicate key information and relevant support services, and legal advice when needed through our free legal advice clinics.

Work Plan

This Strategic Plan is designed to systematically inform work planning within the Alliance, through cascading the Strategy into an annual Work Plan including Milestones, Deliverables and Actions, reviewed in terms of progress on a quarterly basis by the staff and Board. In addition, at the midpoint of the Strategy, an interim evaluation of the Plan will be conducted to determine whether, and to what extent, the achievement of individual actions is contributing to the achievement of the overall Objectives and Outcomes stated in the Strategy.