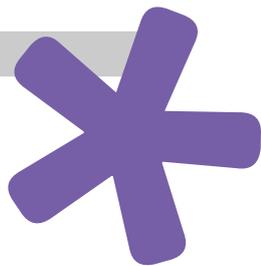


# Annual Report

For the year ending  
31 December 2022



CHILDREN'S  
RIGHTS  

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ALLIANCE

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

## The Children's Rights Alliance Membership 2022

We unite over 140 members working together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child.

- › Accompaniment Support Service for Children (A.S.S.C.)
- › Alcohol Action Ireland
- › Amnesty International Ireland
- › An Cosán
- › Anew
- › Aoibhneas
- › Archways
- › AslAm
- › Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland (AOTI)
- › Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI)
- › ATD Fourth World – Ireland Ltd
- › Atheist Ireland
- › Barnardos
- › Barretstown Camp
- › Bedford Row Family Project
- › BeLonG To Youth Services
- › Bodywhys
- › Catholic Guides of Ireland
- › Child Law Project
- › Childhood Development Initiative
- › Children in Hospital Ireland
- › Children's Books Ireland
- › Children's Grief Centre
- › Clarecare
- › COPE Galway
- › Cork Life Centre
- › Cork Migrant 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
- › Early Learning Initiative (National College of Ireland)
- › Educate Together
- › EPIC
- › Equality for Children
- › Extern Ireland
- › FamiliBase
- › Féach
- › Focus Ireland
- › Foróige
- › Gaelscoileanna Teo
- › Galway Traveller Movement
- › Good Shepherd Cork
- › Grow It Yourself
- › Helium Arts
- › 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
- › iScoil
- › Jack and Jill Children's Foundation
- › Jigsaw
- › Katharine Howard Foundation
- › Kerry Diocesan Youth Service
- › 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 Ireland
- › 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
- › Variety – the Children's Charity of Ireland
- › Women's Aid
- › Youngballymun
- › Young Social Innovators
- › Youth Advocate Programme Ireland (YAP)
- › Youth Work Ireland

# Directors and Other Information

› <b>Chair</b>	Tom Maher
› <b>Treasurer</b>	Orla Cunningham
› <b>Vice Chair</b>	Colm Bryson
› <b>Directors</b>	Tom Maher June Tinsley Orla Cunningham Karen Hannify Moninne Griffith Francis Chance (appointed 30 June 2022) Mary Henderson (appointed 20 June 2022) Susanna Lyons (appointed 2 November 2022) Nita Mishra (resigned 30 June 2022) Catherine Joyce (resigned 30 June 2022)
› <b>Charity Number</b>	CHY 11541
› <b>Company Number</b>	316758
› <b>Charity Registered No.</b>	20031909
› <b>Registered Office</b>	7 Red Cow Lane, Smithfield, Dublin 7
› <b>Company Secretary</b>	Moninne Griffith (appointed 6 July 2021)
› <b>Auditors</b>	CLA Evelyn Partners (Ireland) Limited, Chartered Accountants & Statutory Audit Firm, Paramount Court, Corrig Road, Sandyford Business Park, D18 R9C7
› <b>Bankers</b>	Bank of Ireland, Lower Baggot Street, Dublin 2 Allied Irish Bank, 7/12 Dame Street, Dublin 2
› <b>Solicitors</b>	Shannon & O'Connor Solicitors, 26 Upper Pembroke Street, Dublin 2

# Chairperson's Statement

For the year ended 31 December 2022

In 2022, the Children's Rights Alliance was faced with the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as new challenges in the form of the outbreak of war in Ukraine and one of the most significant cost-of-living crises Ireland has had to grapple with in recent years. In true Alliance form, convening the members together to ensure a collective movement for children, a discourse on the problems and the development of solutions was a key focus throughout the year.

Last year, we held 12 meetings with our members on the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. These have included briefings from UNICEF Ireland, Tusla, and the National Coordinating Response Forum, Eurochild, the UNHCR Ireland and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. In August, we commissioned research by Prof Dympna Divine, on the educational needs of children arriving from Ukraine and bordering countries and through our advocacy work, focused on children and young people's right to education and the need for supports to ensure access to, and registration in schools.

We continued to facilitate many opportunities for members to talk to key decision-makers and government on child protection, welfare, and other emerging issues. Throughout the year, we continued our unique collaborative dialogue with Tusla - the Child and Family Agency, which brings together Alliance members and Bernard Gloster, Chief Executive and senior management of Tusla, to discuss pressing issues for children and young people.

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, and ongoing online safety campaign work offered the platform for young people to have their voices heard and in the Alliance's first hybrid launch of 2022, an incredible panel of young researcher launched Voice, Rights, Action! – a youth-led research report on children's rights education – and sparked a national discussion on lowering the voting age.

In her closing remarks at the launch of Report Card 2022, Judge Catherine McGuinness referred to it as "one of the most successful initiatives of its time" and

the longevity of the series certainly proves this. Report Card 2022 is the fourteenth in the series and examines the Government's progress looking at their commitments to children in the *Programme for Government*. Progress was once again impeded by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Government was awarded its lowest grades in youth mental health and family homelessness with 2 E's. Overall, the Government was awarded a further 5 D's, 4 C's 4 'B's and 1 'A' acknowledging progress in reforming the childcare system, introducing guidelines on reduced timetables and creating a new pathway for undocumented children.

In 2022, the Alliance continued its major public affairs campaign on online safety, #123OnlineSafety, which brought together 18 member organisations to push for key changes to the Government's Online Safety and Media Regulation (OSMR) Bill. This critical piece of legislation has been in the making for over a decade and is a much-needed intervention to keep our children safe online. The campaign was a great success, transforming the narrative and ultimately strengthening the bill which was signed into law in December 2022. All three of the campaign's objectives were reflected in the final legislation including the call for an Online Safety Commissioner and an individual complaints mechanism.

The Alliance continued its 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 Alliance produced a comprehensive alternative report following consultation with members on key issues for children. In September, Tanya Ward and representatives of the Alliance staff and members travelled to Geneva for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's examination of Ireland's record on children and young people. At the end of the year, work began on creating a multimedia version of the alternative report to be launched in advance of the State's appearance in Geneva across a two-day hearing in January 2023. The UN process is a valuable opportunity to place an international spotlight on serious children's rights issues and I would like to extend my gratitude to the members who engaged in this process for their insights and contributions.

The Alliance continued to play a central role shaping the future of education, with an inspiring conference on Alternative Education held in March 2022. Alliance staff were appointed to the Department of Education's Working Group on the Review of Out of School Education Provision which will oversee the recommendations in the Department's review.

The Alliance continues to use its position to push for positive and progressive changes for children and young people. Last year, Tanya Ward continued to advocate for the best interests of children through her role on the Oversight Board on the

roll out of the government's White Paper on Direct Provision and Chair of the National Advisory Council for Children. Both have been instrumental mechanisms to ensure that children's rights are central to reform and emergency responses. In 2022, we also announced an exciting pioneering project funded by the European Commission, in partnership with the Department of Children Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Tusla the Child and Family Agency, Eurochild, UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre the University of Galway, and Foróige. The project will examine the effect of the pandemic measures on activities and services for children and young people through consultations with groups that were disproportionately impacted. The project aims to position Ireland as a case study to document how child participation structures worked during the pandemic and I am excited to see its impact as it progresses over the next two years.

And now I wish to express heartfelt gratitude for the work of a number of people. First, 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 to the impact of the Alliance's work is immense and invaluable. Under the new Strategic Plan, the Alliance is committed to growing a strong, unified movement for children and this work began in 2022 with membership growing from 139 to 144 members, which is the highest number on record.

Following what was a very successful year in funding in 2021, in 2022, the Alliance secured an addition twelve new funders, as well as 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 Alliance staff for facing the new challenges the year brought with great determination and enthusiasm and for their relentless commitment in making Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child.

**Tom Maher**

Chairperson

# Directors' Report

For the year ended 31 December 2022

## 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 for which 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 2022 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 Children's Rights Based Approach**

A children's rights-based approach 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

## Children's Rights Alliance Strategic Plan 2022-2025

In June 2022, the Children's Rights Alliance adopted a new Strategic Plan following a board-led exercise that was supported by Dr Grainne Healy and Dr Kathy Walsh. The Plan has seven priorities outlined below.

- 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.

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

- › A legislative and policy framework that respects and protects the rights of children and young people.
- › Children and young people 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, emphasising 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).**

**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).**

**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).**

**All children and young people can access remedies when their rights are violated (Article 19, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).**

**All children enjoy an adequate standard of living (Article 27, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).**

**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).**

## Monitoring and Evaluation

The Children's Rights Alliance's evaluation framework monitors objectives, outputs and outcomes under the Strategic Plan 2022-2025. 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. With the rollout of a new Strategic Plan, the Alliance will tender for an independent evaluator to carry out an evaluation of progress at the mid-way and final review point of the new plan.

# Activities, Achievements and Performance.

**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 educational reform respects children and young people's rights.

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

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

# Priority 1: Foster a Culture of Children's and Young People's Rights

## Introduction

Children, young people and their parents/guardians/representatives need to be aware of children's rights in order to be able to use them. At the same time, training and capacity building for those involved in the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is critical to promote a culture that respects children's rights. The Children's Rights Alliance Strategic Plan (2022-2025) sets out to make the journey to justice as accessible and child-friendly as possible, aiming to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Increased numbers of children and young people are aware of their rights and know where to go if their rights are violated.
2. 1,500 children and young people are informed about their rights through the Alliance helpline and free legal advice clinics.
3. Children's rights are embedded in the work of professionals working directly with children and young people in key sectors.
4. Professionals in the legal system will better understand and practice child-friendly justice because of their increased capacity to better communicate with children and young people.
5. Participation rights are embedded in the next National Children and Young People's Policy Framework and support for the right to vote for 16 year and 17-year-olds increases.

In 2022, the Alliance identified these annual milestones to support the organisation to meet its goals under the Plan:

- › 500 children and young people are informed about their rights through the Alliance helpline and free legal advice clinics.
- › Increased awareness of Know Your Rights (KYR) and 3000 people have received the KYR guide.

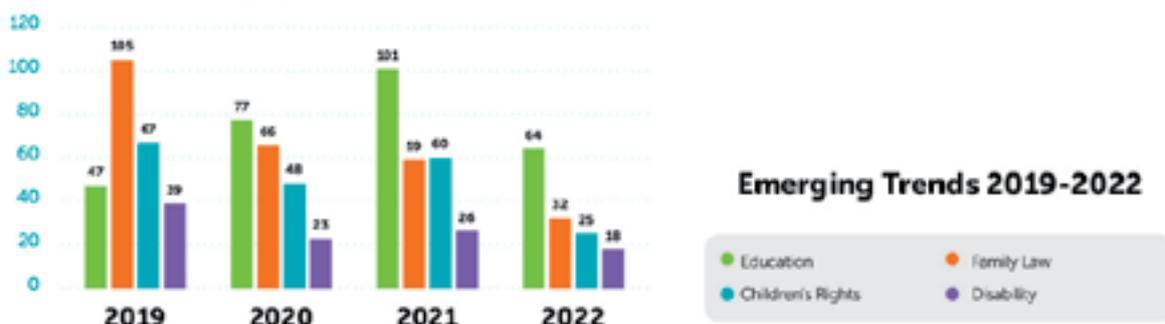
- › KYR guide updated with information on temporary protection and the supports available to those fleeing the crisis in Ukraine.
- › Study published on what children know about their rights and how best to educate them on their rights.

## Children's Rights Alliance Helpline

In 2022, we helped 249 people through a total of 848 contacts. This is a decrease from the 414 cases we saw in 2021. The reduction is on account of reduced capacity as the Alliance had to replace the Legal Information Officer. The number of contacts per case increased, with most people requiring an average of three responses compared with one response in 2021, demonstrating an increase in the complexity of cases.

The highest number of contacts received related to: education (64 cases – 26 per cent) followed by family law (32 cases – 13 per cent), other (31 cases - 13 per cent) children's rights (25 cases – 10 per cent) and immigration (22 cases – 9 per cent). In 2022, 160 parents/guardians sought the support of the Helpline on a broad range of issues including education, health, disability, family law, housing, immigration, early years, care and child protection. Three cases came through to the Helpline from statutory bodies including the Disability Federation of Ireland, Barnardos and Tusla – the Child and Family Agency.

Education has been a dominant Helpline issue for the last three years, and in 2022, it was the most common. Overall, in 2022, the Helpline saw a 31 per cent increase in cases related to education. Throughout the year, the Helpline received several contacts from parents concerned with school closures and their effects on children's educational development, particularly for young primary school children. The most common type of education query was categorised as 'Other', covering a wide range of issues, such as reforming the Leaving Certificate, establishing bullying policies within schools and, school transport issues. The Alliance also received queries from parents engaged in a dispute or complaint with a school on behalf of their child.



## **Spotlight: Section 29 Appeals**

Other parents contacted us as they were struggling to access a primary or secondary school place for their child and wanted to know their options. The Helpline provided these parents with information on the availability of the section 29 appeal procedure and how they can complete the practical steps involved. Some queries related to detention/suspension/expulsion and reduced timetables and again, information was provided in relation to making a complaint to the school and the availability of the section 29 appeals procedure.

### **What is the section 29 appeal?**

**The section 29 appeal is an appeal to the Department of Education which is available where a child has been refused a place at a school due to it being full and/or where a child has been expelled or suspended for more than 20 days.**

Family law was the second most common issue with access and the voice of the child in proceedings being the most prevalent queries. We also received a large number of queries regarding guardianship and custody. Many of those who contacted the Helpline had questions relating to section 32 of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964 which provides for the power of a court to make directions for the purpose of procuring an expert report on any question affecting the welfare of a child or to appoint an expert to determine and convey a child's views. The implementation of this provision in courts has remained a key area of concern and difficulty over the past four years for parents and guardians contacting the Helpline.

## Who is contacting the Helpline?



### Who contacted the Helpline in 2022?



In 2022, 10 Helpline cases involved direct contact from a child or young person. The majority (160 cases) of contacts to the Helpline were from parents and guardians. In addition, 33 cases involved 'Other Adults' which includes foster carers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, family friends, legal professionals, and public representatives. In 2022, the Helpline received 24 queries from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) covering a wide 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.

## Legal Advice Clinics

### What happens at a legal advice clinic?

Our clinics offer free, one-to-one advice with a solicitor from our pro-bono partners, Eversheds Sutherland. Appointments are typically 45 minutes long and involve the individual explaining their problem, the solicitor outlining the options available to them and guidance on potential next steps.

Our clinics are designed to be as accessible as possible. They are held in child-friendly, community spaces across the country. We try to offer a large enough space so that parents can bring their children along. Pre-Covid 19, clinics were often held in hotels and meeting rooms to provide as much anonymity as possible. Since the pandemic, we have held the legal advice clinics online.

In 2022, our free legal advice clinics were facilitated by a new pro bono partner, Eversheds Sutherland. The pro bono partnership was facilitated by PILA (Public Interest Law Alliance), a project of FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres). In 2022, there were 47 referrals to our legal clinics and 28 took place. Concerns relating to disability, education and immigration were the most common issues presented to our legal advice clinics. The Alliance is enormously grateful to Eversheds Sutherland for its continued support and, to Eversheds' partner Eoin MacAodha whose work over the last year has enabled families in need to access legal advice. Given the pandemic restrictions in 2021, it was difficult to meet the annual target, but we have seen increased demand for the legal advice clinics since the beginning of the new partnership. A key learning from the legal advice clinics in 2022 is the benefit of providing an online option thus making legal advice more accessible for families across the country. For people who could not access the internet, we also offered a telephone call appointment. These adjustments helped us achieve our annual milestone for the year.

## Know Your Rights Programme

The Children's Rights Alliance [Know Your Rights Guide](#) is a plain-English guide written for children and young people, parents and people working with them to access information about children's legal rights and entitlements. In 2022, following the invasion of Ukraine, the Alliance updated the Know Your Rights Guide for Ukrainian refugee children as they had a new legal status (temporary protection). With funding support from Tusla - the Child and Family Agency (Tusla), the Know Your Rights Guide was translated into [Ukrainian](#) and [Russian](#). The guide was sent to all stakeholders, reaching over 1,700 contacts including: Tusla, the Children and Young People Services Committees, the Community and Voluntary Pillar, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 120 Family Resource Centres and the Civil Society Ukrainian Forum.

## 'Voice, Rights, Action!' What do children know and how to deliver children's rights education

One of the outcomes under this priority is that increased numbers of children and young people are aware of their rights and know where to go if their rights are violated. As a first step, the Alliance wanted to create a better evidence base to better understand children's knowledge of their own rights, identify gaps in their knowledge and skills, and how these gaps could be addressed. Dr Gabriela Martínez Sainz, School of Education, University College Dublin and Jessica Daminelli, Research and Evaluation Consultant, University College Dublin were commissioned to carry out a participatory study – 'Voice, Rights, Action!' Supported with funding from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, the project was guided by an advisory group, and carried out by a group of youth researchers.

The researchers found that children experiencing the most discrimination are often acutely aware of their rights. Rather, it is the lack of enforcement of children's rights, and other people's attitudes towards them, that is the root of the deeper structural challenges. The recommendations point to the type of information children need about their rights; what children's rights education is needed in Ireland and how to take action when their rights are not respected. The report found that children and young people need to be provided with information on their rights in an engaging way, that can explain and detail the rights they have and, importantly, how to protect them and exercise them within different systems in society from healthcare to justice.

**Voice, Rights, Action!** was launched in University College Dublin on 22 April 2022 by the youth researchers. A key recommendation was the need to extend the right to vote to 16 and 17-year-olds. The Alliance led out with this message in the media. The report was covered by 66 media outlets across two days including [RTE News](#), [Irish Times](#) and [Ireland AM](#). Members of our youth panel were also supported to participate in the media reporting including [RTE News2Day](#), [Opinion 96 FM](#) and [Newstalk FM](#). A snapshot (of 100 tweets) of the online reach on the day of the launch show **#VoiceRightsAction** reached an audience of 96,575. The report also received great political engagement with the recommendation to lower the voting age mentioned in the Seanad and the Oireachtas following the launch.

This work will form the basis from which we will further develop our Know Your Rights Guide and ongoing training with professionals working with children and young people.

## »» Future Focus

In 2023, we will increase our work to embed children's rights in the work of professionals working directly with children and young people by rolling out a training programme with Tusla staff to upskill them on children's legal rights and entitlements and how they can embed this in their everyday work. We will also hold the first Know Your Rights conference focused on upskilling second tier advice givers on children's rights and remedies bodies.

We will also continue our work on ensuring that professionals in the legal system better understand and practice child-friendly justice by working on the implementation of the Family Justice Strategy Actions around the provision of child friendly information to children and young people going through the family courts system.

We will also review the direction of the Helpline and legal advice centres given the difficulties in staffing this area of work and the need to specifically raise funds in the coming years for this work.

## Priority 2: Ensure all Children and Young People's Rights are at the Centre of Law, Policies and Practice

Over the course of the new Strategic Plan, there are several key policy opportunities that will be important mechanisms for delivering change for children and ensuring their rights are at the centre of our laws, policies and services. Over the life of the Strategic Plan, 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 in: poverty, education, child protection/welfare, online safety, disability, Travellers, refugees, and the environment.
- › Ensure that the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 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.

The year 2022 was a challenging year for the Children's Rights Alliance as two key milestones came at the same time: Ireland's review under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the development of a new National Policy Framework for Children and Young People

## Monitoring Developments and Responding to Threats to Children's Rights

The Children's Rights Alliance was invited to make a submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on International Surrogacy, and we appeared before the Committee in May. You can read our opening statement [here](#), where we emphasised the need for the best interests of the child to be central to any proposed system and the need to safeguard a child's identity. Our recommendations were reflected in the Committee's report following consultations however, the narrative on the issue and indeed their report was primarily focused on parents. The legislation did not progress in 2022 so the Alliance will continue to monitor it as it moves through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

## UN Convention on the Rights of Child

In 2023, the Committee on the Rights of the Child will conduct their periodic review of Ireland's implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Review is a key vehicle for the Alliance and its members to raise concerns on the most pressing issues facing children and young people in Ireland. The Children's Rights Alliance led the civil society involvement in the review process by collating a comprehensive written report in response to the State Report (known as the Alternative Report). Compiling the Alternative Report is a critical part of the Alliance's remit and a hugely important part of the review process as it gives us the opportunity to provide the Committee with detailed overview of what life is like for children and young people in Ireland and the persistent issues the Government must address. The consultation included feedback from 16 stakeholders as well as two thematic consultations on Traveller and Roma Children and, Young People with Disabilities. The [Alternative Report](#) was submitted to the UN Committee in August 2022.

The pre-sessional hearing took place in September and the Alliance led a large delegation of civil society and members who took part in the meeting both online and in Geneva. We held three advance meetings at which the delegation presented to the Committee. We began work to design an interactive, multimedia version of the Alternative Report including a series of video interviews capturing the views of young people and their families on some of the key issues detailed in the report and how they impact their lives. This report will be launched ahead of the next sessional hearings where the State will present and answer to the UN Committee in January 2023. The Alliance will travel to Geneva to engage in this constructive dialogue in the new year.

## Children's Rights North and South

In 2022, the need for collaboration and a shared dialogue between organisations representing the interests of children and young people was all the more apparent with the discourse surrounding Brexit and its impact on the rights of children and young people across the island of Ireland, as well as the consequent economic and political disruption it continued to cause.

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 in 2021, with three strands of work:

- 1.** 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.
- 2.** 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.
- 3.** 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.

In 2022, the research was carried out by Professor Helen Stalford and Professor Michael Dougan of the University of Liverpool. Supporting this work, Mo Sykes facilitated consultations with child and youth representatives and youth groups to collate their views on what the underpinning principles should be for Shared Island dialogue and initiatives. These focus groups concluded in Quarter 2 with children and young people ranging in age from seven to 20 taking part. Consultations with stakeholders are scheduled to take place in 2023. Both the academic paper and the children's report were earmarked to be launched in 2022 however, the finalisation of the reports took longer than expected and with both the Alliance and the Children's Law Centre preparing for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child examinations of Ireland and the UK respectively. This project will need to be prioritised going forward.

## Online Safety

We continued our national campaign in 2022 focusing on online safety in the aftermath of Covid-19. The campaign built a broad coalition of 18 Alliance members and focused on three critical asks:

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

The publication of the OSMR Bill was delayed and published on 14 January 2022. While the Bill did not include the campaign's call for an individual complaints mechanism, we warmly welcomed Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin's commitment to protecting the rights of children and young people as she announced her intention to bring her own amendments including the specific naming of an Online Safety Commissioner in the legislation as well as emphasising the importance of the Commissioner's educational remit. The Minister also announced the formation of an expert group that would consider the feasibility of an individual complaints mechanism. The Alliance lobbied for children and young people to be represented in this expert group and welcomed the appointment of Baroness Beebon Kidron who led on this work in the UK. The Alliance made a [submission](#) to the expert group and advocated for the Australian eSafety Commissioner to be among those consulted as part of the process.

In May, we convened a [political panel discussion](#) chaired by former Senator Jillian van Turnhout on how we could ensure the Bill would be fit for purpose, what we needed to see from big tech and online platforms operating in Ireland and what would need to happen next to help create a safer online world for children and young people. On the panel, we were joined by Deputy Peadar Tóibín (Aontú), Senator Malcolm Byrne (Fianna Fáil), Senator Micheál Carrigy (Fine Gael), Senator Pauline O'Reilly (Green Party), Deputy Ivana Bacik (Labour) and Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire (Sinn Féin).

Key advocacy meetings continued for the campaign group as the Bill progressed through the Senate and the Dáil. As part of this work, we developed a [consolidated Bill](#) and produced an [analysis](#) including suggested amendments relating to our key priorities.

Towards the end of 2022, we saw the most significant wins for the campaign and the Alliance's work under this strategic priority. Following a public consultation, in September, the expert group published their report [recommending an individual complaints mechanism](#) and the Minister brought the recommendation forward as an amendment to the Bill. In December, the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act was signed into law in December 2022, with provisions for an Online Safety Commissioner with an educational remit and an individual complaints mechanism – all three of our campaign asks.

## ↓ Key Impact 2022

### Individual Complaints Mechanism

The General Scheme of the Government's Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill originally did not include provisions for an individual complaints mechanism. An individual complaints mechanism ensures that, for children and young people who experience harm online, there is a clear and effective route to a remedy. Without it, a vital safety net is pulled out from under them. It is an effective way of holding platforms accountable to the safety standards we want to see in place for our children and young people who spend so much of their lives online.

Through our campaign, we highlighted the inclusion of the individual complaints mechanism as a red line issue for children's advocates and rights organisations. We highlighted its importance throughout the year with campaign activities, events and in the media.

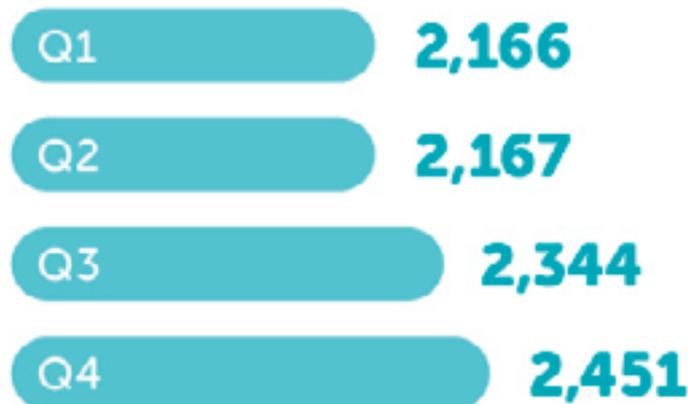
The Alliance welcomed the amendments brought by the Minister including Online Safety Commissioner supported by the full weight of the law to hold big tech and online services to account and the inclusion of an individual complaints mechanism that would ensure that children and young people would no longer have to rely on the platforms alone for redress when they experience harm online. It is rightfully placing the responsibility firmly back on the platforms to improve their own complaints handling processes so they meet a standard of safety we all want for our children and young people.

## Report Card 2022

Our Annual 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. Report Card 2022 analysed Government's progress in 2021, and as with the previous year, the backdrop for the publication remained the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic presented enormous challenges for children and young people – school closures, reduced availability of services and disruptions to everyday social activities. The increased cost of living further compounded the inequalities heightened by the pandemic's impact and framed the analysis of this year's report.

2021 was far from a normal year and, to its credit, the Government made good progress in some areas. The highest grades reflected this, with the Government receiving an 'A' grade for the commencement of the Harassment and Harmful Communications Act. A new commitment to create pathways for long-term undocumented people and their children secured the Government a 'B' grade and there were three 'B-' grades for work to end the Direct Provision system, for reform of the childcare system and for the long-awaited guidelines on reduced timetables.

### Children homeless in Ireland in 2021



At the other end of the spectrum, the government received two 'E' grades– the lowest in Report Card 2022. The first of these was given for the increase in the number of children and their families experiencing homelessness. The fact that there were nearly 300 more children and young people in emergency accommodation at

the end of the 2021 compared to the beginning of that year, is deeply disappointing particularly given the positive actions taken in 2020 resulting in a fall in homeless families.

Meanwhile, another 'E' grade was awarded for the continued practice of admitting children to adult psychiatric units. While there was a slight reduction in 2021 from 27 to 25 young people put on adult wards, even one child in an adult ward is one too many. The fall in grade is also due to the fact that for the first time, the admission of children to adult inpatient facilities will be placed on a statutory footing in forthcoming legislation which appears to contradict the Government's commitment to end the practice. This will be closely monitored by the Alliance in next year's report.

For the third year in a row, we produced a digital version of [Report Card 2022](#) which was launched online on 21 February 2022 with over 230 RSVPs. Speaking at the launch, we were delighted to have Judge Catherine McGuinness, Professor Áine Hyland and Mark Smyth, Past President of the Psychological Society and member of the #123OnlineSafety Campaign.

We also worked with our members iScoil and SpunOut.ie to feature young people's voices for the launch and supporting media and digital output on the issues of online safety and alternative education. The recording is available [here](#).

Media coverage was very positive, securing almost double the media coverage from 2021 with 58 pieces including a television spot on Ireland AM on the topic of online safety, Newstalk Breakfast and [RTE News at One](#). Media coverage also included responses from opposition parties: [Sinn Féin](#) and [Social Democrats](#).



## National Policy Framework for Children and Young People

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* – the National Children's Strategy has underpinned the Government's work delivering its commitments to improve the lives of children and young people since 2014. The successor strategy gives the Alliance and its members the opportunity to influence the direction of travel for the Government and for children and young people going forward and is therefore a core focus for us under this our new Strategic Plan. The Alliance wants to ensure that the successor strategy 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.

In 2022, the Alliance was asked to hold a series of thematic consultation on behalf of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), that would inform the development of the successor strategy to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People*. In total, six consultations took place in 2022 with 151 people taking part. This included a mixture of organisations, individuals, academics, mental health and healthcare professionals, youth workers, family support workers and education professionals. The consultations focused on: briefing on the new Policy from DCEDIY; Data in Children and Youth Services; Lone Parents and Organisations who work with them; consultation with professional/practitioners on mental health and wellbeing. Following the consultative process, the Alliance produced a policy paper outlining the priority areas for the children and young people that should be considered as part of the new strategy. Progress on the next phase of this work was delayed by the Department and will take place in early 2023. The Alliance will continue to work in close partnership with the Department to ensure that those key priorities are reflected in the new strategy, its commitments, and the implementation plan.

## »» Future Focus

In 2023, we will continue to monitor serious violations of children's rights by developing and maintaining a register of issues to inform the work of the Alliance and ensure we engage in reactive work as needed. We will also continue to work with our members to develop our policies on new areas, focusing on the environment in 2023, by consulting with members and establishing a working group to develop what the Alliance role should be and where we can add value.

In January 2023 we will lead a civil society delegation to Geneva for the examination of the State under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We will use this process to advocate for the Committee to make key recommendations in the areas of poverty, education, child protection/welfare including online safety, disability, Travellers, refugees, and the environment. Later in the year, we will work with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to hold the Second Child Summit to focus on how the recommendations of the Committee can be implemented.

Once the Online Safety Commissioner has been appointed in 2023, the #123OnlineSafety campaign will focus on the development of new online safety codes.

## 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

The European Commission's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme issued a call in 2021 for proposals that will contribute to responding to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, by promoting ways to mainstream and embed children's rights in the responses to this and any other emergency situations and contribute to the implementation of the actions put forward by the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. The Children's Rights Alliance working with the UNESCO Family Centre, Foróige, Tusla, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and Eurochild have received funding under this call to run a two-pronged project over the life of the Strategic Plan which will:

- › Examine the effect of pandemic measures on activities and services for children and young people with groups that were disproportionately impacted. This will be implemented by bringing together a Youth Advisory Panel (supported by Foróige), running consultations and working with youth researchers (supported by the UNESCO Family Resource Centre).
- › Identifying best practice in Covid-19 responses in Europe and exploring the role of Child Impact Assessments (CRIAs) and how a children's rights approach can be embedded during times of emergency. We will develop a prototype CRIA and training support aimed at embedding children's rights. This research and tools will be developed in Ireland and then disseminated by Eurochild.

The project aims to achieve the following 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 CRAs.
- › 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.

In 2022, the Project Management Group was formed to oversee the implementation of the project. The Project Management Group includes representatives from the project partners: Foróige, NUI Galway, Eurochild and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency administered through the Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC)] and the associated Partner (DCEDIY). The project's kick off meeting took place in September and a plan was put in place to support the effective delivery of the project.

Following an open call for nominations, the Children and Young People's Advisory Group (CYPAG) was established in October 2022. The CYPAG members range in age from 14 to 18-year-olds and includes young people with a range of lived experiences and identities. The CYPAG advised on the development of the consultation questions and on discussion points with children and young people which were carried out by the University of Galway with young people aged 8 to 16-year-olds who were disproportionately affected by Covid -19 focusing on what activities and services were most affected and the impact of this on their lives and how they perceive decision-making and communication associated with pandemic measures.

## »» Future Focus

In 2023 we will appoint an independent evaluator to assess the project and capture the findings, learnings and recommendations from the initiative. Our partners University of Galway and Foróige will work with the CYPAG on analysing the data from the consultations and carry out collaborative research on how decision-making structures operated at a local and national level during the pandemic. This will be done by holding interviews with decision makers during Covid-19 which will be conducted by University of Galway and a youth research sub-group of the CYPAG supported by Foróige. This will be published as part of a children's report in Quarter Four. Also in 2023, the Alliance will commence the research on best practice in responding to the needs of children during the pandemic in Europe and the role of Child Rights Impact Assessments. Alongside this a prototype CRIA toolkit, a training video will be developed for roll out in 2024.

## Priority 4: Reduce the numbers of children living in poverty and address social exclusion

The Strategic Plan (2022-2025) commits to reducing the numbers of children living in poverty and address social exclusion.

No child should be growing up in poverty and yet, in 2022, the number of children living in poverty increased significantly from the previous year. Over 236,000 children experienced poverty in 2022. To put that in perspective, that is more than the total population of Kilkenny and Waterford combined. Children are most vulnerable to poverty with more children living in consistent poverty in 2022 than any other age group in Ireland.

Poverty pulls children back from opportunities to reach their full potential. Instead of focusing on what resources or supports a child needs to thrive in life, the focus becomes on what is needed to just survive. Poverty affects every aspect of a child's life – their health, wellbeing, anxiety levels and behaviour. Growing up in poverty, children are less likely to go to college and more like to have mental health issues throughout life.

Over the life of the Strategic Plan, the Children's Rights Alliance aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- › The new National Policy Framework on Children and Young People will contain a specific focus on child poverty and 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 is a core principle embedded in the next Policy Framework 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.

In 2022, the Alliance worked on the following annual milestones to help the organisation meet its goals under the Plan:

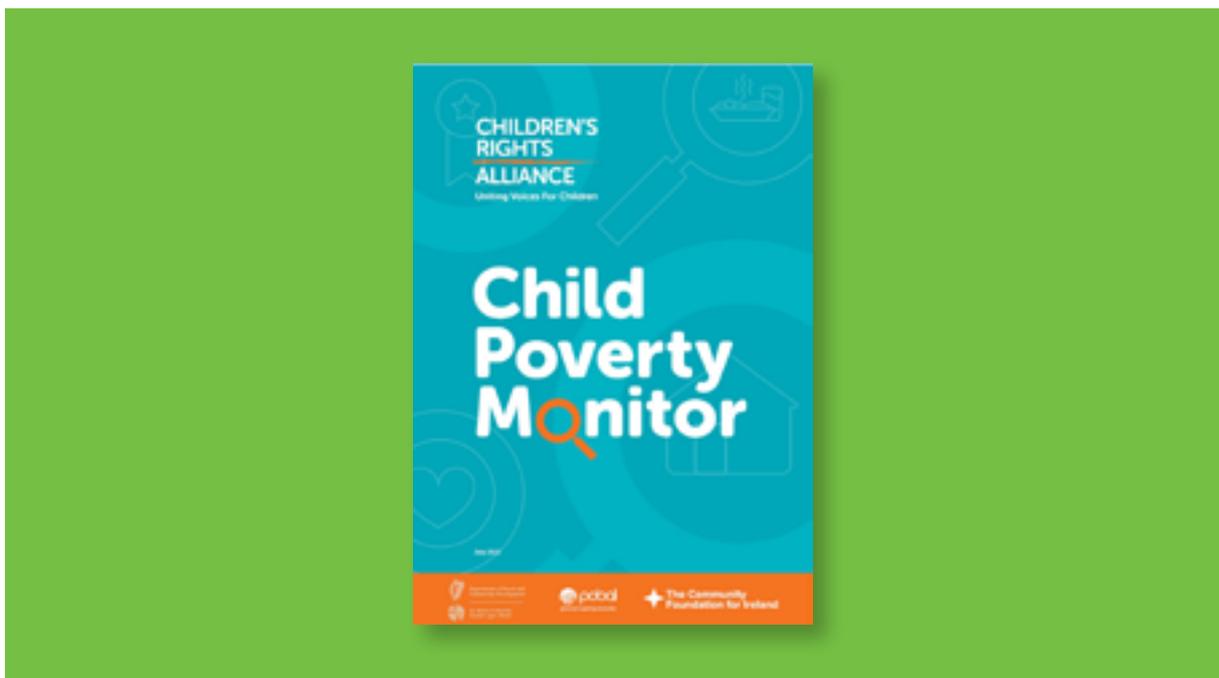
- › Key child poverty indicators established to track over the next three years.
- › Shine a spotlight on the key areas where children and young people continue to experience poverty including in accessing education, healthcare.
- › The Government commences work on the White Paper commitments on children and young people in 2022.
- › International protection payment is increased.
- › Reception policies respond to the needs of vulnerable people (including pregnant people).
- › Blue dot centres are established in communities.
- › Inform a policy response for Government on the educational needs of Ukrainian children.

## National Campaign to End Child Poverty

In 2022, the Alliance launched a new a multi-year campaign to End Child Poverty with a specific focus on early years to break the cycle of poverty early in a child's life, the need for improved public services, housing and education, and the need for targeted supports to reach children most in need. The campaign aims to keep child poverty at the top of the political agenda through new initiatives: the launch of a new research series tracking Government's performance on reducing child poverty and the co-ordination of an End Child Poverty Week to amplify key budget asks to deliver real change for children.

## Child Poverty Monitor

In July 2022 we published the first edition of our Annual **Child Poverty Monitor**. The Monitor tracks Government progress on reducing the number of children trapped in poverty, showcases best practice solutions and spotlights key areas of concern. In launching the Monitor, the Children's Rights Alliance led out with several key asks including: establishing a dedicated child poverty unit in Government; developing a DEIS-style model for early childhood education and care to reach the youngest children most at risk of poverty, expanding universal measures like free school books, hot school meals and access to healthcare and; delivering targeted measures to children and families most impacted by poverty and marginalisation such as an increased Qualified Child Increase and Direct Provision Payment.



The launch of the Monitor secured blanket media coverage (over 100 unique pieces of media coverage) including key national targets: RTE ,Prime Time, Irish Times as well as key local outlets which we targeted with a specific local press release: front page of Cork and alternative media including Rory Hearne's Reboot Republic Podcast and The Group Chat Podcast with Virgin Media News correspondents Gavan Reilly, Richard Chambers and Zara King. Engagement online was also very positive with a snapshot analysis of 100 tweets showing an audience reach of over 833,000.

The high level of media coverage and digital engagement helped to position the Monitor as a launchpad for our pre-budget work. The new evidence it put forward and its robust recommendations caught the attention of opposition party representatives and the report was raised on more than one occasion in the Dáil. We capitalised on the momentum, focusing our lobbying efforts on key stakeholders including Tánaiste Leo Varadkar and Minister for Children, Roderic O Gorman TD on the long-term objective of establishing a child poverty unit. We could also utilise the unique publication in pre-budget for a with Ministers Heather Humphreys, Michael McGrath and Paschal Donohue TD.

## End Child Poverty Week

In September, the Alliance coordinated Ireland's first End Child Poverty Week which placed a focus on the impact of poverty on children and young people in the run up to the budget. The Week compiled a strong programme of high calibre guest speakers that shaped the debate on and offline including senior department officials, high profile social commentators as well as experts and thought leaders for the chosen thematic areas. The opening event set the tone for the week ahead with Fintan O' Toole, columnist with The Irish Times, and Ann McKenzie, the Head of the Scottish Tackle Poverty Unit supporting our call for a dedicated child poverty unit that could drive ambitious change across government departments. Our two in person events focused on two key areas for Budget 2023 – Food Poverty and Early Years. Minister of State Joe O'Brien joined a panel discussion at Crosscare Finglas and pledged his department's commitment to the cross-government working group on food poverty and the real need to explore the case work approach in action at Crosscare. At Buswells, the Early Years panel was a timely reminder of the support behind a more strategic approach to investment in early childhood education and care akin to the DEIS model at primary level to reach children experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation. Online events allowed for further engagement on the themes of Play and Education, broadening the discussion of child poverty from

cost-of-living pressures to young people's participation opportunities, wellbeing and aspirations.

The media coverage throughout the Week and leading to Budget Day is an insight into the impact the campaign was having on the public discourse, securing over 100 media mentions. Online, the digital engagement was one of the highest figures on Alliance campaigns and launches with #EndChildPovertyWeek reaching an audience of over seven million online.

Approximately 200 people attended our five End Child Poverty events. A key challenge in 2022 was the limited time we had to organise the initiative. Much of this was owing to the fact that Government announced the Budget three weeks earlier than expected.

**Day One: National Action**

**Day Two: Food Poverty**

**Day Three: Play and Recreation**

**Day Four: Early Years**

**Day Five: Education**



- › End Child Poverty Week Day 4 Panel (L-R): Julie Ahern, Darragh O' Connor, Gráinne McKenna, Francis Chance, Anne Marie Brooks.



- › Minister of State Joe O'Brien at End Child Poverty Week Day 2 in Crosscare's The Den, Finglas.

## Budget 2023

The national budget is a key touchpoint in the End Child Poverty campaign calendar. The campaign aims to make child poverty a political priority and the budget process provides the Alliance and its members a key opportunity to secure investment in both universal and targeted measures to lift children out of poverty.

On Budget Day, our [response](#) secured media coverage across a number of outlets including Radio Kerry, Newstalk FM, Virgin Media News and RTE News. You can read our analysis of Budget 2023 detailing the difference the budget measures could make to children and young people [here](#).

Budget 2023 was hugely impacted by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, presenting a challenge to the sector's advocacy efforts and calls for longer-term action to combat the systemic issues central to Ireland's child poverty problem. A coordinated call for increases in social welfare focused primarily on core payments for adults, but the need to increase the Qualified Child Increase was overshadowed, with an increase of just €2 for children under and over 12. The preference for investment in universal measures that resonated with the general electorate brought some of the Alliance objectives over the line including

an historic €1 billion in early years and the provision of free schoolbooks for all primary students. However, much needed targeted measures did not follow suit. The Budget failed to deliver effective, targeted measures for children and families experiencing the most acute levels of poverty, such as increasing the child benefit payment for children in direct provision.

## Budget 2023 Impacts

**€1 billion investment in early childhood education and care:** We campaigned for increased investment in early years care and education to break the cycle of poverty early. As Ireland has one of the highest childcare costs in Europe, this investment will make huge inroads in addressing the affordability of early years services for families. However, there was no further movement on the development of the DEIS programme within early years to ensure that the youngest children experiencing the highest levels of poverty have access to wraparound supports at the most critical time in their life.

**Food Poverty:** In Budget 2023, the Government committed to develop a pilot scheme which will utilise a case work approach to tackling food poverty. This speaks to the holistic approach to tackling food poverty that the Alliance and our members Crosscare highlighted during End Child Poverty Week. The budget also included an increase of €20 million for the school meals programme – a priority ask for the Alliance. This will mean more children experiencing disadvantage can access hot school meals which we know to be an effective way to combat food poverty and improve engagement in education.

**Free School Books** announced for all primary school children. Accessing to education is a key thematic focus for the Alliance in both the End Child Poverty Campaign and our work in Education. For many families, the cost of education presents an insurmountable challenge every year. The provision of free school books has long been called for by the Alliance and members as a key way to alleviate the pressure on families and level the playing field for children.

**€45 million to address the impact of Covid-19** on children's education including the continuation of the Summer Programme which helps to mitigate against learning loss.

**Inpatient Fees:** The cost of healthcare can present an enormous barrier to families in poverty when accessing healthcare as and where they need it. Budget 2023 abolished in-patient hospital fees, and the Government re-committed to the expansion of GP cards to 6- and 7-year-olds.

**Targeted Payments:** Extension of the income thresholds for the Working Family Payment was announced as part of Budget 2023 and will ensure more families qualify for this payment. However, the minimal increases seen in other social welfare payments are not enough to keep up with the rise in inflation. The Budget failed to deliver enough effective, targeted payments to reach the children and families most impacted by poverty with just a €2 increase to the Qualified Child Increase for children under and over 12 and no progress made on the commitment to introduce a Direct Provision Payment for children in the direct provision system.

## ↓ Key Impact in 2022

### Child Poverty a National Priority for Government

In December 2022, Leo Varadkar became Taoiseach for the second term of the Programme for Government and made child poverty a key priority for the Government. He also announced the establishment of a new Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit.

The calls for the establishment of a Child Poverty Unit first emerged from child poverty work flowing from the National Advisory Council for Children and Young People which the Alliance was a member. The need was identified from examining the challenges government experienced in addressing poverty as there were few officials who had a sole focus on addressing child poverty. Looking at examples from other countries, including the UK (before the Conservative Party came to power), Scotland and New Zealand, the Council believed that a well-resourced and dedicated unit could play an important role in driving a national anti-poverty agenda.

The Alliance built on the Council's work by advocating for a Child Poverty Unit through its myriad of child poverty actions. The Unit became operational in March 2023 and it has six officials which is a very significant investment by Government. It will help ensure that children and young people are a priority in the most influential department, and the department best places to instigate and sustain cross-governmental work. In order to reverse the tide of child poverty, we need a whole-of-government approach to develop and deliver solutions and the new Unit can be the vehicle to do this. Going forward the Alliance hopes to inform the work of the Unit and advocate for its retention after the next General Election.

## **Spotlight: Food Poverty and Holiday Hunger**

The Alliance sits on the interdepartmental Working Group established in June 2021 by Minister of State Joe O' Brien TD, which is led by the Department of Social Protection on ways to address food poverty. In 2022, we attended three meetings in September, October and November and as part of our engagement with the Working Group, we participated in the evaluation of an external proposal to conduct research on the drivers of food poverty. The need for interdepartmental work on the issue of food poverty has never been more pressing. The need for this support is being felt across the Alliance membership, owing to the aftereffects of Covid-19 and the new forms of poverty families are experiencing during the cost-of-living crisis.

### **Children's Rights Alliance – Holiday Hunger Initiative**

During 2022, the Alliance ran two food provision schemes for members to help meet the increased need in local communities across the country.

### **Fill Your Tank – Enterprise Rent a Car**

With the support of Enterprise – Rent-a-Car, we ran the Fill Your Tank Food Provision Scheme in the summer of 2022. Through this funding, we supported four member organisations across the country: Doras (Limerick), Good Shepard (Cork), Cope Galway and Crosscare (Dublin). The scheme exceeded initial estimates of the families we hoped to support. Across the four projects, 600 children were provided with food, with the scheme supporting 242 families.

*"This project brought the families into regular contact with Doras case workers, giving clients and case workers an opportunity to interact and support the families in a number of other matters." – Hear more about the impact in this interview with RTE's Drivetime with CEO Doras, John Lannon.*

*"It was a lifeline" – Mother*

## Lakeside Fund

With support from the Lakeside Fund, the Alliance ran a food poverty scheme at the end of 2022 to provide funding to our members in the run up to Christmas to address food poverty and holiday hunger. After an initial callout to members, the Alliance received 45 applications for support, with a combined funding ask of almost six times the amount available in the initial fund.

On foot of the demand, we wrote to a number of government ministers to highlight the impact that food poverty is having on children and families in communities across Ireland. The Alliance also sent a copy of this letter to [The Irish Times](#), which was subsequently covered on [RTE Six-One news](#).

Given the demand for support, Lakeside increased their funding and additional support was provided by the Community Foundation for Ireland. The combined fund enabled us to support 10 national schools, 18 Family Resource Centres and 13 other organisations. In total, 3,679 children were provided with food and 1,662 families were supported through the scheme.

*"Not having the worry of what a massive food shop would cost put my mind at ease knowing my boys and I were taken care of"*

The overwhelming demand brought home the sharp impact of the cost of living crisis, particularly on those already living on the breadline. With no school meals or food provision programmes running during holiday periods, it points to the urgent need for Government to assess the level of holiday hunger and best practice approaches to reaching children and young people most in need of support during these times.

*"It is such a persistent issue that we have started breakfast clubs and afterschool cooking clubs but we cannot meet the demand. The food vouchers provided through this funding were a lifeline for our families and helped to address the problem, but it is ongoing"*

## Ending Direct Provision

2021 marked a watershed moment 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 White Paper represents one of the most significant opportunities to replace the institutional-style accommodation. However, progress on implementing the recommendations in the White Paper has been impacted by the outbreak of war in Ukraine and the subsequent, unprecedented number of people fleeing to Ireland and across Europe. In 2022, Ireland welcomed 67,448 people from Ukraine.

The Government had to rely on hotel-type accommodation in the short-term in many areas to accommodate the Ukrainian refugees which is not always suitable for vulnerable persons nor for families over a long period of time. In order to address this crisis, the Alliance advocated for the White Paper's key commitments and particularly those relating to children and young people, to be implemented.

Instrumental to this work is the Alliance's presence on key strategic mechanisms that lead policy development and action in response to the ongoing crisis. Our Chief Executive, Tanya Ward was appointed by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman, T.D. to the Programme Board in July 2021. The Board is to provide guidance, expertise and to monitor progress. Make-up of the Programme Board includes 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. In 2022, the Alliance also sat on a sub-group looking at re-forecasted targets under the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision. The Programme Board met seven times in 2022, with the Alliance also participating and attending four meetings of a housing subcommittee of the Programme Board to examine alternative models to accommodate people seeking protection. The work on the housing subcommittee was particularly impactful in 2022, where new housing and funding models were considered, reviewed and critiqued when necessary, ensuring the best interest of children and young people became a priority.

In December 2022, we convened our members and friends for an important [conference on the implementation of the White Paper to End Direct Provision](#). The conference examined the progress of the children and youth commitments in the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision and engaged stakeholders on the development of those commitments in a changed context. The event took place online with an expert panel including Chair of the XXX, Catherine Day and Minister

for Children, Quality, Disability, Integration, Youth, Roderic O'Gorman. This webinar received high media coverage and was well attended on the day. The recording has reached over 9,000 people. The conference secured media coverage across 36 outlets, including [RTE News](#), [RTE Six One News](#), [Irish Independent](#) and The Irish Times.

Towards the end of 2022, several members and stakeholders contacted the Alliance concerned about the welfare standards and particular child protection issues in the City West reception centre and other adapted facilities, including poor-quality adaptations of offices and other spaces. With the increasing numbers and the shortage of accommodation the providers, the Government increasingly relied upon emergency type accommodation options. While they complied with health and safety obligations in emergencies, they were unsuitable for children and families for any length of time. The sharing of facilities such as bathrooms came up as an issue together with the fact that far right led protests were frightening children, young people and their families. The Alliance wrote to the Minister on these issues and contributed to media coverage calling for urgent action to address this.

## Responding to the needs of children and young people arriving from Ukraine

Responding to the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine was a key focus for the Children's Rights Alliance in 2022. The Alliance sustained close communication with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, as well as Tusla to facilitate consistent information-sharing and to build a coordinated, strategic response across the children's sector. We organised six member briefings and events in 2022 including briefings from UNICEF Ireland, Tusla, the National Coordinating Response Forum, the UNHCR and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

### ↓ **Read our advocacy paper:**

[Initial submission on the reception and integration of Ukrainian children and young people arriving in Ireland](#)

The Government's response to the refugee crisis was extremely welcome. It removed barriers to allow Ukrainian refugees to make their way to Ireland and quickly put a reception system in place. By the end of 2022, nearly 70,000 Ukrainian refugees made their way to Ireland. However, the reliance on hotel-type accommodation coupled with the scale of immigration resulted in concerning reports on the suitability of the accommodation for children, young people, families and vulnerable people. The Alliance did try to influence the Government's reception policies, compiling two policy papers and successfully advocating its position to the Minister for Children, Disability, Integration and Youth to ensure that pregnant women and those who had recently given birth were on the priority list for accommodation. But beyond these successes, we had limited impact on other reception policies.

The Children's Rights Alliance is a member of the Ukraine Civil Society Forum. The Forum, established in March 2022, convenes civil society organisations to discuss issues regarding the State's response to those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. The Forum operates on a cluster model, with the Alliance joint-chairing the children and education cluster. The Forum met twice a week in 2022 and the Alliance held three separate meetings with a smaller cohort of members focused on children and education. On June 24, 2022, the Alliance facilitated a members' roundtable/ children and education cluster meeting on the issues facing children, young people and families who have come to Ireland from Ukraine and the solutions that could potentially address them. A key issue included the low numbers of children not accessing education and early years services. Concerns about accommodation also featured. Following on from this, in July, we held a briefing for our members with Tomás Ó' Ruairc, Assistant Secretary for Data Compliance and Support, Statistics, Public Service Reform Office, Central Policy and Legal Services and International with the Department of Education, with over 30 members and stakeholders attending to share their concerns and ask questions of the direction of policy at the Department of Education.

Building on this work, the Alliance met with the Department of Education in December on the educational needs of Ukrainian children and young people and secured a commitment from the Department to hold a briefing for members with the Regional Education and Language Teams (REALT) for Ukraine oversight team. The focus of the REALTs is to assist families in securing school places, support the needs of these children and, to advise and support the Department of Education in developing new capacity where required. The oversight team also co-ordinates the provision of education services to schools and families.

Given the prevalence of education in the member discussion the Alliance commissioned Prof. Dymphna Devine, Head of UCD (University College Dublin)

School of Education, to conduct research on the educational needs for children in emergency situations, focusing on the education response needed for Ukrainian children and young people coming to Ireland. In October, we arranged a member briefing at which Prof. Devine presented the key findings of the research and held a roundtable discussion on the issues on the ground to inform the recommendations of the research. There were 35 attendees at the briefing.

## » Future Focus

In 2023, the Alliance will scale up its End Child Poverty Campaign work through a newly developed campaign plan and increased team capacity. The campaign calendar will include the touchstones of the 2023 Child Poverty Monitor, Ireland's second End Child Poverty Week as well as a pre-budget campaign. The Alliance will seek to build support for the campaign amongst the wider membership and key stakeholders to maximise impact. There is a key opportunity to push for more ambitious changes across government departments with the new Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit announced by the Taoiseach. This will be a key focus area for the Alliance and the campaign in 2023.

On child refugees, the Alliance will focus on child protection and welfare standards in reception accommodation and seek the introduction of new rules for accommodation providers. The Alliance will also focus on welfare payments for children seeking international protection. Responding on findings from Prof Devine, the Alliance will also seek to influence the Government's education programme for child refugees by seeking the extension of language supports from two to three years and calling for additional funding for youth services.

# Priority 5: Ensure that Educational Reform respects Children and Young People's Rights

The Children's Rights Alliance's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 includes an increased focus on the advancement of education for children in Ireland. Over the lifetime of the Strategic Plan, the Alliance is aiming to achieve the following outcomes:

- › Recommendations in the Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Education (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 lifetime 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.

In 2022, the Alliance focused on the following milestones:

- › CAFE has a strong youth element and key recommendations are secured as part of the process that will reform the education system.
- › Implementation of the review on out of school education ensures that children are provided with a system that meets their needs.
- › The new Early Learning and Care regulations being brought forward contain key children's rights principles.

- › Roadmap of what a public funding model in early years looks like development and support garnered.

## Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Education (CAFE)

The idea of a Citizens' Assembly for Education (CAFE) first emerged at a symposium, 'Towards a More Creative Education System', hosted at the Burren College of Art in September 2018. Subsequently a commitment emerged in the Programme for Government "establish a Citizens Assembly on the Future of Education ensuring that the voices of young people and those being educated are central". In 2022, the Alliance had planned to carry out substantial work on the Citizens' Assembly but this was delayed due to the Government's timeline. However, the Alliance did meet with senior officials in the Department of Education on the citizens assembly and discussed how young people's voice and participation should be supported including the potential to appoint a youth co-chair and a youth leadership group that could set the agenda.

## Out-of-School Education Review Implementation

Almost nine per cent of young people leave school early. This rises to 15.2 per cent of young people in disadvantaged areas. Every year, 4,500 young people drop out of school before completing their Junior Cert. Alternative education (out – of – school education) has developed in many jurisdictions as a response to state-provided , with research showing there are many positive outcomes from alternative education. This includes improvements in literacy and numeracy, the development of students' aspirations and future pathways and increased self-esteem.

In 2019, the Government commissioned a Review of Out-of-School Education Provision focusing on a small number of education centres that operate outside of mainstream education provision and deal with children under 16 who have encountered difficulties staying in education. In 2021 we placed pressure on Government to publish the review and commence work on establishing a new model for alternative and out of school education provision. We continued this work in 2022. An advisory group has been put in place to guide the implementation of the work, with membership comprising Áine Hyland, Gerry MacRuairc, Cormac Forkan, Aisling Redmond, Dr.Cliona Hannon and Niamh Murray.

In 2022 we have placed a heightened focus on the need to expand and fund out-of-school education provision to ensure a child-centred approach to education by providing alternatives that are best suited to the individual child. Many of our members working in alternative education settings provide a safe haven for many children who have often times had negative experiences in mainstream education. For the International Day of Education in January, we ran a social media burst highlighting the positive impact of alternative education on learners. As part of this, an opinion piece by Tanya Ward was published in [thejournal.ie](http://thejournal.ie) that received over 11,000 views. Social media graphics developed secured over 17,000 impressions.

In February, we launched our Annual Report Card (see Priority 2) and placed a specific focus at the launch event, in the media and in our follow up advocacy on the need to publish the Review. Speaking at the launch we were delighted to have Judge Catherine McGuinness, Professor Áine Hyland and Mark Smyth, Past President of the Psychological Society and member of the #123OnlineSafety Campaign.

We also worked with our members, iScoil, to feature young people's voices at both the launch and in our media and digital outputs for our alternative education campaign. The recording of the Report Card launch is available [here](#).

In our Report Card advocacy we met with the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, where we highlighted the need to publish the Review and recognise and fund alternative education centres for children and young people. We held discussions with key stakeholders such as the teachers' unions and Youthreach to generate support for the recognition of alternative education and met with the Assistant Secretary General in the Department of Education, Martina Mannion and her team on the issue.



To continue our campaign's momentum, in March 2022 we held an event to raise awareness of the positive impact of alternative education and the need for a strategy. The event attracted over 100 attendees online and over 300 Facebook views. A panel of young people with experience of alternative education spoke about their positive experiences, and this was chaired by Senator Lynn Ruane. Contributions were made by: Jonathon Doyle, Citywise; Brian Fitzsimons, iScoil; Dr Cormac Forkan, UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway; and Gerard Griffin, Youthreach. The event's social media garnered over 15,000 impressions on Twitter and secured national media coverage (RTÉ Drivetime) and local media coverage (KFM Radio, LMFm, Midwest Radio, Limerick's Live 95, Southwest Radio, Kilkenny Observer, Cork Beo).

With our sustained media pressure over the first months of the year, the [Review of Out of School Education Provision](#) was published by the Department of Education in May 2022. This Review marks the start of much-needed work in the area of education to ensure that alternative education opportunities and adequate supports are put in place for students shut out of mainstream education. The review highlighted the unstructured nature of the provision to date and commits to address this to ensure a consistency of approach and governance standards. The Review makes a welcome commitment to provide a framework of supports and services available to schools for students who are at risk of becoming disengaged from education.

The Alliance was nominated to sit on the group established by the Department of Education to implement the Review, one of only two civil society organisations on the group. The group met five times in 2022 to consider how to implement the Review's recommendations. The Alliance also sits on the referrals' subgroup, which considers the best referral pathways into alternative education settings for children and young people. It met twice in 2022.

## Review of the Early Learning and Care Regulations

In March 2022 the Government launched a public consultation on a review of the Regulations governing Early Learning and Care primarily focusing on the enforcement powers of the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate, the independent statutory regulator for the sector. The regulation of early learning and care (ELC) services is provided for in the Child Care Act 1991 (as amended by the Child and Family Agency Act 2013) and the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016. The Act provides substantial powers to the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate (Tusla EYI) in relation to registration, inspection and enforcement. The Regulations set out the

minimum standards ELC services must meet in order to register with the Tusla EYI and to operate an ELC service.

In 2019, the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs announced that a review of the enforcement powers of the Tusla EYI would be undertaken by the Department and that the Chair of Tusla had been consulted to get the views of the Board on the matter. In particular, the Minister wished to extend Tusla's powers to enable it to close down or suspend services immediately, where it had significant safety or welfare concerns in relation to a service. The review was to also consider how parents can be informed at the earliest possible opportunity of serious concerns about a service being investigated by Tusla EYI.

The Children's Rights Alliance commissioned Dr Aisling Parkes of the School of Law UCC to complete its submission. The Submission focused on the need to ensure the people working with children have the appropriate level of qualification and that children's rights are the driver for regulation. Unfortunately, our submission had limited impact on the regulations.

## Know Your Rights: A Guide to Reduced Timetables

The Government published the Guidelines for Schools on the Use of Reduced School Days in September 2021, following a sustained campaign by the Alliance and its members between 2020 and 2021. They provide clarity to school authorities and parents and guardians on the use of reduced school days and should ensure that this practice is limited to only those circumstances where it is deemed absolutely necessary. Where reduced timetables are used, schools must put the best interests of the child first. The Guidelines came into effect on 1 January 2022. We held a practical information session in March 2022 for members who work with families on the ground. Over 60 members, parents and organisations attended. We also published a [Know Your Rights Guide](#) on the new Guidelines to empower families to be more aware of the rights of children and young people.

## Public Funding Model for Early Years

As part of our work on the Early Childhood Development campaign led by Eurochild, in 2022 we commissioned research on the development of a public model of childcare. Ireland has the second lowest public spending on early childhood education and care in the Organisation on Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD is clear that if Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is not sufficiently subsidised, fewer children from disadvantaged backgrounds participate in it. At present, the State provides subsidies directly to all providers of childcare services in an attempt to reduce the financial cost for parents and carers availing of services at market prices. In December 2021, the Irish Government published a report from an Expert Group charged with developing a new funding model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare. The report provides 25 recommendations on how to progress the development of a new model of funding. However, a major shortcoming in the scope of the work undertaken by this group was that any new funding model must operate within the existing service delivery model (i.e. private provision).

The Alliance will explain and define different models of public provision of early years' education currently available in key European countries and summarise the key features and benefits; review the recommendations from the Expert Group to see how far they deliver upon a public early years' model; and make recommendations to evolve the system to a best in class public early years' service.

## Reform of the SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education)

In July 2022 the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, published the draft curriculum to update the Junior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The new updated curriculum proposed to cover: Understanding myself and others; making healthy choices; relationships and sexuality, and emotional wellbeing. The publication of the draft curriculum is an important milestone when it comes to the social and emotional development of young people in Ireland. Children and young people are growing up in a complex social environment and we have to make sure that they have the right tools to navigate it. We brought our members together to consult on the draft curriculum, which then fed into our submission, which welcomed the new proposed developments, including the focus on consent and also on supporting young people through the curriculum to appreciate sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression that was previously lacking. We also made a number of recommendations to strengthen the approach that was

being proposed including the need to strengthen the focus on gender equality and the links between gender inequality and violence against women and girls as well as widening the topic of consent to apply beyond intimate relationships. The Alliance issued a [press release](#) on the publication and received coverage in [The Irish Examiner](#) as well as local print and radio. Chief Executive Tanya Ward also penned an opinion piece raising our key concerns in [The Irish Times](#).

## »» Future Focus

With the many developments ongoing to reform the education system, in 2023 we will review this priority of the strategic plan to take account of the changing environment we now find ourselves in.

In 2023 we will roll out work with our members to influence the review of the Senior Cycle Reform that has commenced in the Department of Education which could have a huge impact on the way education system is reformed to meet the needs of children and young people. We will also mobilise our members in a campaign to ensure that the Citizen's Assembly on the Future of Education has a strong youth element. Further, we will continue to represent the children and young people on the out of school education review advisory group within the Department of Education to advocate for a system of alternative education to be established that meets the needs of young people who are left behind by mainstream education.

## Priority 6: Build a National Movement for Children's and Young People's Rights

Children's Rights 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. The diversity, expertise and regional representation of our membership is reflected by members who are working in the areas of education, health, mental health, equality, integration, homelessness, access to justice, domestic violence, arts and culture and more.

Our Strategic Plan (2022-2025) places a strong emphasis on membership engagement and participation. Under the Plan, the Alliance will ensure that support among its members is strong in terms of participation, engagement and funding support. The Plan also seeks to grow the membership by 10 per cent by the end of 2025.

In 2022, the Alliance membership included 144 full members (not-for-profit organisations), 57 individuals and two associate members. Our membership of not-for-profit organisations, which is the majority of our membership, has steadily grown, year-on-year, by 25 per cent in the last 5 years. In 2022, 10 new members joined, including eight not for profit organisations, and three organisations left as they had ceased operating.

The Alliance is aiming to grow the membership sustainably as growth can lead to additional demands on the organisation. The Alliance carried out a considerable number of actions to support the members' work around children's rights last year, and realistically, the team will need to be able to grow to support any further work.

## Annual General Meeting (AGM)

- › Thursday 30 June 2022, attended by 30 members online.
- › End Child Poverty Political Panel: Chaired by Fergus Finlay, the panellists included: Deputy Kathleen Funchion (Sinn Féin); Deputy Neasa Hourigan (Green Party); Deputy Paul Murphy (People Before Profit); Senator Fiona O Loughlin (Fianna Fáil); Deputy Aodhán Ó Riordáin (Labour); Senator Mary Seery Kearney (Fine Gael); Deputy Peadar Tóibín (Aontú); Deputy Jennifer Whitmore (Social Democrats). Professor Hugh Frazer, a leading expert on child poverty at European level, delivered a keynote address. Almost 100 members and friends watched this panel discussion online and social media (#EndChildPoverty) trended #1 on Twitter in Ireland during the event, garnering over 20,000 impressions on Twitter.

## Youth Nominations

- › We linked with the [Cork Migrant Centre](#), to support the nomination of Rayaa (15) to the [Eurochild's Children's Council](#) (ECC) which plays an advisory role in relation to Eurochild's key advocacy priorities, governance decisions and their flagship biennial conference. Rayaa also addressed the Eurochild General Assembly on 11 May 2022. Thanks to Rayaa for representing Ireland!

## Membership Organising

In 2022, we brought our members together to work on key campaigns, submissions and policy papers, as listed below.

- › UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: 12 members took part in a Steering Group providing oversight and support to the drafting of the Alliance's civil society report in preparation of Ireland's examination under the UNCRC, scheduled to take place in 2023.
- › Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE): 9 members contributed to an Alliance submission on the SPHE curriculum for the Junior Certificate. This was an important opportunity for members to respond to a pressing need to amend the curriculum which no longer responds to the needs of children and young people (one meeting).

- › National Policy Framework for Children and Young People: The Government is developing a new five year cross-government National Policy Framework – the most important policy for children. The Alliance was asked to hold a series of thematic consultation on behalf of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), that would inform the Policy Framework. Six consultations took place in 2022 with 151 people taking part focusing on: data in children and youth services; lone parents and organisations who work with them; consultation with professional/practitioners on mental health and wellbeing.
- › Traveller children: Nine members participated in an Alliance consultation on how to roll out its work addressing discrimination and human rights issues for Traveller children and young people (one meeting).
- › Children with disabilities: 11 members participated in an Alliance consultation on how to roll out its work addressing discrimination and human rights issues for children and young people with disabilities (one meeting).
- › Unaccompanied minors: At the request of the Irish Refugee Council, the Alliance linked with Tusla to convene a cross-government/NGO group which included the UNHCR and the Jesuit Refugee Service to look at the assessment of unaccompanied minor refugees and their entitlement to Tusla services. The Government had agreed to development guidelines and training and the Alliance and Tusla co-organised two meetings to enable stakeholders to influence the Government's policies.
- › Online Safety: 18 members met and coordinated on the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill (3 meetings).
- › Child Poverty: 17 members provided oversight support to the Alliance's First Child Poverty Monitor and End Child Poverty week (four meetings). See Priority 4 for more details.

## Member Information Briefings

- › Six briefings in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine including updates from the UNHCR, Unicef, Tusla, Department of Education, Eurochild, the Irish Red Cross and the National Coordinating Response Forum (March, April, May, June, July and September, 2022).
- › Briefing with Department of Education on Senior Cycle Reform (March 2022).
- › Briefing on Social Inclusion and Alternative Education (March 2022).

- › An in-person, members networking briefing and meeting on the Strategic Plan with Kevin McCarthy, the Secretary General of the Department of Children, Youth, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (October 2022).

## Membership Communications

- › 30 Oireachtas Monitors providing weekly round-ups of child and youth developments in the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- › Six newsletters with updates from Government, members and stakeholders.

## Membership Funding Opportunities

In 2022, we provided funding to members to address food poverty in the local communities they work in across Ireland. In summer, we ran a Fill Your Tank Funding scheme supported by Enterprise Rent a Car (€20,000) which support four organisations to run summer projects. In December, responding to the increases in the cost of living, we secured a total of €232,946 through the Lakeside Foundation, Community Foundation Ireland and personal donations to provide funding to 28 member organisations. You can read more about the impact of these schemes under Priority 4.

## Member Dialogue with Tusla – Child and Family Agency

The Alliance continued to provide an important dialogue between our members and Tusla – Child and Family Agency. This dialogue provide an opportunity for members to raise important policy issues for children and young people with Tusla leaders, while also offering a platform for Tusla officials to update members on strategic and operational developments. Initiated by the former Tusla CEO, Bernard Gloster, this dialogue has been supported by the Interim CEO, Kate Duggan. In 2022, the Alliance facilitated two engagements with Tusla, zoning in on emerging issues, including sexual exploitation of children and out-of-hours services in residential placements, while exploring ways to bed in prevention and early intervention. The tone of the dialogue is respectful, constructive and aimed at problem solving; it comes up in membership feedback as one of the most important benefits for members. The dialogue is also useful to help uncover important issues for children and young people under Tusla's remit and provides a way for the sector to build a positive relationship with an important national public body for children.

## Tusla Dialogue Impact: Identifying Gaps and Developing Solutions to Support Children and Young People

Through the ongoing dialogue with Tusla, members highlighted the need for additional services for parents of children in the care system. In 2021, Tusla asked the Alliance to do a 'deep-dive' and commissioned the organisation to carry out research. The Alliance was able to provide a research paper with inputs from service providers and individual parents. Tusla then asked us to commission the development of a new service. Barnardos was awarded the contract in June 2022 and it represents a €1.5 million investment over three years. The service will support the advocacy and information needs of parents of children in the care system. Barnardos will pilot the service in Dublin North, Wexford and Waterford in areas with the highest rates of children in care and it will be operational in 2023.

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## Reports, Publications and Submissions in 2022

- › Report Card 2022, February 2022
- › Submission to the Expert Group on Individual Complaints (OSMR Bill), March 2022
- › Opening Statement to the Committee on Gender Equality on the Definition of the Family in the Irish Constitution, March 2022
- › Analysis of the Online Safety and Media Regulation (OSMR) Bill, March 2022
- › Submission to the Expert Group on Individual Complaints Mechanism, March 2022
- › Voice, Rights, Action! Report, April 2022
- › Submission to the Joint Committee on International Surrogacy, May 2022
- › Director's Report 2021, June 2022
- › Helpline Report 2021, June 2022
- › Summary of new Strategic Plan 2022-2025, June 2022
- › Child Poverty Monitor, July 2022
- › Civil Society Alternative Report under the UNCRC, Sept 2022
- › Submission to the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on Primary and Post-Primary Mental Health Supports, Sept 2022
- › Analysis of Budget 2022, Oct 2022
- › Submission on the review of early years inspections, Oct 2022
- › Submission on the Roadmap for Social Inclusion, Oct 2022
- › Submission on Reform of the SPHE Curriculum for Junior Certificate, Oct 2022
- › Submission in Response to the Housing Commission's Consultation on a Referendum on Housing in Ireland, Oct 2022
- › The Rights of Refugee Children in Education: An international review of best practice – Children's Rights Alliance commissioned study undertaken by Professor Dympna Divine
- › Know Your Rights: A Guide to Reduced Timetables
- › Know Your Rights Translated: Ukrainian
- › Know Your Rights Translated: Russian

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

## Structure, Governance and Management

### Governance

The Strategic Plan 2022-2025 commits the charity to full compliance with its obligations under 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. The Plan also obliges the Alliance to: ensure compliance with relevant legal and regulatory requirement and that appropriate internal financial and risk management control are in place (including oversight of the Annual Risk Register and delivering on unqualified audit opinion).

The Children's Rights Alliance was established as a limited company in 1995 and operates in line with its Constitution. It 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. The Board of Directors of the 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.

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.

The Board is supported by a committee structure which deals with specific aspects of the company's business. There were two standing committees in 2022. The Chief Executive was in attendance at all subcommittees except the Remuneration Committee when her own remuneration, terms/conditions and performance review were being discussed. The Governance and Finance Director was present for the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and is Secretary to the Nominations Committee.

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.

## Governance of the Children's Rights Alliance's Board in 2022

### **Board and Committee Changes**

Under the Board Rotation policy, Catherine Joyce and Nita Mishra retired from the Board and Francis Chance (nominated by the Prevention and Early Intervention Network) and Mary Henderson (nominated by the Immigrant Council of Ireland) were elected onto the Board at 2022 AGM.

Susanna Lyons was co-opted onto the Board in September 2022.

### **Board Effectiveness**

Every year the Board completes a self-evaluation. In 2023, it was agreed to provide a more high level workplan and quarterly reports to facilitate review of strategic outputs and objectives.

### **Board Skills Review**

Every year the Board reviews the skills and make-up. Ethnic diversity was identified as an issue and while the Board has a broad range of skills, ICT and fundraising were identified as gaps.

## **Board and Committee Conflicts Interest, and Members Remuneration & Expenses**

All Boards and Committees are non-executive and voluntary (no remuneration). No payments, including expenses, were made to any Board or Committee members during the 2022 financial year. Conflicts of Interest declarations are invited at the start of each meeting agenda and all Directors and Committee members complete an annual written declaration on Conflicts of Interest.

## **Induction, Training and Development**

Board induction training took place with new members in February 2023. 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.

The Board took part in a training on how to develop a Risk Appetite with Carmichael Centre in October 2022.

## **Children's Rights Alliance Board: Membership, Attendance, Tenure, Focus during the year, Priorities**

### **Board Profiles**

#### **Tom Maher - Chair since 2019**

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.

### **Colm Bryson (Vice Chair)**

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.

### **Orla Cunningham (Treasurer)**

Orla is a co-opted board member of the Children's Rights Alliance since March 2020. She currently works as C.O.O. for Trinity College Dublin and worked with Bank of Ireland for 30 years and has held numerous leadership positions and managed multiple projects during her career, which includes 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.

### **Moninne Griffith (Company Secretary)**

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.

### **Francis Chance**

Francis is the current Chairperson of the Prevention and Early Intervention Network. He has over 40 years' experience of working with children and families in Ireland in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. Currently Francis is working as a Consultant

in Children and Family Services, having worked with the Katharine Howard Foundation as Programme Manager for the Nurture Programme: Infant Health and Wellbeing from 2015 to 2020. The Nurture Programme sought to strengthen the HSE's universal supports to parents in pregnancy and early childhood. Previously Francis worked with Barnardos and with the Eastern Health Board / Northern Area Health Board. Francis is a Professional Social Worker, qualifying from the University of Liverpool.

### **Karen Hannify**

Karen was co-opted to the Board on 25 February 2021 and is Director of Marketing, Communications and External Relations with Foróige, an organisation that works with almost 50,000 young people annually. Karen joined Foróige 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 several terms on the Boards of both Léargas and the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), including a term as Vice-President of NYCI. As part of her role, Karen works with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to ensure that children and young people have a voice in decision making on issues that affect their lives. Karen holds a Master's Degree in Public Relations.

### **Mary Henderson**

Mary is a qualified solicitor who holds an LLM from the Irish Centre for Human Rights at NUI Galway. She specialises in immigration law and represents many children and young people in applications to the Department of Justice and has acted as solicitor in judicial review proceedings on behalf of children and young people of a migrant background. Mary has experience of working with teenagers and young people from voluntary work as a youth leader with Voluntary Services International. Mary teaches and examines on the Law Society of Ireland Certificate in immigration law and she also holds a Certificate in Public Legal Education.

### **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 formal recognition for Travellers as a distinct ethnic group in 2017.

## Susanna Lyons

Susanna is the Chief Executive Officer of the Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority (AHBRA). Susanna is responsible for the day-to-day management of the AHBRA, ensuring an effective organisational structure with capacity to deliver a regulatory framework including registration, standards for AHBs, monitoring and assessing of compliance, education and guidance, and the collection and publication of information. Susanna has over 30 years of experience in risk, financial management, strategy and governance. She spent five years with the Regulation Office in the Housing Agency, focusing on the provision of voluntary regulation. Prior to that Susanna spent 25 years working for a number of US multinationals with a focus on finance and risk.

## 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 has worked in the area of social policy for nearly 20 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.



› Photo of members of the Children's Rights Alliance Board (L-R: Orla Cunningham, Colm Bryson, Karen Hannify, Tom Maher, June Tinsley, Susanna Lyons)

## Children's Rights Alliance Board

Member	Attendance	Tenure	Dual Role	Board Priorities
<b>Tom Maher</b>	5/7	7 years	Chair, Remuneration Committee member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› The Board adopted a new Strategic Plan covering 2022-2025 and focused on funding/ resources to deliver the Plan.</li> <li>› The Board also adjusted its strategy on account of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and impact on refugee movements.</li> <li>› The Board also focused on the reopening of the office, health and safety standards during Covid-19 and kept the cost of living and its impact on staff under review.</li> </ul>
<b>Colm Bryson</b>	5/7	5 years	Vice Chair, Remuneration Committee member; Finance, Audit and Risk Committee member	
<b>Orla Cunningham</b>	5/7	3 years	Treasurer, Finance, Audit and Risk Committee member; Remuneration Committee member	
<b>Moninne Griffith</b>	5/7	2 years	Secretary, Governance Committee member	
<b>Francis Chance</b>	6/7	1 year	—	
<b>Karen Hannify</b>	6/7	3 years	—	
<b>Mary Henderson</b>	6/7	1 year	—	
<b>Susanna Lyons</b>	1/1	7 months	FAR Committee member	
<b>Catherine Joyce</b>	0/4	Resigned 30 June 2022	—	
<b>Nita Mishra</b>	1/4	Resigned 30 June 2022	—	
<b>June Tinsley</b>	6/7	6 years	—	

In 2022, the Board covered the following areas of work:

- › Approved proposed changes to the Constitution.
- › Approved the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan including associated measurements and success indicators.
- › Approved the Annual Work Plan and a new reporting template in line with the new Strategic Plan.
- › Reviewed quarterly CEO reports including context analysis and impact analysis.
- › Undertook risk management, risk appetite and risk awareness.
- › A review of Board effectiveness and implementation plan for associated recommendations.
- › Reviewed, approved and reported of the first under the Charities Code.
- › Reviewed the work of the sub-committees.
- › Approved the budget, accounts and oversight of quarterly finances and financial sustainability.
- › Undertook approvals of new members and membership changes.
- › Adopted a new policy on vulnerable adults.
- › Approved the appointment of senior staff.
- › Approved expenditure over €10,000.
- › Approved the nomination of the Chief Executive to stand for election as Vice President of Eurochild.
- › Reviewed content relation to the parents of children in care project, quality management proposals, the website, IT security, the cost of living for the staff, discrimination against LGBTI children, member consultations on disability and Traveller issues.
- › The Alliance's position on surrogacy, the response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, cross-border work, Alliance nominations to the Mental Health Commission and membership of STAD - Coalition to End Direct Provision.
- › Reported to company members at the AGM.

## Finance, Audit and Risk Committee

Member	Attendance	Tenure	Committee Focus 2022
Orla Cunningham	7/7	—	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› 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.</li> <li>› Approved the audit plan, the annual audit and directors' report and audited accounts.</li> <li>› Approved changes to the financial rules governing the organisation.</li> <li>› Approved the annual budget and reviewed the organisation's financial performance quarterly.</li> <li>› Approved the risk register and updates.</li> <li>› Approved the legal compliance reports.</li> </ul>
Colm Bryson	7/7	—	
Susanna Lyons	5/7	—	

## Remuneration Committee

Member	Attendance	Tenure	Committee Focus 2022
Orla Cunningham	3/3	—	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Responsible for advising the Board on the remuneration policies for the Chief Executive/staff and reviews the Chief Executive appraisal.</li> <li>› Kept the cost of living under review and made recommendations to the Board on annual leave and remuneration.</li> <li>› Commissioned an independent remuneration and compensation review by Quality Matters in line with the Benefits and Pay Review 2022.</li> </ul>
Colm Bryson	3/3	—	
Susanna Lyons	3/3	—	

## Nominations Committee (expanded to Governance Committee in 2023)

Member	Attendance	Tenure	Committee Focus 2022
Tom Maher (Chair)	2/2	—	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› 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.</li> <li>› Reviewed the skills audit and made recommendations to the Board.</li> <li>› Prepared for elections and co-options.</li> </ul>
Moninne Griffith (Company Secretary)	1/2	—	

# Financial Review

The financial outcome for 2022 is set out in the statement of financial activities.

<b>Results</b>	<b>31 Dec 2022</b>	<b>31 Dec 2021</b>
	€	€
<b>Net Deficit for the financial year</b>	5,828	54,166
<b>Incoming Resources</b>	1,050,867	768,553
<b>Resources Expended</b>	1,056,695	822,719

The net deficit for 2022 of €5,828 is split between an unrestricted surplus of €20,003 and a restricted deficit of €25,831.

The unrestricted net surplus related to additional income received and reduced unrestricted expenditure, which was not anticipated. The Alliance received additional income from membership fees and the reduction in general overheads over the year has resulted in the surplus.

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 2021 and the associated expenditure for the funding happened in 2022.

## Statement of Financial Activities

	Unrestricted fund 2022 - €	Restricted fund 2022- €	Total Funds 2022 - €	Total Funds 2021 - €
<b>Income and Endowments from:</b>				
Donations and fundraising income	75,900	26,000	101,900	82,988
Charitable activities	-	372,799	372,799	328,956
Other funding	200	528,887	529,087	314,281
Investment income	47,081	-	47,081	42,328
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>123,181</b>	<b>927,686</b>	<b>1,050,867</b>	<b>768,553</b>
<b>Expenditure on:</b>				
Raising Funds	-	47,486	47,486	47,750
Charitable Activities	103,178	906,031	1,009,209	774,969
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>103,178</b>	<b>953,517</b>	<b>1,056,695</b>	<b>822,719</b>
<b>Net Movement in Funds</b>	<b>20,003</b>	<b>(25,831)</b>	<b>(5,828)</b>	<b>(54,166)</b>
<b>Reconciliation of Funds</b>				
Total Funds brought forward	743,003	213,663	956,666	1,010,832
Net movement in funds	20,003	(25,831)	(5,828)	(54,166)
<b>Total Funds Carried Forward</b>	<b>763,006</b>	<b>187,832</b>	<b>950,838</b>	<b>956,666</b>

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 22 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 2022, 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.



In 2022, the Children's Rights Alliance received a total of €927,686 (2021: €622,937) in restricted income, which represents 88% of the total income. The increase in restricted income is due to additional philanthropic funding received in 2022 for the Food Provision Scheme (€207,946), Infant Development fund (€50,000), Irish Youth Foundation (€10,000) and Fidelis Insurance (€40,000).

There were two principal sources of restricted income during 2022: Government grants (35%) and philanthropic sources (50%).



### 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, Tusla and the European Commission - CERV (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. The breakdown of the philanthropic funding relates to the Community Foundation of Ireland (€235,004); Lakeside (€161,946); the KHF (€30,000); Rethink Ireland (€16,000); the Irish Youth Foundation (€10,000); Eurochild (€9,000) and the Ireland Funds (€6,937). An additional sum was raised from corporate sources including Fidelis Insurance (€40,000) and Enterprise Holdings (€30,000).

In 2022, the Children's Rights Alliance received a total of €123,181 (2021: €145,616) in unrestricted income which represents 11% of the total income. There are two principal sources of unrestricted income in the year 2022: Donations and legacies (62%) and Income from Investments (38%).

## Donations and Legacies

Donations and Legacies included membership income (€75,600) and Donations in kind (€300). Membership income has increased by 5% from 2021; this is due to an increase in uptake of membership for the Alliance in 2022. Donations in Kind has reduced by 97% from 2021.

## Income from Investments

Income from Investments relates to rental income and management fees (€47,081); both increased by 10% in 2022, with full rental occupancy in 2022.

## Expenditure



In 2022, total expenditure was €1,056,695 (2021: €822,719). The charitable activities expenditure in 2021 of €1,009,209 (2021: €774,699) increased by 23% 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 is staff costs of €522,561 in 2022 (2021: €518,208) which represent 50% (2021: 61%) of the overall expenditure for the Alliance. The increase in the staff costs of 1% in the year 2022 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 €950,838 of which €187,832 were restricted and €763,006 were unrestricted. Given that the overall expenditure in the year 2022 amounts to €1,056,695, this meant that the Alliance exceeded the six-month policy reserve by €234,658. 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% of the excess reserve in 2023.

## Statement of Financial Position

	2022 €	2021 €
<b>Fixed Asset</b>		
Tangible Assets	298,149	290,705
Investments	50,000	50,000
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Debtors	67,943	236,482
Cash at bank and in hand	1,037,268	885,757
	<b>1,453,360</b>	<b>1,462,944</b>
Creditors within 1 year	447,258	346,270
<b>Total Assets less Current liabilities</b>	<b>1,006,102</b>	<b>1,116,674</b>
Creditors after 1 year	55,264	160,008
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>950,838</b>	<b>956,666</b>
<b>Charity funds</b>		
Restricted Funds	187,832	213,663
Unrestricted Funds	763,006	743,003
<b>TOTAL FUNDS</b>	<b>956,666</b>	<b>956,666</b>

There are signed multi -annual contracts with funders to the value of €877,313 which are not included in the statement of financial position at 31 December 2022. This splits into Philanthropic Funding of €645,004 and Statutory Funding of €227,309. The period of the multi- annual contract is for the period 2022 to 2025.

### Policy for Investments

The Alliance's policy for investments is to retain its cash reserve in low-risk vehicles. During the year 2022, 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 2023.

### Apportionment

In 2022, 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 Risks 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.

The Alliance mitigates its core financial and operational risks as follows:

- › Continually monitors the level of activity, prepares and monitors its budgets, targets and projections;
- › Internal/operational control risks are minimised by the implementation of financial policies and procedures which control the authorisation of all transactions and projects;
- › Puts an agreement in place with an IT provider to put an IT security system in place that mitigates against ICT risks;
- › Has a policy of maintaining reserves of six months' operational expenditure, which allows the company to meet its statutory obligations. The company has developed a strategic plan which will allow for diversification of future funding and activities in order to minimise liquidity risk;
- › Closely monitors emerging changes to regulations and legislation on an ongoing basis;
- › Ensures that staff and board members of the organisation have the required training to maintain appropriate governance levels;
- › Has minimal currency risk and credit risk. The company has no interest rate risk due to the fact that the company has no borrowings;
- › Continues to adopt best practices in order to mitigate against reputational risk; and
- › Ensures that there are sufficient staffing levels to avoid staff burnout.

The Alliance has carried out a risk assessment on the internal environment and has put mitigating factors in place, restrictions on working in the office that respect social distancing. The Alliance has developed a risk register for managing risk within the organisation which is used by the Board to manage risk and to guide the Executive.

In 2022, the Alliance's risks related to any potential significant reduction in core funding from a key funder and its impact on business continuance. The organisation carries reserves to deal with this. Another challenge is not having sufficient staff to deliver core activities particularly when dealing with sickness due to Covid or another form of leave. This is a particular risk where staff are connected to smaller funded projects. Again, the organisation's reserves are there to support these eventualities. In terms of reputational risks, key issues arising relate to the significant expectation on the Alliance to deliver in a whole range of areas (compounded by the broad scope) and having sufficient capacity. Another reputational risk relates to accuracy in policy/research outputs and quality management. The Alliance has rules in place on peer review to safeguard against these risks. Finally, a human risk relates to the Alliance's ability to maintain quality in the delivery of its helpline and legal advice clinics. Currently it has a legally qualified staff member overseeing the helpline and its pro bono solicitor is legally indemnified and regulated by the Law Society of Ireland.

## Decision-Making

The Board has reserved key areas 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; 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; remuneration; membership matters; endorsement of external campaigns or initiatives and litigation. The Board delegates authority on certain duties and responsibilities like signing 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 and managing 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/Governance and Finance and Director and submitted to the Board one week in advance of meetings. 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.

## Legal Compliance

The Strategic Plan makes a commitment that the Children's Rights Alliance Board and management shall comply with relevant legal and regulatory requirements and that appropriate internal financial and risk management controls are in place. In 2022, the Alliance submitted its 2021 Annual Report to the Charities Regulator, its reports under the Lobbying Register and returns for the Companies Registration Officer on time. In 2022, the organisation put emphasis on implementing its data protection policy, particularly on managing external relationships with data processors. The organisation implemented recommendations from a Health and Safety audit in response to managing Covid19 in the workplace and training was organised for staff on health and safety during Covid19/working from home, the data protection and ergonomics.

## Management and Staffing

The Strategic Plan sets out to 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.

The Children's Rights Alliance continued to retain a dedicated and high performing team in 2022 and developed a new staffing structure in line with the new Strategic Plan. By the end of the year the team included: a Chief Executive; Legal, Policy and Services Director; Governance and Finance Director; Campaigns and Communications Director; EU Projects and Know Your Rights Manager (from

September 2022); Legal and Policy Manager; Senior Research and Policy Officer; Legal Information Officer (from November 2022); Grants and Membership Development Officer; and Finance Officer (from December 2022).

Throughout 2022, the Alliance introduced a hybrid working policy following a consultation with the team and supported staff to balance work from home and a return to in-person/office working. The organisation also continued to rollout a developmental plan to replace interiors and improve the working environment for the team. In 2022, the Alliance also commissioned Quality Matters to review pay and compensation to ensure its competitiveness, with the Board going on to increase benefits to the team.

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 - when completed - reported as completed annually to the Board.

## Communications

The new Strategic Plan commits the Children's Rights Alliance to being the leading voice on pressing issues for children and young people; a credible source for information on children's rights; and that it is transparent, and effectively communicating its work.

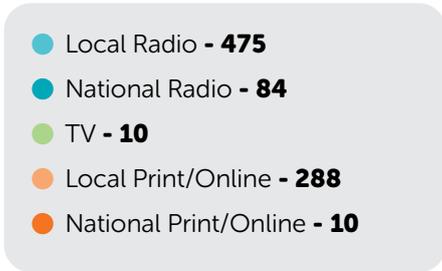
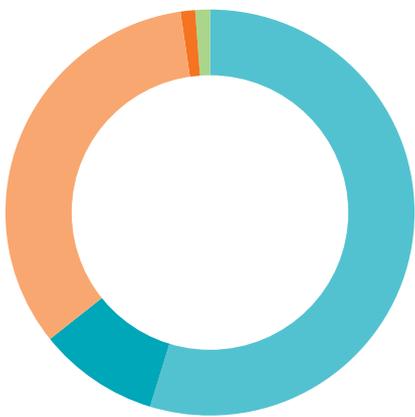
The Alliance issued 25 press releases in 2022. In 2021, a new provider was contracted for media monitoring, and this resulted in a marked difference in how the Alliance tracks and analyses its presence in the media. We noted that, in previous years, our media mentions (272 in 2020, 205 in 2019 and 265 in 2018) had not accurately captured 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.

In analysing our media impact, the Alliance focuses on unique or individual mentions by media outlets. The figures below do not include repeat mentions or news

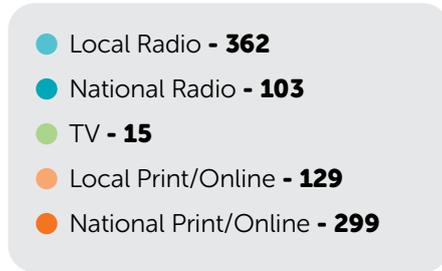
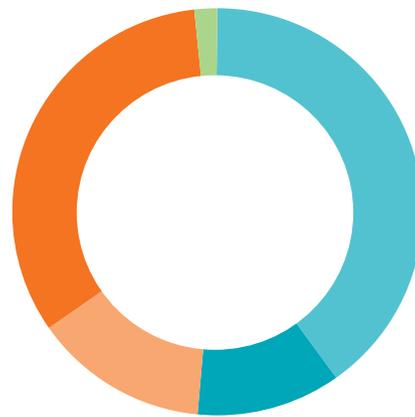
bulletins syndicates. In 2022, unique media mentions totalled 908, an increase on the 847 mentions in 2021.

There was greater balance in our media presence in 2022, when compared to 2021. In 2021, Radio accounted for two thirds of all media coverage for the alliance (66 per cent), with Local Radio reach particularly high (85 per cent of broadcast coverage). In 2022, coverage was more balanced between National and Local outlets. However, it is worth noting that the reach on Local Radio was almost three times that of National Radio but in Newspaper Print / Online, this was the opposite, with national coverage outweighing the local.

### Media Coverage 2021



### Media Coverage 2022



One of the core strategic objectives under communications is securing media coverage for other key priorities and the issues they represent. In 2022, it was our End Child Poverty campaign that received the lion's share of coverage, accounting for almost a third of our annual coverage. The analysis of annual media coverage in recent years has highlighted the changing nature of the Alliance's media presence. Previously, the Report Card launch was the flagship event of the year, accounting for the biggest portion of media coverage. However, in recent years, it has been positive to note that there is a steady and sustained share of voice on other priority issues, as seen below.

## 👆 **Ukraine & Refugee Issues** **97 media items**

## 👆 **Education issues** **110 media items**

## 👆 **Voice, Rights Action! launch** **71 media items**

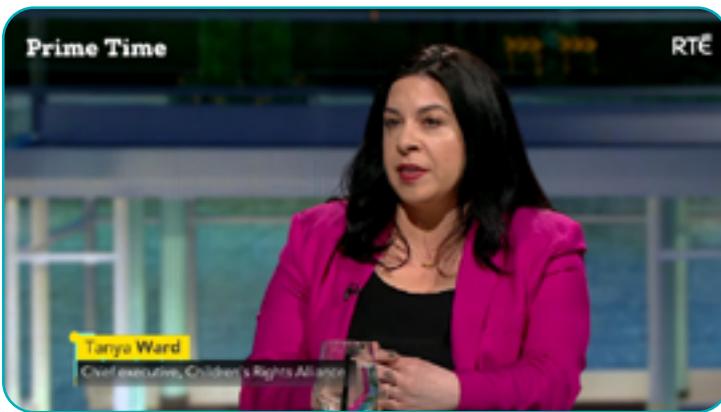


› Coverage of our youth-led research report Voice, Rights, Action! in April 2022.

The organisation's profile has also benefited from the increase in high-profile media interviews. In 2022, the Alliance secured fifteen TV interviews, three times the amount secured in 2021. Tanya Ward, Chief Executive, was also a recurring panellist on Newstalk's On The Record with Gavan Reilly, that boasts an audience of almost 100,000 listeners.



- › Julie Ahern, Legal, Policy and Services Director joins Ireland AM for the launch of Voice, Rights, Action! research report (April 2022).



- › Tanya Ward, Chief Executive speaks to RTÉ's Prime Time regarding child protection concerns for Ukrainian refugees (May, 2022).

In terms of social media, the Alliance attracted 822 new followers on Twitter, an increase of 4 per cent, with no significant change in its following on Facebook. The outlier in this was LinkedIn; the Alliance actively sought to increase its presence on LinkedIn, because of the nature of the public's engagement with it. This has paid dividends. Our following increased from 2,729 to 4,598 but, most importantly, engagement has grown significantly on issue-based posts and are now as high as other platforms.

### Follow our communication channels:



**Twitter**  
[@ChildRightsIRL](https://twitter.com/ChildRightsIRL)



**Facebook**  
[Children's Rights Alliance](https://www.facebook.com/ChildrensRightsAlliance)



**Linked In**  
[Children's Rights Alliance](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ChildrensRightsAlliance)



**Website**  
[www.childrensrights.ie](http://www.childrensrights.ie)

# Thank You!

A big thank you to our 145+ 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: The Community Foundation for Ireland; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department of Rural and Community Development; The European Commission, Enterprise Holdings; Eurochild; European Commission; Fidelis Foundation; Katharine Howard Foundation; Lakeside Fund, Rethink Ireland; Pobal; The Ireland Funds, The Irish Youth Foundation; Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

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# CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ALLIANCE

Uniting Voices for Children

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Founded in 1995, the Children's Rights Alliance unites over 145 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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