

Children's Rights Now

CHILDREN'S
RIGHTS
ALLIANCE
Uniting Voices For Children

NEWSLETTER ISSUE 1: 2024



Dear Members and Alliance friends,

Welcome to our 2024 Children's Rights Now! Newsletter. This newsletter contains more details about our work across all key priorities in our Strategic Plan and the important role our members play in building and strengthening this movement for children and young people.

Over the past few months, the Children's Rights Alliance, alongside our members, have been fully engaged in building the momentum behind our issue-based campaigns and member dialogues to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people. I am delighted to bring you the news of our impacts.

The start of the year is always a busy one for the Children's Rights Alliance with the launch of our flagship publication, **Report Card**. The online launch helped broaden the audience for the report and increased political engagement resulted in sustained media coverage on critical issues for children and young people, including mental health and

housing. This was quickly followed by the launch of the first of many resources being produced in our **Building Children's Futures project** – an EU-funded project that seeks to spotlight the importance of child rights impact assessments in the development and delivery of laws, policies and services for children. You can read more about the project, our partners and the resources below. In April, we also launched **Listen Up! Children's Voices on the Future** – a consultation with children and young people on Children's Rights on the Island of Ireland in partnership with the Children's Law Centre. The research report provided children and young people with the opportunity to reflect on the impact Brexit has had on their lives, their understanding, experiences, and expectations with regards to their rights as children, and identifiable actions to guarantee their voices are heard.

Over the summer months, our End Child Poverty campaign activity accelerated. Alongside 12 member organisations, we held a **Buswells Drop-In Day in April** to meet and brief Oireachtas members on the issue of Holiday Hunger. In May, we held a high-profile launch of our **Child Poverty Monitor** supported by Community Foundation Ireland, followed shortly after by the inaugural Child Poverty and Wellbeing Summit led by the Programme Office in the Department of Taoiseach. We ran a case clinic at the Government's Summit focused on Ending Holiday Hunger and will continue to engage with key officials and Oireachtas members on the issue in the lead up the summer months.

As part of the next phase of our online safety campaign work, we issued a response to RTE's Primetime Investigates on TikTok and ahead of the Local and European Elections, we engaged with Dublin European candidates to ensure that children and young people's safety and wellbeing online was a priority if elected. We convened an in-person **EU Hustings** event focused on online safety, with six main party candidates joining a panel discussion that was shaped by questions put forward by young people representing our member organisations.

It has been a very exciting few months at the Alliance with several member briefings and events organised. We are also fortunate enough to be expanding our team, with a new Senior Education Officer, Operations Lead and Online Safety Legal Officer joining the team since the beginning of the year.

Thank you, as always, for your continued and greatly valued support.



Tanya Ward
Chief Executive



1. Fostering Children's Rights

Children's Rights Alliance Helpline

Children's Rights
Alliance Helpline





Our Helpline and Legal Advice Clinics provide legal information specifically on children's rights and **free one to one legal advice**. You can email the helpline team anytime at help@childrensrights.ie

Know Your Rights Training 2024

In April, we rolled out a training programme to upskill second-tier advice givers on children's right and embedding a child-rights approach to their work, in partnership with Tusla – the Child and Family Agency. In total, 176 professionals participated in the training. For more information about training opportunities, please contact members@childrensrights.ie

You can read our Know Your Rights Guide [here](#).
The guides are also available in [Ukrainian](#) and [Russian](#).

2. Children's Rights in Law, Policies and Practice

Report Card 2024

Our annual Report Card series remains a key resource in ensuring that Government keeps its promises to children and young people. [Report Card 2024](#) is the fourth analysis under the *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*, tracking the Government's commitments to children in health, housing, education, early years, poverty and equality. An independent panel of experts graded the Government's performance and this year that included two 'A' grades in relation to Free School Books and Online Safety, and an 'E' grade on youth mental health for the third consecutive year. Read our press release [here](#). At this year's launch we were delighted to be joined by Bernard Joyce (Director, Irish Traveller Movement), John Lannon (CEO of Doras) and Noeline Blackwell (Online Safety Coordinator, Children's Rights Alliance).



You can watch the full launch event [here](#).
Read or download Report Card 2024 [here](#).

Shared Island Report

In April, we launched Listen Up! Children's Voices on the Future - Consultation with children and young people on Children's Rights on the Island of Ireland: Responding

to the Uncertainty of Brexit and Beyond. The research project, funded by Community Foundation Ireland and Social Change Initiative, provided children and young people with the opportunity to reflect on the impact Brexit has had on their lives, their understanding, experiences, and expectations with regards to their rights as children, and identifiable actions to guarantee their voices are heard. We also launched a detailed legal analysis on The Post-Brexit Legal Framework carried out by Professor Helen Stalford and Professor Michael Dougan from the University of Liverpool highlighting the implications of the Framework for Children's Rights on the Island of Ireland.



Read the full reports [here](#).
Watch the launch recording [here](#).

Keeping Children and Young People Safe Online

The new year kickstarted the next phase of our online safety campaign, in partnership with Community Foundation Ireland and the Oak Foundation. In January, we convened a member meeting and consulted with 30 of our member organisations to inform a submission to Coimisiún na Meán on the draft Online Safety Code. You can read our submission [here](#). In February, the Alliance issued a specific call to Government to prioritise children and young people's safety online when developing the new Online Safety Code at the launch of Report Card. You can watch the panel discussion here and read our press release [here](#).

In The Media:

[Listen](#): Noeline Blackwell on RTE's Drivetime

[Read](#): Noeline Blackwell on the need to protect children and young people online

Watch: Noeline Blackwell on [Al Jazeera](#) Media Online Safety Panel

Making Youth Online Safety a Priority at European Level

Ireland has a critical role in the global movement to regulate online services and platforms. Ahead of the local and European elections on 7 June, we wanted to heighten attention on the importance of children and young people's safety online and the need for our EU representatives to prioritise children's rights in the online world if elected to the EU Parliament. We convened an EU Hustings focused on online safety and issues of concern to our members including cyberbullying, exposure to child sexual abuse material and grooming, dangerous recommender systems and algorithms leading to harmful content and harvesting of children's data. Young people representing our member organisations Jigsaw, Citywise, Spunout and Scouting Ireland put their questions to a panel of Dublin MEP candidates including Lynn Boylan (Sinn Féin), Ciarán Cuffe (Green Party), Clare Daly (I4C), Regina Doherty (Fine Gael), Sinead Gibney (Social Democrats) Aodhán Ó Ríordáin (Labour Party) and Bríd Smith (People Before Profit). The event was chaired by Ian Power, CEO of Spunout, with closing remarks from Noeline Blackwell, our Online Safety Coordinator.

[Read](#): Press Release with our call to action

[Listen](#): Ian Power and Noeline Blackwell interview

Youth Safety Online and Regulation

Following our AGM on 26 June, we held an on-person event focused on the importance of regulation of the online world and the need to prioritise children and young people's safety in the digital space. Prof Sonia Livingstone (LSE and 5Rights Foundation), one of the thought-leaders in children's digital rights, delivered a keynote address followed by a panel discussion including inputs from Alex Cooney (CyberSafeKids), Prof Debbie Ging (Dublin City University), Fiona Jennings (ISPCC). The event was chaired by Noeline Blackwell (Children's Rights Alliance) and covered a range of topics from children's access to harmful and violent content, the need for better digital and media literacy education, digital marketing and the need for a robust Online Safety Code. You can watch the recording of the event [here](#). If you have questions about our work in this space, please contact [Noeline](#).

39th and 40th Referendums

Following a children's rights analysis of the wording of the 39th and 40th Referendums, consulting widely with our members and legal experts, the Children's Rights Alliance called for a Yes Yes Vote in the two referendums held on 8 March. We organised a briefing with Prof. Conor O' Mahony on the proposed changes, the recording of which is available [here](#). You can read our position paper [here](#) for our detailed analysis.

3. Understanding the Impact of Covid-19

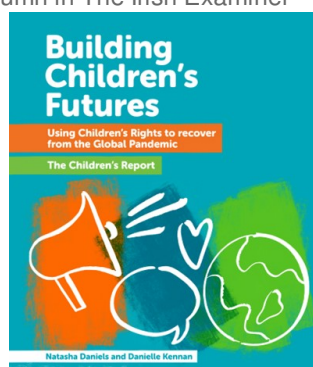
Building Children's Futures - Using Children's Rights to Recover from the Global Pandemic

The 'Building Children's Futures' project, funded by the European Commission, examines the effect of pandemic public health measures on services for children and young people, with a particular focus on groups of children who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The project is led by the Children's Rights Alliance, with partners the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Tusla, Ireland's Child and Family Agency and Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC), Eurochild, UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre University of Galway and Foróige. Following interviews with high-profile decision-makers, co-conducted by University of Galway researchers and the project's Child and Young Person Advisory Group (CYPAG), the Children's Report was launched in February. The launch was chaired by Karen Hannify, Head of Communications and Marketing, Foróige and included a presentation of the research and a Q&A panel discussion with members of the CYPAG.

In The Media:

[Read](#): Coverage in The Irish Times

[Read](#): Dr Colm Noctor's column in The Irish Examiner





Watch the launch discussion [here](#).

Read The Children's Report [here](#).

Read our press release [here](#).

>>Future Focus

In June, working with Tusla Children and Young People's Services Committees we rolled out training sessions on children's rights and how to use Child Rights Impact Assessments. Over 100 people in local areas all over Ireland were trained. Eurochild, together with [Building Children's Futures](#) project partners held an international, hybrid conference in July with children and youth representatives across Europe towards in Malta, as part of our EU-funded [Building Children's Futures](#) project. The conference brought together children, national governments, the European Union, civil society, professionals, all to discuss the importance of listening and including children meaningfully in decision-making through the use of child rights impact assessments.

4. Poverty and Social Exclusion



[Tackling Holiday Hunger](#)

In April, we brought together 12 of our members involved in our Food Provision Initiative, to facilitate a Drop In Day for TDs and Senators on the issue of Holiday Hunger. It was a great opportunity to brief politicians and decision makers on the prevalence of food poverty, the impact it has on children, young people and their families and importantly, to shed a light on the issue of 'holiday hunger' which sees families being put under acute pressure when schools are closed. We developed a [policy paper](#) to support our advocacy on the day and our engagement since.

We returned to the issue of Holiday Hunger on Wednesday 3 July, convening a panel of expert speakers from community groups, family support and youth services across the country to speak to the prevalence and impact of holiday hunger on children and families they work with. More details of the event and its impact will be included in the next newsletter.

[Child Poverty Monitor 2024](#)

On Monday 20 May, we launched the 2024 [Child Poverty Monitor](#). The Monitor is a unique series of reports that analyses child poverty in Ireland and tracks Government progress on reducing the number of children trapped in poverty, made possible through the continued support of Community Foundation Ireland. This year, we launched the Child Poverty Monitor in Swan Youth Service, Dublin 1. The event was chaired by Denise Charlton, Chief Executive of the Community Foundation Ireland, with a brilliant panel of speakers including keynote, Elizabeth Conroy (Department

with a brilliant panel of speakers including keynote, Elizabeth Carravan (Department of the Taoiseach), Dr Naomi Feely (Children's Rights Alliance), Gillian Brien (Director, Swan Youth Service), Sinead Smith (CEO of Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services), Grainne McKenna (Assistant Professor, Dublin City University) and Tanya Ward (Children's Rights Alliance).



The full series is live on our website: [available here](#).

You can read our press release [here](#).

[You can watch it all back here!](#)

[A New Equal Participation Model](#)

Our Chief Executive, Tanya Ward, spoke at the launch of the Equal Start Model on 20 May. Equal Start is a funding model of early years service provision with a set of universal and targeted measures to support access and participation for children who experience disadvantage. Investment in Budget 2025 to support the rollout of the programme is the most important investment the Government can make. You can read the launch press release [here](#).

[Child Poverty and Wellbeing Summit](#)

Following the launch of the Child Poverty Monitor, the Alliance joined colleagues across civil society at the inaugural Child Poverty and Wellbeing Summit led by the Child Poverty and Wellbeing Programme Office in the Department of the Taoiseach. At this high-profile Summit, we co-chaired a case clinic with the Department of Social Protection focused on the issue of 'holiday hunger' and solutions to bridge the gap in hot meal provision when schools close for holiday periods. We will continue to work closely with the Programme Office to progress this work. We were delighted to see our call for a whole-of-government approach and political drive to end child poverty echoed by Gordon Brown in [The Irish Times](#) speaking in advance of the Summit.

[Supporting Child Refugees](#)

The Alliance participated in three Ukrainian Forum meetings as well as ongoing weekly meetings. In March, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth published a new policy for Beneficiaries of Temporary

Protection from Ukraine which sees new arrivals sent to designated accommodation centres for 90 days. We raised our concerns about the implications of this policy on the rights of Ukrainian children to access education and will continue to monitor its impact in the coming months.

[Separated Children and Unaccompanied Minors](#)

Tusla – the Child and Family Agency approached the Alliance in late 2023 to establish a stakeholder meeting on the issues facing separated children and

unaccompanied minors. We held two meetings. The purpose of this stakeholder engagement was to focus on the needs of separated children and young people, the challenges when responding to the demand for services and developing appropriate solutions. Following stakeholder engagement, a draft report with recommendations was prepared and is with the Minister of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth for consideration.

If you have any queries regarding the engagement, please contact [Tanya](#).

Child Welfare and Alternative Care

In April 2024, we held a member strategy meeting in relation to child protection, welfare and alternative care. Twenty organisations were represented in the discussion at this in-person meeting in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's office in Dublin. The discussion focused on the key issues facing children and young people and the challenges in responding to the increased demand on core welfare services. The meeting will inform future Tusla dialogue meetings and our programme for government work.

A Children's Budget 2025 – Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

Our core message throughout our pre-budget advocacy and communications last year was the need for Budget 2024 to be a Children's Budget, specifically designed to break the cycle of poverty. One very positive measure included in Budget 2024 was the commitment to expand the **Free School Books Scheme** to Junior Cycle. In March 2024, this took effect with the Minister of Education announcing further details. Read our press release [here](#). It is essential that we see continued investment in the scheme to roll it out to Senior Cycle level in Budget 2025.

Children's Rights Alliance Submissions:

- [Child Poverty Target](#)
- [Tackling Holiday Hunger in Ireland](#)
- [Pre-Budget 2025 Submission to the Department of Social Protection](#)

>> Future Focus

The Alliance attended the Pre-Budget Social Inclusion Forum and the National Economic Dialogue to raise our call for Budget 2025 to be a Children's Budget – designed to break the cycle of poverty. Over the summer, we will be planning our third End Child Poverty Week which seeks to ensure child poverty is a political priority throughout budget negotiations.



5. Educational Reform

Senior Cycle Reform

As part of the redevelopment of the Senior Cycle, the Minister for Education established the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Partners' Forum. Children's Rights

established the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Panel Forum. Children's Rights Alliance have been appointed to the Partners' Forum. The focus of the work in recent months has been on subject development, assessment research and the development of the wider senior cycle reform programme. The Alliance continues to raise the importance of developing an appropriate evaluation methodology to measure the impact of the reforms on young people to ensure the pressure and stress reported by students during the Leaving Certificate in particular, is reduced.

Alternative Education

Through our position on the Working Group to oversee the work on the Review of Out of Hours School Provision, the Children's Rights Alliance continues to place 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. In February, we held a member briefing with 25 of our members attending, outlining the work that has been carried out since 2023. Through the position on the Advisory Group, the Alliance also reviewed and gave detailed feedback on the draft report produced by the Department of Education, with the final report expected in Quarter 3. For members looking to engage with us in our work in this area, please contact [Julie](#).

New: Join our Members Advisory Group on Education

Ensuring educational reform respects children and young people's rights and supporting education equality are key priorities in our Strategic Plan. Through the support of our members, we continue to work on a number of areas to progress these priorities including Senior Cycle Reform, Alternative Education, Early Years and CAFE (Citizens Assembly on the Reform of Education). We received a fantastic response to our call out to members to join our new Education Advisory Group which will inform our work in this space. If you have questions about this aspect of our work, please contact our Senior Education Officer, [Siobhan](#).

6. National Movement for Children and Young People

Membership

As an Alliance, we are proud to use our collective voices to work together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. Since January, we have welcomed ten new organisations to our movement for children and young people. Our membership now stands at 159 not-for-profit organisations from all across Ireland and you can see the full list of our members [here](#).

We always love to hear from our members. If you have any feedback on any aspect of your membership or if you are interested in becoming a member, please get in touch with us at members@childrensrights.ie

Tusla Dialogue

Our ongoing dialogue meetings with Tusla-the Child and Family Agency remain an engaging opportunity for our member organisations to participate in constructive discussion with senior decision members in Tusla. The purpose of the dialogue is to ensure a consistent line of communication between the national child protection service and the organisations and staff on the ground working with vulnerable children and young people. They provide a critical forum for Alliance members to raise their key concerns and discuss emerging issues for the children they work with, to inform the decision-making and responses from Tusla and its support services

to inform the decision-making and responses from Tusla and its support services. Our first meeting of the year was held in January with 40 member organisations in attendance with members raising concerns including child protection and welfare for children in the international protection system. The second meeting took place in-person on 17 June with key issues raised including Tusla's Strategic Reform Process, unallocated child protection cases and the shortage of placements for children in care.

HSE dialogue

Our HSE dialogue seeks to establish ongoing communication with Alliance members and the Health Service Executive (HSE) and CEO Bernard Gloster. It is also an effective way to advocate for, and progress, changes in the provision of public health and social care services to children and young people. We hope the new dialogue will enhance communication and information exchange, as well as fostering a long-term relationship with a key stakeholder to the Alliance, our members and our wider network. The next dialogue meeting will take place in Quarter 3 and we will be in touch with the details in the coming weeks.

Annual Members' Meeting

Our Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 26 June in The Ashling Hotel. Thank you to all who joined us in-person on the day. It is always an important day for the Children's Rights Alliance team to recognise the impact made possible through the support of our members and ongoing support of our Board and funding partners.

Thank you to all of our funders, members and friends for your continued solidarity and support.

**Visit us at childrensrights.ie
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