



National Children's Strategy

What is the National Children's Strategy?

The National Children's Strategy, *Our Children — Their Lives*, was published in November 2000 after extensive consultation with parents and groups working with children, as well as with children themselves. The strategy is a 10-year plan of action, which calls on the statutory agencies, the voluntary sector and local communities to work to improve the quality of all children's lives. It includes a range of actions across such areas as giving children a voice (so that their views are considered in relation to matters that affect them), eliminating child poverty, ensuring children have access to play and recreation facilities, and improving research on children's lives in Ireland.

The strategy provides the first comprehensive national policy document for the full range of statutory and non-statutory providers in the development of services for children and is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The strategy adopts a 'whole child perspective', recognising the multidimensional nature of all aspects of children's lives. The recognition that all parts of children's lives are interlinked has, in turn, implications for public policy-making and the integration of services relating to children.

The National Children's Office (NCO) was established in 2001 to lead and oversee the implementation of the National Children's Strategy. The NCO was given the lead responsibility for Goal 1 (children's participation) and Goal 2 (research). In regard to Goal 3 (improving supports and services), the NCO had a particular responsibility for progressing key policy issues identified as priorities by the Cabinet Committee on Children and which require cross-departmental/interagency action. Individual Government departments retain responsibility for implementing the actions relevant to their role in the National Children's Strategy, with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) monitoring progress and supporting coordination where appropriate.

The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs was given responsibility for overseeing implementation of the National Children's Strategy and coordinating Government policy on children in order to maintain the policy coherence achieved through the publication of the strategy. The Minister has specific statutory delegated functions in each of the three departments involved — Health & Children, Education & Science, and Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Second National Children's Strategy

A second ten-year National Children's Strategy will be developed, in conjunction with stakeholders, in the light of the experience gained under the first ten-year strategy (which covers the years 2000 to 2010). Informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it will immediately follow the existing strategy. Action will be progressed from 2009.

What does the National Children's Strategy say?

In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the National Children's Strategy defines a 'child' as a human being under the age of 18 years. The National Children's Strategy proposes to improve the status of all children and young people in Ireland and the quality of their lives by implementing three 'national goals'.

The 3 National Goals are:

1. "Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity."
2. "Children's lives will be better understood; their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services."
3. "Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development."

The third national goal comprises fourteen objectives:

The 14 Objectives are:

1. "Children's early education and developmental needs will be met through quality childcare services and family-friendly employment measures."
2. "Children will benefit from a range of educational opportunities and experiences which reflect the diversity of need."
3. "Children will be supported to enjoy the optimum physical, mental and emotional wellbeing."
4. "Children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood."
5. "Children will have opportunities to explore information and communication technologies in ways which are safe and developmentally supportive."
6. "Children will be safeguarded to enjoy their childhood free from all forms of abuse and exploitation."
7. "Children will be provided with the financial supports necessary to eliminate child poverty."
8. "Children will have access to accommodation appropriate to their needs."
9. "Children with behavioural problems coming before the courts or in trouble with the law, will be supported in the least restrictive environment while having their needs addressed."
10. "Children with a disability will be entitled to the services they need to achieve their full potential."
11. "Children will be educated and supported to value social and cultural diversity so that all children, including Travellers and other marginalised groups, achieve their full potential."
12. "Children will have the opportunity to experience the qualities of family life."
13. "Children will benefit from and contribute to vibrant local communities."
14. "Children will benefit from a built and natural environment which supports their physical and emotional wellbeing."