

This Issue

Budget 2010

The Murphy Report

Member Focus:
Irish Second-Level
Students' Union

Children's Mental
Health Coalition

News in Brief

FGM National
Action Plan

The Adoption Bill

ICESCR Shadow
Report

Child Literacy

European Action
on Drugs

DIT and Child
Rights Syllabus

20th Anniversary
of the UNCRC

Weight of Budget 2010 Falls Heavily on Children



The entire country had been anticipating Budget 2010 with significant apprehension and fear. We were warned that the focus would be on cuts, rather than taxation, and that such cuts were necessary to show the international community that Ireland could pull itself out of recession.

Despite significant public protest, Child Benefit bore the brunt with a cut of €16 per child. The Minister for Social and Family Affairs told us in advance that vulnerable families would be compensated, but increases in the Qualified Child Increase (QCI) and the Family Income Supplement (FIS) fail to take account of the existing problems with these payments. To date, despite improvements FIS take-up remains low and there have been long delays in families accessing payments. Budget 2010 was a missed opportunity for Government to integrate the tax and welfare systems and enable the introduction of a targeted 'second tier' payment for all families on low incomes, regardless of whether that income comes from welfare or from low-paid work.

Frequent references to the drop in the cost of living fail to recognise that the costs associated with children have increased in 2009: childcare by 6%, primary and secondary education by 7% and healthcare by 3%. The Government must be aware that Child Benefit cuts, the increase in medical costs and cuts to the One Parent Family Payment are cuts that affect the same child.

That said, the Alliance was pleased to note some positive measures in the Budget, such as setting aside €3 million to hold a constitutional referendum on the rights of the child, €15 million allocated to rolling-out the Ryan Report recommendations, and investment in mental health and youth justice. But, despite these, the burden is one that sits very heavily on children. Our analysis of Budget 2010 is available on www.childrensrights.ie On 25 January we will publish **Report Card 2010**, which will grade Government on its progress in implementing its commitments to children, including financial support to families.

Until then, the Alliance wishes you a very **Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.**

Jillian van Turnhout, Chief Executive

Remember to read
our Special Edition
Newsletter
on
Child Literacy in
January 2010



Latest poll
on web site

Should Child Benefit
be Cut in the Budget?

RESULTS
NO – 93%
YES – 7%

The Murphy Report: Gross Inadequacy Highlighted

On 26 November 2009, the *Dublin Archdiocese Commission of Investigation Report (The Murphy Report)* was published. The Commission reported on the handling by Church and State authorities of a sample of allegations and suspicions of child sexual abuse against clerics in the Dublin Archdiocese between 1975 to 2004. The Alliance welcomed the publication of the Report and, like many other commentators, we were highly critical of the gross inadequacy in relation to child abuse highlighted in the Report. The *Murphy Report* coupled with the *Ryan Report*, reinforces the need for urgent reform of the child protection system in Ireland.

Placing a legal duty on all those working with children to comply with the *Children First* child protection guidelines was once again identified as a priority in the Alliance response to the *Murphy Report*.

We noted that the *Murphy Report* quite rightly states that the primary responsibility for child protection must rest with the State and that all institutions must be open to scrutiny – avoiding scandal and protecting individual or institutional interests must never again be put before the welfare and best interests of the child.

Finally, it is high time that Irish society responds to Murphy, Ryan, Ferns and other reports by taking steps to bring about a new culture for children in Ireland. Such a culture must fully respect children, listen to them, believe them, and act on their concerns. The Alliance believes that a constitutional amendment acknowledging children's rights is the best way to ensure this.

Member Focus



The Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU) aims to give students a voice in education and issues that affect them. ISSU connects students nationwide and is the national umbrella body for second-level school student councils.

ISSU's aims to:

- provide training and development of secondary school student councils, in conjunction with relevant bodies;
- develop policies on issues affecting Irish second-level students and bring the needs and rights of students to the attention of the relevant authorities;
- provide a transparent, democratic and reliable organisation;
- work in collaboration with other educational institutions and bodies, both in Ireland and Europe and to work closely with educational curriculum policy makers and teachers' unions to continually develop a transparent, fair and modern education system; and
- most importantly, to give students a structured platform through which the voice of the Irish Second-Level Students will be heard.

Over the past year ISSU has focused on developing its new structures in order to lay the foundation for all future work. It has been a very busy and productive year for the ISSU team and it has also required many very special people to enable and support it and help to lay strong foundations for the organisation.

ISSU is represented on the Organising Bureau of the European School Student Union's Student Rights Working Group and to mark International Students' Day on 17 November and the 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on 20 November, ISSU produced a Student Rights themed issue of our newsletter, Ceangal. We were honoured to include a contribution from Jillian van Turnhout of the Children's Rights Alliance in the newsletter; an electronic copy can be viewed at <http://ceangal.issu.ie/>

For further information see www.issu.ie or email the ISSU team at info@issu.ie



Children's Mental Health Coalition Launched

The Children's Rights Alliance and Amnesty International Ireland have come together to establish the Children's Mental Health Coalition. The Coalition, which comprises 38 groups from a range of backgrounds and sectors, will advocate on the mental health needs of children and young people under 18 years of age in Ireland.

Our vision is that Ireland should be one of the best places in the world to be a child, where every child's right to mental health is realised. Not only does the Government have a legal and moral obligation to improve the lives of children in Ireland, it has the power to make this happen. A Government policy on mental health exists, *A Vision for Change*, but what is needed now is political action to put that policy into practice.

The Coalition has developed a manifesto outlining the gaps in mental health support for children, and their solutions. Its immediate implementation will truly make a difference. The manifesto is the product of consultation and discussion within the NGO sector and with children and young people themselves.



Over the next two years, the Coalition will lobby the Government for action in four key areas prioritised by Coalition members, namely: mental health services, the education system, the criminal justice system, and the care system.

The Coalition needs your support! To join the Children's Mental Health

Coalition, or to find out more about our work, log on to www.childrensmentalhealth.ie or contact: Karol Balfe at kbalfe@amnesty.ie or on 01 8638308.

News in Brief

- The Alliance would like to remind members that **The Body Shop** is donating €3.45 from the sale of its new hand cream *Soft Hands, Kind Heart* to campaigns and projects against child trafficking. The cream sells for €5.95. Great for Christmas presents!
- The newly-formed **Children's Mental Health Coalition** launched its new manifesto and web site (www.childrensmentalhealth.ie) on 15 December. (See above for more details.)
- Integrating Ireland and the Refugee Information Service have merged to form the **Integration and Social Inclusion Centre Ireland**. On 14 January, in City Hall, the organisation will be launching its latest research on the integration of migrant youth, called *At Home in Ireland*.
- The **Equality and Rights Alliance** published its research report, *Downgrading Equality and Human Rights*, in November this year. This important report looks at the work of the Equality Authority and the Irish Human Rights Commission and assesses the effects their funding cuts will have on their operations. Go to www.eracampaign.org to download the report.
- The **Irish Penal Reform Trust** launched a new research report, *The Detention of Children: International Standards and Best Practice* on 30 November, 2009. Go to www.iprt.ie to download the report.
- The **UN Open-Ended Working Group** held its first session from 14 to 18 December 2009 to discuss the establishment of an **optional protocol to the UNCRC to provide for a complaints procedure**. For more information, go to www.childsrighstnet.org

Adoption Bill



On 8 December, the Alliance's Jillian van Turnhout, Chief Executive, and Maria Corbett, Policy Director, made a presentation to the Joint Committee on Health and Children in relation to the Adoption Bill

2009. Joining the Alliance was Deirdre McTeigue, Director of the Irish Foster Care Association.

The Adoption Bill 2009 is a long-awaited development in the area of children's rights. The Alliance welcomes the Bill and believes it should be enacted without delay.

The Bill consolidates seven different Adoption Acts and directly incorporates into national law the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

The Hague Convention is the international standard setter and provides the best available framework for managing the risks associated with inter-country adoption, such as corruption and the sale or trafficking of children. Its incorporation will make a real difference to children's lives, and is a hugely positive step for children and for Ireland.

The Bill will also progress the implementation in Ireland of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and hopefully lead to Ireland's ratification of the UN Optional Protocol on the sale of Children.

However, the Alliance has advised that there are a number of areas in which the Bill needs to be strengthened. These include the voice of the child; managing the transitional period between the present provisions and the enactment of the Bill; a statutory framework for pre- and post- adoption support services; the best interests of the child principle; and the lack of a statutory framework for information and tracing services. Critical issues not addressed in the Bill also include provisions for children who are not eligible for adoption, the introduction of open and semi-open adoptions, and a consideration of family diversity.

Adoption legislation must be child-centred. Adoption is a pathway to realising a child's right to grow up in a family, so the best interests and safety of the child must be paramount. Our submission: <http://www.childrensrights.ie/files/AdoptionBill09Sub071209.pdf>

Ireland's Female Genital Mutilation National Action Plan

25 November 2009 marked the one year anniversary of Ireland's National Action Plan to Address Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). One year on, the National Action Plan is yet to be formally adopted by any government agency and specific legislation outlawing the practice in Ireland is still not in place.

The Children's Rights Alliance is a member of the National Steering Committee of the National Plan of Action to Address FGM. There is currently no explicit legal protection against FGM in Ireland; neither is there specific legislation to protect a child from being removed from Ireland to have the procedure carried out overseas. These two scenarios need to be catered for together in legislation.

The Alliance welcomes the commitment made in March by Minister for Health and Children, Mary Harney TD, to examine the possibility of introducing legislation to ban FGM. We urge the Irish government to follow through and outlaw the practice in Ireland.

A copy of Ireland's National Action plan is available at <http://www.akidwa.ie/fgm.php>

Donate to a Member Organisation



The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of over 90 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working for the rights and needs of all children living in Ireland.

This Christmas, if you would like to donate to a charity, why not choose one of our member organisations? Go to the Alliance Members Section on www.childrensrights.ie



Shadow Report on Economic Social and Cultural Rights

Alliance member organisation, Amnesty International Ireland, is compiling a Shadow Report on Ireland's progress in implementing the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Amnesty is seeking input from NGOs in its work.

The focus of this Shadow Report will be the right to health and the right to housing. Amnesty has chosen these two areas because it believes they are the most significant rights violations in the Irish context at this time, but also the issues

that affect the greatest number of people and have the greatest impact on the enjoyment of other rights.

The Irish Government ratified the ICESCR in 1992. A method of holding the Government to account on what it actually delivers is the United Nations review and monitoring process. The Government submitted periodic reports to the UN in relation to the ICESCR in 1999 and in 2002 and the next round of reporting is due to begin shortly.

If you have expertise in the area of health and/or housing, and would like to submit your views or findings for consideration by the editorial team, please contact Ruth Gallagher, Human Rights in Ireland Officer, Amnesty International at rgallagher@amnesty.ie

Child Literacy

Child literacy was designated as a key policy priority for the Alliance in 2009. Reading and writing are fundamental life skills, and literacy is the key to every child's education.

Despite this, one in ten children leaves primary school with serious literacy difficulties; this rises to one in three in disadvantaged communities. Ireland has no national level literacy strategy, nor does it have a literacy policy for all schools. DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Action Plan, 2005-2010, has a focus on literacy, but it is only applied in designated disadvantaged schools.

The Alliance recommends a three-pronged approach in tackling the issue: development of a child-centred National Literacy Policy; an increase in time spent teaching literacy in disadvantaged areas; and the guarantee of further professional development for teachers, with a specific focus on child literacy.

In selecting child literacy as a key policy priority, the Alliance aimed to push this critical issue forward. The Alliance actively participated on the project team of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) in relation to the development of the *Child Literacy and Social Inclusion: Implementation Issues* report, published November 2009.

The Alliance is hosting a Roundtable on Literacy in early 2010. Details will be posted on www.childrensrights.ie **READ MORE in our Special Edition Child Literacy Newsletter—out in January 2010!**

European Action on Drugs (EAD)



European Action on Drugs (EAD) is a recently-launched initiative of the European Commission that aims to provide a strong, coordinated and balanced approach to the problem of drug misuse within European society. EAD is inviting Alliance members to join this campaign to help create a common platform for drug prevention and awareness. To join as a member, organisations are invited to submit a description to EAD of their work in the area of drug prevention, awareness or in the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. The campaign offers high visibility and recognition throughout the European Union,

as well as networking and partnership with other signatory organisations. In addition, there are opportunities to participate in a broad range of activities, such as award events, in Ireland or at European level. Member organisations receive regular updates from the Commission and a special newsletter, and can use the EAD logo and other promotional material. To learn more visit www.action-drugs.eu or contact Kinga Byrne, National Coordinator at: ireland@action-drugs.eu

DIT leading the way



The Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) has designed a new Child Rights Syllabus for a European Journalism degree taught in seven universities in Turkey. Including an e-learning platform, the initiative has the support

of UNICEF Central and Eastern Europe.

DIT's Head of Journalism, Michael Foley, said: "If journalism students have an understanding of what is meant by children's rights, they have a remarkable weapon for holding governments to account, ensuring a major part of the population has a voice and a source of good stories." Those studying the syllabus earn credit points recognised within other European Union universities.

It is hoped the experiences gleaned in Turkey will further refine this exciting development in shaping the ethics and standards of news reporting on children.

20th Anniversary of the UNCRC



Government Buildings: Young people meet the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews, TD; Jillian van Turnhout, Chief Executive, Children's Rights Alliance and Melanie Verwoerd, Director of UNICEF Ireland to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the UNCRC.

20 November 2009 marked 20 years of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Teenagers from the Children and Young People's Forum of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and The Base in Ballyfermot, UNICEF, and the OMCYA, and other schoolchildren from

Dublin in Government Buildings to discuss progress in implementing the UNCRC in Ireland and worldwide.

If you would like to submit material for future eNewsletters or be added to our circulation list, please contact Carys Thomas at carys@childrensrights.ie

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