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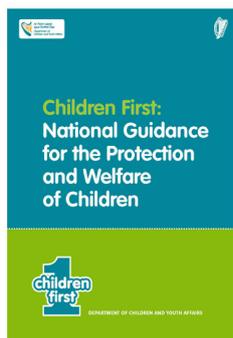
Staff Update



Statutory Footing for Child Protection

On 15 July, the revised *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* was published by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald TD. At the same time, it was announced that *Children First* would be placed on a statutory footing, meaning that State agencies, such as the HSE and the Gardaí, along with voluntary bodies dealing with children, will have a legal duty to report child abuse concerns, share relevant information and cooperate in the best interests of the child. We, at the Alliance, called for *Children First* to be put on a statutory footing in 2006 in our shadow report (*From Rhetoric to Rights*) to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. So this is a development long-overdue.

This was a timely announcement as, two days earlier, we saw the publication of the *Cloyne Report*, and *Cloyne* demonstrated that individuals in the Catholic Church ignored child protection guidelines. The Alliance issued an unequivocal statement: there is only one way to report child abuse concerns in this country and it is to the statutory authorities of the HSE or the Gardaí, who are empowered to investigate abuse and take action to protect children and prosecute offenders. July also saw the publication of draft heads of the National Vetting Bureau Bill 2011. The Alliance will be watching the progress of the Bill and will be calling for the vetting parameters to apply to those working with children in both employed and voluntary capacities.



We hope that by placing *Children First* on a statutory footing it will change the culture in Ireland of putting our heads in the sand, to one where we tackle abuse through inspection and the enforcement of law. We call on the Government to consult extensively with NGOs and practitioners when drafting the Bill, in order to ensure that the legislation is framed appropriately. The Minister herself has said that there will be no 'a-la-carte approach to Children First', and we strongly endorse this.

The *Children First* guidance document and the recently launched *Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook* are available to download at www.dcy.a.ie and www.hse.ie respectively.

Best wishes,

Senator Jillian van Turnhout

Members' Roundtable Discussion on Constitutional Reform



Alistair Hodgett of Campaign for Children speaking. Alistair Hodgett and Lara Kelly of Campaign for Children gave a flavour of the findings from their polling work. Both presentations focused on how NGOs can work to support constitutional change, the supports needed for NGOs to do this and opportunities for joint work. The Roundtable ended with a questions and answers session, which allowed for an in-depth and lively discussion. If you would like to lend your support to our campaign, contact communications@childrensrights.ie.

On 6 July, the Alliance held a Members' Roundtable on the Constitutional Amendment to strengthen children's rights in the offices of the European Parliament. We were delighted to see so many of our members present. The Roundtable was opened by Senator Jillian van Turnhout (outgoing Chief Executive). A presentation was then given by both Maria Corbett (Policy Director) and Carys Thomas (Communications Director) who provided updates on progress towards a constitutional amendment and associated Alliance work, with an emphasis on our communication activities.

Member Focus



Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) is the representative body for the rape crisis sector in Ireland. We are the expert resource and information centre on issues of sexual violence, relevant policy and social change. We nationally coordinate standardised best practice in service delivery to meet survivor needs.

One of our core tasks is the collection, analysis and release of national data on the sexual violence that is reported to specialist sexual violence services. The online database system is going from strength to strength after seven years of development and refinement. This year we can look in even more detail at our data and talk about the context, nature and relationship to perpetrators of incidents of child sexual abuse (CSA), both recent and historical. The RCNI member centres currently inputting on the database see more child survivors of sexual violence than any other non statutory body. The majority of our child service users are between the ages of 14 and 18. One thing we will be able to confirm is what many in child protection have long understood, that perpetrators of CSA are often children themselves.

This work is progressing despite ongoing uncertainty due to the HSE removing all RCNI core funding at the end of the year. The support of our friends and colleagues across the NGO sector has been invaluable to our continuation with our work. We hope to see you at the launch of the RCNI National Statistics the week of the 21st of November.

Ryan – Second Progress Report

On 19 July, the Second Progress Report of the Oversight Group on the Implementation of the Ryan Report was published. The Alliance welcomed the improved quality and accountability of this year's report, while also acknowledging that there is still much more room for improvement in terms of activities and positive impact for children. The Alliance, as an independent member of the Oversight Group, fed into the development of the progress report. Maria Corbett attended two meetings chaired by Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald TD, and submitted numerous comments. A subgroup of Alliance members was formed to support the Alliance's work on the Oversight Group. It is hoped that a longer lead-in time to next year's report will allow us to conduct a more thorough consultation with our member organisations.

News in Brief

- **UPR State Hearing 6 October** Ireland's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) State Hearing takes place on 6 October in Geneva at 8-11am Irish time. The Minister for Justice and Equality, Alan Shatter TD, will attend on behalf of the Irish State. The Alliance participates on the Cross-Sectoral Steering Group convened by the ICCL. For more information, see www.rightsnow.ie.
- The **Integration Centre** launches its *Roadmap to Integration 2011* on 13 October in Buswell's Hotel Dublin at 10.45am.
- 17 October marks the **UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty**. A commemoration event organised by ATD Fourth World begins at 11am. For more information, contact ATD Fourth World, at 01 8558191.
- Research is currently underway for **Report Card 2012** and we will be in touch with members shortly, seeking your input.
- **Amnesty International** Ireland has just launched a very insightful report responding to the publication of the Ferns, Ryan, Murphy and Cloyne reports. *In Plain Sight* assesses the grave and systemic human rights violations identified in the reports and the State's responses to them against standards in international law. This report is rich in analysis, looking at specific human rights abuses and the responsibility of society at large. The report can be downloaded at www.amnesty.ie
- The **recruitment of the new Chief Executive** is ongoing and members will be informed as soon as possible.
- **Alliance Staff News:** Congratulations to **Mairéad and Tim Somerville** on the recent **birth of baby Flynn**. Congratulations also to **Niamh Gallagher and Stephen Douglas** on their **recent engagement**. The Alliance would also like to welcome our new intern, **Saoirse Molloy**, to the team.

Alliance Pre-Budget Submission

The Alliance presented its pre-budget submission to the Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton TD, at the annual pre-budget forum on 16 September. We called on the Minister to do three things for children in Budget 2012:

- **Be fair:** ensure that children's rights are protected in Budget 2012 and consider the impact of all budgetary decisions on children.
- **Be focused:** make ending child poverty a key goal in Budget 2012, in the short and longer-term measures it introduces.
- **Be flexible:** build flexibility into the social welfare system so that it can support families to cope with their changing financial circumstances.

We urged the Minister to use her own Department's 2010 *Value and Policy Review of Child Income Support and Associated Spending Measures* report as a blueprint for action. The Report makes a strong case for structural reform of child income supports and acknowledges the benefits of a mixed child income support strategy, made up of both universal and targeted elements.

It specifically recommends the introduction of an 'integrated child income support payment' which would build on existing payment structures to move incrementally towards a single child-related payment with both universal and targeted components. Full details can be found at www.childrensrights.ie

Stop Sex Trafficking of Children and Young People Campaign



Presentation of the petition to Minister Fitzgerald outside Leinster House

The Alliance and The Body Shop continue their work on the *Stop Sex Trafficking of Children and Young People* global campaign. On 21 July, the Irish campaign petition was officially accepted on behalf of the Government by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald TD, outside Leinster House on Kildare Street. Over 165,000 signatures were collected in Ireland.

The global petition was the largest ever by The Body Shop, securing over 7 million signatures in 50 countries. These signatures were submitted to the United Nations in Geneva on 29 September.

After the handover, an official at the Department of Children and Youth Affairs indicated that positive steps to ratify the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography have been taken and are ongoing. Ratification of the Optional Protocol was one of the four petition “calls”.

Following an invitation to tender, the Alliance has contracted three projects, funded by the campaign and aimed at separated children and ‘aged-out minors’:

1. Educational and Social Supports: Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project.
2. Pilot Independent Advocate Programme: Irish Refugee Council.
3. Research on Safe Care for Child Trafficking Victims: Child Migration and Social Policy Research Group, School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork.

National Children’s Day: 28 September

28 September marks National Children’s Day: the anniversary of Ireland’s ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 19 years ago. The Alliance visited the award-winning Nurture Childcare Crèche in Dublin as part of our celebrations and Senator Jillian van Turnhout, our outgoing Chief Executive, took the opportunity to inform parents about the need for constitutional reform and to read a story to the young children about their right to play.

We also issued a press release repeating our call to Government to set a date to strengthen children’s rights in the Constitution. Currently, Government is reviewing the wording of a new constitutional amendment and has promised a referendum next year on this important issue; we are urging Government to keep to this timeline.



Senator Jillian van Turnhout, Chief Executive of the Children’s Rights Alliance, celebrates National Children’s Day with the children, parents and staff of Nurture Childcare Crèche in Dublin.



New UNCRC Optional Protocol: A Communications Procedure

On 17 June, the UN Human Rights Council adopted the final draft Optional Protocol on a communications procedure for children’s rights violations. In June 2009, the Council mandated an intergovernmental working group to explore the possibility of a complaints mechanism and in February this year, after only 18 months, the final draft wording was agreed by the working group. The Alliance shares the disappointment of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) and other NGOs that a collective complaints mechanism was not included. Such a mechanism would have enabled complaints alleging recurring violations to multiple individual children, rather than a single ‘named’ individual.

However, the Protocol does go some way to increasing the visibility of children by creating an opportunity for the voice of the child to be heard during the complaint process. Once the final draft is adopted by the UN General Assembly (in December 2011), it will be open for member states’ signatures and ratification or accession at a signing ceremony in 2012.

EESC: Update on Opinion on Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and Database

Emma McKinley, Research and Policy Officer, continues to act as Expert to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on the Opinion on Preventive Measures Against Child Abuse. We are happy to report that the Opinion has been voted to the penultimate stage, securing 84/84 positives votes! The final hurdle is 26-27 October when the Opinion

goes to the Committee's Plenary Meeting. A Europe-wide database of best practice on preventive measures against child sexual abuse is being developed as a related piece of work. It is hoped that this will be a comprehensive list of statutory and non-statutory players, so please add the name of your organisation if you are working in this area <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.soc-spotlight.19287>.

Merriman Summer School

Maria Corbett, Policy Director, spoke at the Merriman School, Lisdoonvarna, Co. Clare on 19 August. The theme of the school this year was "Changing Irish Childhoods". Maria took part in a lively panel discussion on the constitutional amendment on children. Other panellists were Mary O'Rourke, former teacher, TD and Senator; Carl O'Brien, Chief Reporter of The Irish Times; and Fergus Ryan, Lecturer in law at the Dublin Institute of Technology. There was significant media coverage of this event, including an Irish Times article referencing Maria's call to strengthen children's rights in the Constitution. Minister for Children, Frances Fitzgerald TD, gave the opening address and Labour presidential candidate, Michael D Higgins, who closed the school, repeated Maria's assertion that a constitutional amendment on children's rights would set down an important marker that 'every childhood counts'.

Check-out Our latest Podcast



Mary King, Chairperson of the Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project (DRP) celebrates the organisation's ten-year anniversary on World Refugee Day (June 20 2011). She talks about how things have changed over the past ten years for asylum seekers and separated children in particular, and why the DRP has been so successful in providing support and gaining the trust of its clients.

Visit www.childrensrights.ie to listen to this popular podcast and visit the DRP's web site (www.drp.ie) to download their recent publication, 'The Story of the Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project', a collection of reflections written by DRP clients.

Council of Europe – Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2012-2015)

In September, the Alliance made a submission to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and to the Council of Europe on the draft Council of Europe's *Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2012-2015)*. The Alliance welcomed the development of the Strategy and the goals contained within it to:

- provide guidance and assistance to member states in the implementation of international standards on the rights of the child;
- support member states in devising and implementing holistic children's rights strategies and policies; and
- introduce a child-rights perspective in all Council of Europe activities.

TV Ban for Junk Food?

The Alliance will be making a submission to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland's (BAI) consultation on the Children's Commercial Communications Code. The deadline for submissions has been extended to 16 October. We will be calling for a total ban on the advertising of junk food to children.

This is not a new issue for the Alliance; we called for a total ban in our Second Shadow Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2006. Let's reduce the weight of junk food advertising on children and the pressure on our health services.

Make a submission by going to: <http://bit.ly/qrRYzN>

Staff Update



We would like to formally welcome Louise Dromey, Office Manager, to the Alliance team. Louise comes to the Alliance with a background in Management Science and Information Systems, having worked in administrative roles in both Trinity College Dublin and the University of Edinburgh. Louise has replaced Mairéad Somerville (who is on maternity leave). Mairéad and baby Flynn, our newest advocate for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (right), wish her well.



If you would like to submit material for future eNewsletters, please email communications@childrensrights.ie

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