

**Submission
to the
Department of the Taoiseach
in relation to the
Participation
of the
Children's Rights Alliance
in
Social Partnership**

31 October 2002

Representation of Children and Children's Interests in Social Partnership

Children under the age of 18 comprise approximately 30% of the Irish population. While the interests of older teenage children are ably represented in social partnership by the National Youth Council of Ireland, most children are not represented and have no voice in these proceedings. To advance their interests within social partnership, children and those working on behalf of children are obliged to rely on groups and organisations primarily concerned with addressing the needs of a particular sector of the adult population.

Given the unique needs and concerns of children, a social partnership structure that does not provide children's advocacy groups a seat at the table cannot be said to be fully representative. It is also not likely to foster discussions and negotiations that place sufficient attention on children's issues or give priority to the best interests of children unless those issues and interests are compatible with the agendas of those directly represented at the negotiating table.

Attention to Children's Issues in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness

A reading of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) suggests the potential value of including advocates for children in the negotiations around the next social partnership agreement.

While the PPF includes much that is important and highly beneficial to children, it does so principally through policies and measures that are largely indirect rather than targeted at the often unique needs of children.

Within the PPF's five Operational Frameworks, for example, sixty-three 'key measures' are proposed. Of these measures, two – increasing Child Benefit and protecting the well-being of children in childcare – relate directly to children. Of the five key measures in the area of Healthcare, none target children, not even the measure that promises enhanced services to four specific population groups.

Within the body of the PPF there are a number of important commitments to children, including promises to significantly increase Child Benefit, to focus on the Medical Card needs of families with children, to strengthen child protection and to take important steps in the areas of early childhood education and early school leaving. The PPF also places considerable and welcome emphasis on the issue of childcare. It is important to note, however, that while childcare is an issue of importance to children, it is at least equally about meeting the needs of adults – employers and working parents, in particular. We would propose that the next partnership agreement build on the PPF by placing additional emphasis on the well-being of children in childcare and on

measures relating to training, vetting, staffing levels and quality standards required to ensure such well-being.

In other areas of the PPF, however, references to children are infrequent, perhaps reflecting the common assumption that the needs of children can generally be met by adopting policies that benefit society as a whole.

Children, however, do have specific needs and rights that are sometimes not met or promoted by policies, programmes or procedures designed with the adult population primarily in mind. Examples would include anti-poverty measures that fail to target households with children where the adults are not employed; housing development schemes with no provision for play and recreation; emergency housing arrangements such as B&Bs that are wholly inappropriate for young children; hospital environments designed without adequate and separate facilities for the care of children; family law proceedings that do not recognise the rights of children; public information materials and delivery systems that are incomprehensible to or ineffective with children; and laws and protocols designed to respect family or church privacy that increase the exposure of vulnerable children to physical and sexual abuse.

In the foreword to the PPF, the Taoiseach describes three challenges that faced the social partners at the outset of negotiations, the first of which was “ensuring that everybody can feel the benefit of social partnership...” Three years later, it is clear that great progress has been made towards achieving that objective. Looking forward, we believe that additional progress in this respect can best be facilitated and achieved by including representatives of children’s interests in the process of social partnership and in the discussions towards a new partnership agreement.

Ensuring the Best Interests of Children in Social Partnership: Public Policy Context

Ensuring that the best interests of children are advanced and the voice of children is heard in social partnership is consistent with the principles and goals of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the National Children’s Strategy.

Among the four key principles of the Convention are Article 3, which states that “the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration” in all actions taken concerning children, and Article 12, which obliges State Parties to take into account the views of children on matters which affect them.

These principles are embraced by the National Children’s Strategy, launched by the Government in November 2000 to progress the implementation of the Convention. The Strategy outlines three National Goals, the first of which is “Children will have a voice.”

Fundamental to the National Children’s Strategy is the understanding that the rights and needs of children sometimes require the adoption of policies and initiatives designed specifically for children, and always require the evaluation of the impact on children of policies and initiatives designed for society as a whole.

The National Children’s Strategy also states that all government departments will be required to identify and detail in writing the impact of their policy proposals on children. These child impact statements are designed in part to meet the Strategy’s objective of “keeping children’s issues to the fore in the government decision-making process.”

Bringing a children’s rights perspective to the social partnership process would also comply with the recommendation of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child that Ireland “incorporat[e] the principles and provisions of the Convention [on the Rights of the Child] in a systematic manner in the designing of all its policies and programmes.”

Children’s Rights Alliance: Meeting the Criteria for Inclusion in Social Partnership

As outlined by the Department of the Taoiseach, “the criteria for recognition by Government as Social Partners include that organisations be national and representative in nature, have the capacity to meet the demands and obligations that arise as part of this participation and add to the capacity of the social partnership process to address issues effectively.”

National and Representative

The Children’s Rights Alliance is a national coalition of 72 non-governmental organisations concerned with the rights and welfare of children in Ireland.

The Alliance is the only national federation, network or umbrella body working to promote the interests of children up to the age of 18 across the full spectrum of their rights and needs. Our sole focus is on the rights and needs of children.

The Alliance is a democratic organisation governed by an Executive Committee elected annually by its member organisations at the Alliance’s Annual General Meeting. Membership of the Alliance is open to organisations concerned with the rights and welfare of children and with the implementation in Ireland of the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Objectives and policies are determined by the membership at its Annual General Meeting. The policies, projects and activities of the Alliance are developed through ongoing collaboration and consultation with its members.

The Alliance’s Executive Committee meets on a monthly basis to oversee the development and implementation of the Alliance’s policies. The Chief Executive reports on a monthly basis to the Alliance’s Executive Committee

on all steps taken in relation to its aims and objectives and agreed programme of work. The Executive Committee includes a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson, an Honorary Secretary, an Honorary Treasurer and four Ordinary Members. The strategic and day-to-day management of the Alliance is carried out by its Chief Executive.

The 72 member organisations of the Alliance include both national and local organisations. While most of the national organisations, which make up more than three-quarters of the Alliance's membership, have their headquarters in the Dublin area, they provide services or represent members throughout Ireland. One service provider has offices in 10 counties; an early childhood education association has nearly 2,000 members and 21 branches throughout Ireland. The child advocacy and child protection groups, youth organisations, parent representative groups, family support and advocacy organisations, professional associations of social workers, psychologists, teachers and child care workers all have a national focus and national memberships based throughout the country.

Alliance member organisations have their main offices in the following counties: Dublin, Cork, Galway, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Limerick, Louth, Monaghan, Mayo, Sligo, Wexford and Wicklow.

The focus of the Children's Rights Alliance has been on policy development and implementation primarily at the national level. Since its inception, the Alliance has made policy contributions and submissions relative to virtually every major area of national policy and practice affecting the lives of children in Ireland.

Capacity to Meet Demands and Obligations of Social Partnership and to Add to the Capacity of the Social Partnership Process to Address Issues Effectively

Since its establishment in 1995, the Alliance has demonstrated its capacity to contribute to the development of public policy and the provision of services for children in a manner that has resulted in greater recognition and realisation of children's rights throughout Ireland. With the growth of its membership from an initial group of eleven organisations to its current roster of seventy-two, the Alliance has also developed its capacity to serve as a vehicle for public policy promotion on behalf of a large and diverse range of organisations concerned with the rights and welfare of children.

The Alliance regularly makes submissions to public bodies on a wide range of issues that impact on the lives of children. The value of the Alliance's policy contributions has been recognised by the statutory sector through the numerous invitations that have been extended to the Alliance to serve on a variety of advisory councils, expert panels and national fora including, among others, the following bodies:

- National Children's Advisory Council
- Expert Working Group on Childcare
- Advisory Group to the National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee

- Working Group to Review Child Abuse Guidelines
- National Health Consultative Forum
- National Forum on Early Childhood Education
- Protection of Young Persons Monitoring Group
- Human Rights Commission Advisory Group on Children with Disabilities

The Alliance has also been designated a National Anti-Poverty Network by the Combat Poverty Agency. In addition, the Alliance was chosen to develop and manage the national children's rights awareness campaign by the Department of Health and Children and was selected by Comhairle to develop a Web-based children's rights policy and information project.

The Alliance is routinely invited by government departments and public agencies to make policy submissions on issues that have an impact on children.

To ensure its effective and responsive participation in social partnership, the Alliance would dedicate a substantial portion of the staff time of its Chief Executive and Policy Officer to the process. The Alliance would also establish a Social Partnership Committee consisting of members of its Executive Committee and representatives of its member organisations. The Social Partnership Committee would provide additional policy development expertise on various issues and would reinforce the representative nature of the Alliance's contributions across the entire range of policy matters addressed in social partnership.

The policy development examples listed below demonstrate the proven capacity of the Alliance to make substantive, responsive and effective policy contributions of a national and representative nature across a wide range of issues affecting children:

Children's Rights Alliance Policy Development Capacity and Policy Related Activities	Examples
Making written submissions to statutory bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission to the Constitution Review Group, 1995 • Submission to the Commission on the Family, 1996 • Submission re: Children First Guidelines, 1996 • Submission to the National Forum on Early Childhood Education, 1998 • Submission re: National Children's Strategy, 2000 • Submission re: National Health Strategy, 2001 • Submissions re: National Anti-Poverty Strategy, 2001 • Submission re: National Plan for Women, 2002

<p>Serving on advisory boards, committees and working groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submissions to the Oireachtas re: Ombudsman for Children Bill, 2002 • Submission re: Better Regulation and Regulatory Management, 2002 • Submission re: Equality Authority's Strategic Plan, 2002 • Submission re: School Bus Safety, 2002 • Submission to the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, 2002 • Submission re: Draft Standards on Practices and Procedures in Foster Care
<p>Presenting oral submissions and participating in consultative meetings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Children's Advisory Council, 2001-2002 • Advisory Group to the National Childcare Coordinating Committee, 2001-2002 • Implementation and Advisory Group for the White Paper on Supporting the Community & Voluntary Sector, 2001-2002 • National Health Consultative Forum, 2001-2002 • Human Rights Commission Advisory Group on Children with Disabilities, 2002 • Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment Protection of Young Persons Monitoring Group
<p>Producing policy reports</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testimony in relation to the European Convention on Human Rights Bill 2001 before the Joint Committee of the Oireachtas on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights, 2001 • Testimony in relation to the Children Bill 1999 before the Joint Committee of the Oireachtas on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights, 2000 • Participating in the National Health Consultative Forum, 2001 • Testimony in relation to the European Committee on the Prevention of Torture, 2002 • Participating in the work of the National Children's Advisory Council • Publication of <i>Seen and Heard: Promoting and Protecting Children's Rights in Ireland</i>, 1996 • Publication of <i>Small Voices: Vital Rights</i>, 1997

<p>Reflecting and promoting the goals and policies of member organisations re: children's needs and rights</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of <i>National Children's Strategy, Goals and Commitments</i>, 2001 • Publication of <i>Ending Child Poverty in Rich Countries: What Works?</i>, 2002 • Publication of <i>Hearing Young Voices</i>, 2002 • Incorporating the concerns and objectives of member groups into comprehensive position papers and policy submissions supported by the membership of the Alliance • Public forum on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, 2001 • Letters to Ministers and public statements re: children with educational disabilities, 2001 • Support for member organisations' objectives and recommendations re: asylum-seeking children, play and recreation policy, early childhood education, commercial sexual exploitation of children, human rights commission formation, anti-poverty measures, development education needs, access to health care, housing policy, children's participation, 2001 - 2002
<p>Providing education and training sessions on children's rights</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular educational workshops and seminars for children, young people and professionals working with/for children on children's rights and the UN Convention
<p>Organising conferences and seminars</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosted <i>Once Upon a Future</i> national conference to consider recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child following hearings on Ireland's implementation of UN Convention, 1999 • Convened seminar on National Children's Strategy, 2000 • Co-hosted conferences on child poverty, 2000 and 2001 • Hosted conference <i>Ending Child Poverty: Making the Commitment Real</i>, 2002 • Plans underway for North/South conference on using the principles of and structures arising from the

<p>Assisting member organisations with contributing to policy formation</p>	<p>Good Friday Agreement to promote the realisation of children's rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the alternative NGO report submitted to the UN monitoring committee, providing member groups an additional means of contributing to the development of public policy • Advising and assisting member groups on their policy submissions to the National Children's Strategy and in relation to the work of the National Children's Office • Convening policy meetings with member groups to plan how to contribute effectively to public policy formation • Responding to requests from member groups for policy information • Development and implementation of Alliance website to serve member organisations and to provide a single, accessible source of information on children's rights policies and services for Ireland's children and young people
<p>Adopting policies and advocating for children across a broad spectrum of public policy issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care waiting lists, recommendations of Chief Medical Officer, needs of asylum-seeking children, children's safety concerns, NAPS review, children with educational disabilities, ESRI reports, implementation of Children Act 2001, Ombudsman for Children legislation, homelessness among children, National Children's Strategy, the right of children to be heard, steps to eliminate child poverty, advocacy rights of the disabled, guardian ad litem service, budget policy, children in care, constitutional reform, rights of Traveller children, need for child death review teams, Programme for Government, juvenile justice issues, play and recreation, 2001-2002
<p>Public policy representation and advocacy work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written and oral submissions to public officials and statutory bodies • Regular meetings with government officials to discuss policies and programs affecting children • Letters to ministers and public

	<p>officials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in panel discussions, seminars, workshops, planning meetings and conferences with representatives of statutory bodies and NGOs • Partnership in the <i>Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative</i> to promote policies to secure the elimination of child poverty • Creation of subcommittees and subgroups among members to plan activities, develop programs and formulate agreed positions on public policy matters relevant to the rights and needs of children

Policy Priorities for the Alliance in the next Social Partnership Agreement

The following briefly outlines a number of the policy issues the Alliance would like to see addressed in the course of the discussions towards a new partnership agreement. Greater detail on many of these issues can be found in this submission in the section on Alliance Aims and Objectives.

Child poverty

- Timetable and action plan for achieving the target of eliminating child poverty by 2007
- Recognition that employment-based strategies will not have an impact on the 8% of children remaining in consistent poverty comparable to that experienced by the 16% of children who have left consistent poverty since the mid-1990s
- Introduction of a refundable child tax credit portable across the welfare to work divide
- Child Benefit and the cost of raising a child
- Standardisation of Child Dependant Allowance
- Apparent increases in the depth of relative income child poverty
- Well-being of the child as a measure of poverty and social exclusion
- Material deprivation and social exclusion experienced by asylum seeker children in 'direct provision'
- Recognition of the connection between level of expenditures on public services and level of child poverty
- Recognition of the right of the children not to live in poverty

Children's Health, Safety and Protection

- Implementation of the Health Strategy
- Extension of the Medical Card on a phased basis to all children

- Adoption of protocols and standards in relation to the care of children in hospitals
- Response to recent dramatic rise in alcohol consumption by children and young people
- Need for the immediate introduction of comprehensive employee vetting procedures to ensure the safety of children who come into contact with adult staff
- Expansion of Springboard projects and family support initiatives
- Preparation and implementation of National Injury Prevention Strategy targeted to meet the safety and protection needs of children
- Introduction of Child Death Review teams
- Support for suicide prevention measures
- Implementation of Special Residential Services Board Guidelines for children in special care units
- Protection of children from commercial sexual exploitation
- Implementation of Children First and Duty to Care guidelines
- Response to significant fall in immunisation take-up levels
- Protection of children of ethnic and racial minorities from abuse and harassment

National Children's Strategy and Embedding Children's Rights

- Implementation of the National Children's Strategy
- Development and use of well-being indicators
- Child impact statements in relation to all decisions and actions affecting children
- Development of mechanisms to ensure the views of children are heard in relation to decisions and actions affecting them
- Training in relation to children's rights of all statutory personnel who work with or in connection with children
- Incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into Irish law

Children in Crisis

- Implementation of the Children Act 2001 and introduction of its remaining provisions, including sections covering special care orders, family welfare conferences and private foster care
- Resources to support innovative, community-based early intervention services for children with severe emotional and behavioural problems
- Establishment of a Child Law Unit within the Legal Aid Board
- Implementation of the statutory provisions of the Guardian *ad litem* service
- Resources to support an end to the practice of placing non-offending children in facilities for offenders, of mixing children and adults in detention and of chronically failing to staff social services and facilities serving vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people

Child Friendly Communities

- Timetable and resources to ensure implementation of forthcoming National Play Policy and National Recreation Policy

- Provision of decent accommodation to the approximately 3,000 Traveller children living on the roadside without suitable facilities
- Establishment of national child-friendly standards regarding urban and metropolitan development
- Full implementation of Local Authority Homeless Action Plans
- Plan to achieve an end to the practice of housing families with young children in B&Bs
- Support for community-based services and accommodation for children and young people leaving care
- Emphasis on the well-being of children in childcare and on measures relating to training, vetting, staffing levels and quality standards required to ensure such well-being

Children with Disability

- Recognition of the rights of children with disabilities
- Domiciliary Care Allowance increase reflecting the actual costs of providing support to a disabled child
- Need for additional investment in educational facilities and in residential, day and respite care places and support services for disabled children

Education

- Recognition of the urgent need to address chronic and predictable numbers of early school leavers and children not transferring from primary to secondary level
- Support for programmes addressing educational disadvantage
- Investment in reformed school-meals programme to improve children's health and to encourage participation in education
- Universal pre-school education and childcare provision prioritising children experiencing poverty, including Traveller children, homeless children and asylum seeker children
- Need to match the annual Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance with the actual costs of returning to school

Member Organisations of the Alliance

The membership of the Alliance consists of a diverse range of groups including child advocacy and child protection organisations; children and youth groups; children and family service providers; human rights organisations; academic bodies; groups working in the area of early childhood education; disability organisations; family support and advocacy groups; parent representative organisations; trade unions and professional associations representing teachers, social workers, psychologists and child care workers; anti-poverty organisations; community groups; and others with an interest in children's rights.

In addition to serving on the Executive Committee, member organisations may participate in subcommittees or working groups established to plan, develop and implement the work programme of the Alliance.

There are currently 72 member organisations of the Children's Rights Alliance.

Member Organisations

An Comhchoiste Reamhscolaíochta Teo
Ana Liffey Children's Project
The Ark
Arrupe Society
Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland
Barnardos
Border Counties Childcare Network
Boys Hope Girls Hope Ireland
Children At-Risk in Ireland (CARI Foundation)
Catholic Guides of Ireland
Catholic Youth Care
Cherish
Children in Hospital Ireland
Council for Social Welfare
Crosscare
Dept. of Applied Social Studies, UCC
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
Educate Together
Education Department, UCD
Enable Ireland
Focus Ireland
Foroige National Youth Development Organisation
Home Start Blanchardstown
Irish Association of Care Workers
Irish Association of Hospital Play Staff
Irish Association of Social Workers
Irish Association of Suicidology
Irish Association of Young People in Care
Irish Centre for Human Rights
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Irish Council for Civil Liberties
Irish Foster Care Association
Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Irish Penal Reform Trust
Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association
ISPCC
Irish Traveller Movement
Irish Youth Foundation
Junglebox Childcare Centre
Kids' Own Publishing Partnership
La Leche League of Ireland

Lionra OnLine
 Mary Immaculate College of Education
 The Matt Talbot Community Trust
 The Mothers Union Ireland
 Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth Project
 National Association for Parent Support
 NAMHI (National Association for the Mentally Handicapped of Ireland)
 National Children's Nursery Association
 National Parents Council (Primary)
 National Parents Council (Post Primary)
 National Youth Council of Ireland
 National Youth Federation
 OPEN (One Parent Exchange & Network)
 Parental Equality
 Parentline
 Pavee Point
 Psychological Society of Ireland
 Resident Managers Association
 St. Nicholas Montessori College
 St. Nicholas Montessori Teachers Association
 School of Social Science and Legal Studies, DIT
 Society of St Vincent de Paul Youth Clubs
 Southwest Wexford Community Development Group
 Step by Step Project
 Sugradh
 Tallaght Partnership
 TREOIR
 UNICEF (Irish National Committee)
 Women's Aid
 Youth Initiative in Partnership

Affiliated Member Organisations

Children's Law Centre (Northern Ireland)
 The Bridge Child Care Development Service (UK)

Executive Committee of the Children's Rights Alliance

Chairperson	Liam O'Dwyer	Irish Youth Foundation
Vice-Chairperson	Margaret Burns	Council for Social Welfare
Treasurer	Dr. Frank Flanagan	Mary Immaculate College
Secretary	Hilary Kenny	Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association (IPPA)
Member	Noirin Hayes	School of Social Science And Legal Studies, DIT
Member	Mary O'Connor	Children in Hospital Ireland
Member	Peter McVerry, s.j.	Arrupe Society
Member	Mary Flaherty	Children At Risk in Ireland Foundation (CARI)

Aims and Objectives of the Alliance

The Children's Rights Alliance works to secure the implementation in Ireland of the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ireland.

The following outlines the Alliance's objectives and initiatives for the 2002-2003 period and details some of the activities of the Alliance in relation to its programme of work adopted at the Alliance AGM in October, 2002:

1. Promote compliance with the commitments and goals of the National Children's Strategy.

- Promote action on the full body of commitments and goals detailed in the Strategy
- Monitor compliance with timetables and action plans set forth in the Strategy
- Promote action on all of the Strategy's structural commitments, including the development and use of well-being indicators, child impact statements and mechanisms to enable children's views to be heard in relation to decisions that affect them
- Seek the development of action plans by the National Children's Office for those goals and commitments not accompanied by specific timetables for action
- Collaborate and cooperate with all statutory bodies, NGOs and others working to ensure that the potential of the National Children's Strategy to meet children's needs and safeguard their rights is fully realised
- Continue to consult regularly with the Minister for Children, the Director of the National Children's Office, and all other officials and staff charged with responsibilities to develop and implement the Strategy at national, regional and local levels
- Publish a Progress Report on the implementation of the Strategy
- Make public statements in relation to progress in implementing the Strategy
- Participate actively in the National Children's Advisory Council and promote its functions, including monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Strategy; undertaking and advising on research, including the development of well-being indicators; advising on training; advising on the development of mechanisms to consult with children; advising on improved coordination and delivery of services to children; and advising the Minister for Children on all aspects of children's lives

According to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the General Assembly-elected body with responsibility for monitoring and promoting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a key factor contributing to the slow pace of implementation has been the failure of governments to establish comprehensive national strategies and action plans to ensure full adherence to the rights and obligations detailed in the Convention. Without such plans, progress has been predictably piecemeal and lacking in coherence, often foundering due to a lack of coordination or a

clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the relevant statutory bodies. To address that need, the Children's Rights Alliance made the establishment of a mechanism and plan for coordinating national policy on children a key objective.

The Alliance had decided from its inception that it could make a strategic contribution to the rights and welfare of children in Ireland by involving itself in the monitoring process in relation to the Convention.

Upon the completion of an extensive consultation process with its member organisations, the Alliance submitted its *Small Voices: Vital Rights* report in 1997 to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Alliance's report and subsequent oral presentation to the Committee in 1998 called for a wide range of steps to be taken, including establishing an Office of Ombudsman for Children, promoting awareness of children's rights, incorporating the Convention into the Irish Constitution and domestic law generally, taking further steps to eliminate child poverty and developing a coordinated national policy on children and a national plan for progressing the implementation of the UN Convention.

Following the January 1998 hearing on Ireland's record with respect to children's rights, the Committee published its *Concluding Observations* and noted as its first point of concern that "there is no comprehensive national policy which fully incorporates the principles and provisions of the Convention". Accordingly, the Committee went on to recommend that Ireland "adopt a comprehensive National Strategy for Children, incorporating the principles and provisions of the Convention in a systematic manner in the designing of all its policies and programmes" and "concentrate in a single body the mandate to coordinate and make the appropriate decisions to protect the rights of the child." Other recommendations of the Committee included establishing an Office of Ombudsman for Children, intensifying efforts to eliminate child poverty, promoting awareness of children's rights, and incorporating the provisions of the Convention into the Irish Constitution and domestic law generally – each a key concern and recommendation of the Alliance.

Later that year, at the Alliance's national conference on the *Concluding Observations*, Minister for Health and Children Brian Cowen announced that the Government intended to develop a National Strategy for Children. The Strategy was launched in November 2000 by the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern and Minister for Children Mary Hanafin. Referencing virtually every issue addressed by the UN Committee, the Strategy outlines actions to be taken to "progress the implementation of the Convention" and to improve the lives of children in Ireland.

To assist in the promotion and implementation of the National Children's Strategy, the Alliance prepared and published a summary of the Strategy's goals and commitments. The summary serves as a guide to member organisations of the Alliance, other NGOs and all those in the community and

voluntary sector seeking to ensure that the potential of the Strategy is fully realised.

The Alliance has also met with the Director of the National Children's Office on a frequent and regular basis as part of a collaborative effort to progress implementation of the Strategy and the Convention. The Alliance has emphasised the need for action on a number of issues of importance to its members, including the Office of Ombudsman for Children; children being reared in B&Bs; the need for targets for the elimination of child poverty to be set under NAPS; the need for proper resourcing and comprehensive scope for the National Longitudinal Study on Children; children's rights awareness raising; the training of statutory personnel in children's rights; the development of a National Plan on the commercial sexual exploitation of children; the development of a National Play and Recreation Policy; and children's health care rights and needs, among others.

2. Enable Ireland's first Ombudsman for Children to be a strong, independent and effective champion of children and their rights.

- Continue to advocate for the Ombudsman to be appointed through an open, transparent and consultative process that involves children and the children's NGO sector
- Promote the adequate resourcing of the Office of Ombudsman for Children
- Undertake a review of independent children's rights institutions in other jurisdictions to identify accomplishments and best practices relevant to children in Ireland
- Use this review to suggest initial agenda items for the Ombudsman for Children to consider addressing after taking office
- Continue to work closely with Children's Commissioner advocates in Northern Ireland to ensure that the strongest possible rights protection be afforded to all children in Ireland, North and South, consistent with the rights and equality principles enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement

The Alliance believes that independent children's rights institutions are needed to ensure that children's rights not only be respected in theory, but realised in practice. Since its inception in 1995, the Alliance has campaigned for the establishment of an Ombudsman for Children in Ireland.

Over the past two years, the Alliance continued to press for an independent Office of Ombudsman for Children in Ireland. Upon the publication of the Bill in February 2002, the Alliance analysed the legislation and submitted a package of amendments designed to strengthen the Bill in various respects while continuing to call for passage of the legislation before dissolution of the Dail. Marking a major step forward for children and their rights, the legislation was adopted as one of the last Acts of the 28th Dáil.

Since then the Alliance has advocated for the appointment of the Ombudsman be subject to an open, transparent and consultative process. To ensure that the potential of the legislation is fully realised and that children will have a strong, independent ally to champion their interests, the Alliance is urging that the position of Ombudsman for Children be publicly advertised and

that the selection process involve children and those working in the NGO sector to promote and protect children's rights. Such an approach would be consistent with the UN's Paris Principles, the UN's Handbook on National Human Rights Institutions and the guidelines of the European Network of Ombudsman for Children.

3. Advance the effort to eliminate child poverty in Ireland.

- Carry out the Alliance's work programme as a National Anti-Poverty Network
- Establish and launch the *End Child Poverty Coalition* as a successor partnership to the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative*
- Promote awareness and implementation of the commitment in the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy to end child poverty by the target date of 2007
- Promote implementation of the National Children's Strategy commitment, "*Children will be provided the financial supports necessary to eliminate child poverty*"
- Publish and distribute proceedings of the "Ending Child Poverty: Making the Commitment Real" conference
- Act as a catalyst and resource for anti-poverty work among member organisations in accordance with Alliance's responsibilities as a designated National Anti-Poverty Network
- Assist in developing the capacity of children and young people experiencing poverty to represent themselves at policy levels
- Publish pre-budget submissions on behalf of the *Coalition*
- Promote the extension of the Medical Card to all children

Since its inception, the Alliance has sought to raise awareness of child poverty in Ireland and to advocate for measures to seek its eradication. It has done this through written submissions, oral presentations, working groups, news articles and reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. In its current Strategic Plan the Alliance identifies working towards the reform and improvement of policies affecting children who are poor, disadvantaged or otherwise marginalised as one of its main objectives.

In 2001, the Children's Rights Alliance was selected by the Combat Poverty Agency to be one of three new National Anti-Poverty Networks. The Networks are being funded under a national programme to support anti-poverty work. The programme is aimed at organisations which include a broad range of groups representative of people experiencing or at risk of poverty and organisations which are seeking to prevent and eradicate poverty in Ireland. A copy of the Alliance's National Anti-Poverty Network Programme 2002 is included with this submission.

For the past three years, the Alliance has participated in the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative* along with its partner organisations. The aim of the *Initiative* is to promote greater awareness of child poverty and to advocate for changes in public policy that would contribute to the prevention, reduction and eventual elimination of child poverty.

The *Initiative* was initially established in 1999 as a two-year programme to address child poverty in Ireland. The Alliance was one of five initial participating organisations in the *Initiative*, along with Barnardo's, Combat Poverty Agency, National Youth Council of Ireland and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Three additional organisations subsequently joined the *Initiative*: Focus Ireland, Pavee Point and People with Disabilities in Ireland.

During 2001-2002, the Alliance intensified its involvement and participation in the *Initiative*. Over the past year, the Alliance pursued these aims through a number of *Initiative* activities, including:

- producing a Pre-Budget submission
- preparing a radio advertisement campaign aimed at raising awareness of child poverty
- holding a conference in July 2001 on the review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS)
- hosting a conference in April 2002 entitled "Ending Child Poverty: Making the Commitment Real"
- launching a major international study on child poverty, *Ending Child Poverty in Rich Countries: What Works?*
- making a series of submissions to the various working groups undertaking the review of NAPS National Anti-Poverty Network
- managing several research projects
- issuing press releases and making comment to the media on the above activities and on the issue of child poverty

National Anti-Poverty Strategy Submissions. In March 2001, following a call for submissions in relation to the review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, as provided for under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF), the Alliance forwarded submissions to the six Working Groups established as part of the NAPS review. In conjunction with its partners in the *Initiative*, the Alliance also provided to the NAPS Working Groups a submission entitled *Setting Targets in NAPS*. These submissions outlined a comprehensive plan of action designed to achieve the elimination of child poverty in accordance with a measurable timetable including specific targets.

Ending Child Poverty in Rich Countries Research Report. In April 2002, the Alliance published a research study on child poverty undertaken by Dr. John Sweeney, a Lecturer and an economic and social research consultant based at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. The report, *Ending Child Poverty in Rich Countries: What Works?* examines the experiences of rich countries in reducing child poverty in households both in and out of employment. The study focuses on the key features of public policies that have contributed to lowering rates of child poverty.

Ending Child Poverty Conference. In April 2002, the Alliance hosted a conference entitled *Ending Child Poverty: Making the Commitment Real*. The conference launched new research into the causes of widely varying rates of child poverty in rich nations at a comparable stage of economic development; examined what can be learned from the experiences of other European countries; and looked at actions and policies required to implement the

commitment to eliminate child poverty made in the the National Children's Strategy and the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The day-long conference was attended by more than 175 policy makers, researchers, advocates and practitioners working to reduce poverty among children.

4. Enable children's views to be heard in relation to issues that affect them.

- Launch and distribute *Hearing Young Voices* research study on children's participation in decision making and on models for meaningful consultation with children
- Develop and distribute resource materials and guidelines for NGOs, including small organisations, for promoting participation by children
- Promote the development of children's participation training materials for policy makers whose decisions have a significant impact upon the lives of children and young people
- Promote the training of professionals and statutory staff who work with children to develop a deeper understanding of children's rights and a greater capacity to consult with children regarding matters that affect them

Hearing Children's Voices. Over the past year, the Alliance in conjunction with the National Youth Council of Ireland has been undertaking a research project focused on identifying principles and models of good practice for consulting with children and young people in relation to public policy development. Particular attention has been given to the challenge of enabling children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion to be heard. To fulfil this aim, the researchers undertook a substantial literature review, surveyed 124 relevant policy-makers and practitioners, conducted face-to-face interviews with ten policy-makers and practitioners, and consulted with over sixty children and young people aged between 7 and 18 years.

In September 2002, the Alliance and the Youth Council launched this report, entitled *Hearing Young Voices*. In addition to the study, a range of targeted good practice guidelines on consulting children and young people in relation to public policy developments affecting them in Ireland will be published. The research study and good practice guidelines aim to progress the creation of meaningful, equitable and sustainable opportunities for children and young people to be heard at the level of public policy. These materials are designed to assist statutory agencies and NGOs whose work impacts on children and young people with efforts designed to provide opportunities for children and young people to be heard.

5. Promote awareness and understanding of the Convention and training in children's rights for relevant statutory personnel.

- Develop the Children's Rights Information Centre portion of the Alliance's website
- Launch the Alliance's website, www.childrensrights.ie
- Hold workshops and seminars on children's rights

- Disseminate information and printed materials on children's rights and the UN Convention
- Ensure awareness raising efforts are targeted appropriately to reach children and young people; policymakers; professionals and statutory staff who work with children and young people; parents and other adults
- Develop a plan and timetable for action in relation to children's rights training for statutory personnel who work with or in connection with children
- Conduct second phase of awareness raising campaign on children's rights and the UN Convention

Children's Rights Training. In its *Concluding Observations*, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasised the importance of ensuring that all staff who provide services to or work with children have a thorough understanding of the Convention and its attendant rights and obligations. In consultation with its member organisations, and in conjunction with a third-level institution, the Alliance is now designing a training initiative based on its own work in this area, on experiences in Northern Ireland and on training programmes developed internationally. The training will be specifically tailored to the personnel identified by the UN Committee as having a particular need for such training.

Awareness campaign. The second phase of the children's rights awareness raising campaign will build on the first phase of the Alliance's campaign, conducted in 1999-2000, which focused on generating awareness of the existence of the UN Convention. Its elements included: a television commercial broadcast on the national television channels, RTE1, Network 2, TV3; an Irish version of the television commercial broadcast on TG4; a screening of the commercial in cinemas throughout the country over the Christmas period; a two-minute info-commercial (video) on the Convention designed for children; a low-call, information phone line providing information on the Convention; and leaflets for adults and children.

The elements of the second phase of the campaign will include broadcast and print materials and will aim to develop a broader awareness and deeper understanding of children's rights among the general public, policy-makers and those who work with children and young people.

Workshops. The Alliance will continue to conduct its series of workshops and seminars on children's rights for adults, young people and children. Through presentations, large and small group discussions, brainstorming exercises, moving debates, artwork, mime and other activities, workshop participant develop their knowledge of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and explored key questions, including: What is a child? What are rights? Why has a special body of rights been created for children? What is the relationship between rights and responsibilities? While most seminars and workshops address children's rights and children's rights issues in Ireland in general terms, some are designed to explore specific themes such as children's participation rights. Each workshop and seminar provides participants, many of whom are drawn from the Alliance's member

organisations, an opportunity to bring children's rights back home to their daily experiences and practices. In addition, all workshops and seminars since the launch of National Children's Strategy in November 2000 are used to raise awareness of the Strategy and how the participants might contribute to its implementation.

Children's rights website. Over the past year the Alliance has been designing and developing a major information project: the creation of a Children's Rights Alliance website that will be the online source of information on the rights of children in Ireland. The site, www.childrensrights.ie, will be designed to provide children, young people, their parents or guardians and professionals working with or for children with current, comprehensive, concise and age-appropriate information on children's rights, entitlements and services in Ireland.

In November 2001, the Alliance received approval from Comhairle for a grant to support the development of the website as a rights, entitlements and services informational tool for use by children, young people and their parents or guardians. The website will be developed in a manner designed to overcome another major shortfall in existing information on children's rights and services – its limited accessibility arising from presentation in formats or terms that do not accommodate the diverse needs of those who may require the information. By providing essential information, the site will also communicate what remains a key message given continuing low levels of awareness of children's rights: specifically, that all children have a wide range of rights that entitle them to have their needs met through the provision of appropriate services and supports.

In conducting these awareness-raising efforts, the Alliance assists the Government with implementing a recommendation by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child that the State “develop a systematic information campaign on children's rights for children and adults alike” and a related commitment under Goal One of the National Children's Strategy to “ensure that children are made aware of their rights and responsibilities”.

6. Prepare the Alliance's Second Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

- Offer to consult with Government in relation to preparation of the Second National Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child
- Design timetable and framework for internal consultation with membership of the Alliance in relation to both the Government's and the Alliance's reports to the Committee
- Establish Alliance working committees to assist with the drafting of the Alliance report
- Consult with membership of the Alliance to identify and prioritise substantive issues relating to the implementation of the Convention
- Examine Ireland's compliance with the Committee's *Concluding Observations*
- Circulate draft Alliance report to membership for approval

- Publish and submit the Alliance's report following publication and submission of the Government's Second National Report

To support improvements in the lives of children across the full range of needs and rights addressed by the Convention, the Alliance has involved itself in the process of monitoring Ireland's progress in fulfilling its obligations under the Convention.

Following a year-long consultation with its member organisations, in 1997 the Alliance forwarded a submission, *Small Voices: Vital Rights*, to the UN Committee. The submission represented the views of the Alliance on how Irish law, policy and practice complied with the principles and provisions of the Convention and identified the further measures considered necessary to ensure compliance.

On the basis of this submission, the Alliance was invited to participate in the pre-sessional meeting of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in October 1997. The aims of this meeting were to undertake a preliminary review of the *First National Report of Ireland on the Implementation of the Convention* and to identify the main issues to be raised with the Government delegation during the plenary hearing. The Alliance's presentation to the UN Committee drew particular attention to a number of issues raised in *Small Voices: Vital Rights*, including the need for a national coordinating mechanism for policy on children; children's rights awareness raising; an Office of Ombudsman for Children; attention to the rights and needs of Traveller children and children from other cultural, ethnic and racial minorities; children's health care, educational and housing rights; play and recreational rights; and the urgent need for additional actions designed to eliminate child poverty.

Representatives of the Alliance attended and gave testimony to the plenary hearing of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child which took place in January 1998.

Following the hearing, the UN Committee issued its findings and recommendations in its *Concluding Observations*. The Committee included in its findings and recommendations the key issues and concerns raised by the Alliance.

The UN Committee will focus on progress made in relation to each of its recommendations when it considers the Second National Report of Ireland in 2004. The recommendations will provide a significant benchmark against which to measure Ireland's progress with regard to implementing the Convention.

7. Incorporate into Irish law the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- Responding to the request of the Minister for Children, submit proposals for incorporating the Convention into Irish law

- Hold conference to focus attention on the proposals and on their importance
 - Use the impending incorporation into Irish law of the European Convention on Human Rights to build support for incorporation of the UN Convention
- 8. Protect the rights of children in the care and juvenile justice systems.**
- Promote adoption of the comprehensive package of children's rights recommendations put forward by the Alliance and submitted to the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Degrading or Inhuman Treatment or Punishment during the Committee's May 2002 visit to Ireland
 - Continue to oppose the opening of the new children's prison wing
 - Support the accelerated introduction of those sections of the Children Act, 2001 not yet in force

Juvenile Justice. In May 2002, in response to an invitation from the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Punishment, the Alliance made a written submission and gave oral testimony to the Committee. The Alliance's submission focused on the implementation of the Children Act 2001; the proposed children's prison wing for 14 and 15 year olds; the need for safeguards in relation to Special Care Orders; the conditions of detention for non-offending children; the rights of children in detention; staffing issues; and the commingling of children in the child care and juvenile justice systems.

The Alliance made a number of recommendations, including the following:

- Abandon plans to open a children's prison wing
- End the practice of placing non-offending children in facilities for offenders
- End the practice of mixing children and adults in detention
- Bring into force the remaining provisions of the Children Act 2001, including sections covering special care orders, family welfare conferences and private foster care
- Implement statutory provisions regarding the Guardian *ad Litem* service
- Implement the guidelines of the Special Residential Services Board
- Ensure that all staff who work with children are fully trained in children's rights
- Appoint an Inspector of Children Detention Schools
- Fill vacancies in the child care and social work service
- Ensure that all children in detention are informed of their rights

9. Protect and promote children's rights as opportunities and challenges arise.

- Submit policy proposals to statutory bodies on matters relating to children's rights and needs
- Accept invitations to participate in advisory bodies or in consultations with statutory bodies on matters relating to children's rights and needs

- Correspond with public officials in support of children's rights
- Issue public statements in response to threats to children's rights
- Support the rights of all children, including children with disabilities, Traveller children and Irish-born children of non-nationals
- Collaborate with the Human Rights Commission on children's rights

Examples of actions taken by the Alliance in this regard include the following:

Commercial sexual exploitation. In 2000, the Alliance wrote to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform urging the Government to develop a National Plan of Action to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children in accordance with the Stockholm Agenda for Action.

In January 2001, the Alliance addressed a public meeting in the Mansion House on combating child prostitution, pornography and trafficking of children. The meeting was organised by the international organisation ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking).

Disability. In March 2001, the Alliance wrote to the Minister of Education and Science urging the Government to withdraw its appeal of the High Court decision requiring the State to provide free primary education to Jamie Sinnott and to award damages to both Jamie and his mother Kathryn. The Alliance also called upon the Government to recognise its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Irish Constitution to respect Jamie Sinnott's right to education, and to take appropriate steps to ensure a quality education is made available to all children, including those with intellectual and physical disabilities.

In conjunction with a national disability organisation, the Alliance has begun to discuss the development of an educational initiative to address the needs and rights of children and young people with educational disabilities. The Alliance intends to develop this project during 2002 in a manner that will complement and advance the work being undertaken in this area by a wide range of disability rights and service organisations.

European Convention on Human Rights. In June 2001, the Chief Executive testified before the Joint Committee of the Oireachtas on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights on the European Convention on Human Rights Bill, 2001. The Committee was urged to incorporate the Convention into Irish law but to do so in a manner that would give the ECHR the full force of Irish law. Emphasis was placed on the importance of establishing a good precedent for the future incorporation of other international human rights instruments, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Asylum-seeking children. In November 2001, the Alliance called for action to be taken to correct the violations of children's rights identified in the report *Beyond the Pale* which documents the living conditions of dispersed asylum-seeking children in Ireland. The Alliance called for an end to material deprivation among asylum-seeking children, for their basic rights to be

respected and for attention to be given to their specific needs in the development of the National Play and Recreation Policy.

Early childhood education. In March 1998, the Alliance made a presentation to the National Forum on Early Childhood Education highlighting the concerns of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child with regard to disparities in access to education. The Committee noted “with concern the difficulties still faced by children from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including Traveller children, children from poor families and refugee children, as to the enjoyment of their fundamental rights, including access to education [...]” In its presentation, the Alliance recommended that active measures be taken to ensure that all children have equal educational opportunities.

Childcare. Throughout 1998, the Alliance participated in the Expert Working Group on Childcare emphasising the importance of the rights of the child as a fundamental framework for the work of the Working Group in drawing up a National Childcare Strategy and asserting that all children should have equality of access to and participation in quality childcare.

Since March 2001 the Alliance has participated in the new Advisory Group to the National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee established under the aegis of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The National Committee was established in 2000 to oversee the development of a childcare infrastructure in Ireland. The purpose of the Advisory Group is to proof the work of the Committee in relation to children with special requirements and ethnic minority children, including Travellers.

Irish-born children and deportation. In March 2002, the Alliance raised the issue of the rights of Irish-born children in the context of proposals to deport their non-national parents. The Alliance noted that a number of the rights enjoyed by these children under both the UN Convention and the Irish Constitution would be placed in serious jeopardy if their parents were to be deported. The Alliance called on the Minister for Justice to put on hold deportation efforts and policy changes in this area until the Government could explain what will happen to the Irish children left behind and how their rights will be vindicated if they are taken out of the country by their deported parents.

Testimony in relation to Children Act 2001. In December 2000, the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, and Women’s Rights invited four organisations, including the Children’s Rights Alliance, to make oral presentations in relation to the Children Bill 1999, which has since become the Children’s Act 2001.

Testifying before the Joint Committee, the Alliance’s Chairperson commented on the Bill from the perspective of the requirements of the UN Convention, specifically as it relates, firstly, to the framework for the development of the juvenile justice system; secondly, to protecting children against persons who have custody, charge or care of children; and thirdly, to family welfare

conferences and other new provisions for dealing with out of control non-offending children.

Five Steps for Children. In May 2002, the Alliance urged the Taoiseach to put children first on the agenda of the incoming Government by taking five steps to promote and protect children's rights:

- Make the appointment of the first Ombudsman for Children subject to an open and consultative process
- Establish an expert panel to review child deaths resulting from violent assaults
- Insist that the views of children be considered by members of Cabinet prior to the adoption of public policies affecting children
- Abandon plans to open a new prison wing for children ages 14 to 15.
- Incorporate into Irish law the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Health care rights of children. In May 2001, the Alliance made a submission in relation to the new National Health Strategy. The Alliance drew attention to article 24 of the Convention which asserts the 'right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health'. Emphasis was placed on the need to extend the medical card to children and to eliminate the waiting lists that some children are forced to endure while others with private insurance enjoy prompt and unrestricted access to medical care when it is needed. The submission also focused on key issues including provision, health promotion, equity, access, and the broad spectrum of children's health needs.

Throughout 2001, the Alliance's Chief Executive actively participated in the National Health Consultative Forum and prepared an additional submission focusing on the issues of equity, access and diversity in the health and health-related services.

In addition, the Alliance made written submissions to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group on Health and to Minister of Finance Charlie McCreevy and issued public statements relating to specific instances involving the health care rights of children.

In September 2001, the Alliance publicly endorsed the Chief Medical Officer's proposal to consider providing free medical care to children, and reiterated its call to the Government to adopt the reform in its new National Health Strategy and in the Budget for 2002.

Special Reports project. In 2003, the Alliance will begin publishing a series of Special Reports on public policy topics of critical importance to children and to the Alliance's member organisations. Designed to supplement the oral and written policy submissions regularly made by the Alliance, these Reports will focus on matters that need to be publicly addressed to support the work of

member organisations, promote the development of important public policy, progress the initiatives of the National Children's Strategy and promote the implementation of the UN Convention.

Among the topics under consideration for inclusion in this series of reports are the following:

- Children's rights charters for health care providers
- Preventing accident-related child injuries and deaths
- Identifying the key features of a "child-friendly" community
- Designing child impact statements that make a difference
- Helping children and young people to avoid tobacco addiction: What works?
- Disability and education: The fundamental design features of a model school
- Implementing the Children Act 2001: Challenges and opportunities
- Protecting the rights of young children in B&Bs
- Improving child nutrition through free school meals programmes
- Promoting children's rights in an All-Ireland Charter of Rights
- Incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into Irish domestic law

10. Develop and strengthen the Alliance.

- Involve membership in Alliance initiatives and campaigns
- Consult membership in relation to the Alliance's Strategic Plan, pre-budget submission and policy submissions
- Develop a new three-year Strategic Plan for the Alliance
- Increase membership in preparation for the Alliance's report and presentation to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in relation to Ireland's performance in implementing the Convention
- Expand Alliance capacity to make policy submissions and interventions, to respond promptly to children's rights issues as they arise and to conduct multiple, simultaneous campaigns
- Secure additional core and project funding to enable the Alliance to undertake its planned initiatives and activities