



Submission to the Select Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights in relation to the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill 2008

April 2008

The Children's Rights Alliance, a coalition of over 80 NGOs working to secure the rights and needs of children in Ireland, welcomes the opportunity to submit its observations on the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill 2008, to the Select Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights.

The Alliance welcomes several aspects of the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill 2008, however, it has serious concerns about the negative impact of several of the proposed provisions and omissions from the Bill on children. The Bill is a key legislative development in the area of children's rights and child protection that has the potential to greatly impact on the lives of non-Irish citizen children, in particular separated children. It also has the potential to further the implementation in Ireland of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Ireland ratified in 1992.¹ Essentially, the Alliance is calling for children to be made visible within the Bill.

The Alliance will confine its observations to highlight a number of key omissions from the Bill and then put forward recommendations in relation to five areas where we believe the Bill can, and should, be strengthened to ensure that children's rights are upheld and that essential child protection measures are put in place.

In addition, the Alliance supports the recommendations made in relation to the Bill by our partners in the *Action for Separated Children in Ireland* – namely, Barnardos, the Irish Refugee Council and the ISPC. This submission is not exhaustive.² The Alliance's policy in relation to migrant children can be found in *From Rhetoric to Rights: Second Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child* (2006).³

Summary of Recommendations

- The best interests of the child must be the primary consideration in all decisions.
- Separated children should be provided with a Guardian on identification.
- Reform the legislation and practice governing the care of separated, including providing temporary permission to remain for children in a legal limbo.
- Uphold the child's right to family life through additional family reunification provisions.
- Implement measure to protect children at risk of trafficking and support victims.
- Child must not be detained for reasons related to their immigration status.
- Children must have an individual right to seek asylum
- Children must not be denied access to public services
- Humanitarian considerations must be a criteria when seeking protection

1 *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>.

2 *Action for Separated Children in Ireland* is a forum uniting the campaigning efforts of Barnardos, the Children's Rights Alliance, the Irish Refugee Council and the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

3 Children's Rights Alliance (2006) *From Rhetoric to Rights: Second Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child*, Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance. The report can be downloaded from www.childrensrights.ie

Key Omissions from the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, 2008

Best Interests

In line with Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Bill should include a provision that the principle of the best interests of the child be the primary consideration in all decisions that impact on a child. The inclusion of such a provision will ensure that children are treated as children first and migrants second.

Right to be Heard

Under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child a child has a right to have their views taken into account, in any matter affecting him or her, in accordance with his or her age and maturity. Separated children face a series of distinct challenges within the protection process. There is a need to provide a mechanism to independently represent, aid and assist separated children in the care of the Health Service Executive (HSE). The Bill should provide for the appointment of a Guardian to each separated child on identification. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child provided authoritative guidance on the role of such guardians in its General Recommendation No. 6.⁴

Separated Children (see also page 9)

Current legislative provision for identifying, protecting and supporting separated children is wholly inadequate. The Bill offers an opportunity to ameliorate this situation. The Bill should adopt a definition of separated children in line with the SCEP *Statement of Good Practice*⁵; it should provide identification and age determination mechanisms in line with international best practice, and provisions on family reunification and tracing, guardianship, treatment and care and best interests determination.

Legal Limbo: Sections 24(6) and S.73(9)-(11) allow for a HSE employee to decide whether a protection application should be made on behalf of a separated child. Such a decision should be made by an independent Guardian appointed on the arrival/identification of the separated child. In instances where an application is not made, the child remains in a legal limbo: he/she has no legal status, may not have any identity papers, and it is unclear what will happen when the child reaches 18 years. The Bill should grant such children temporary permission to remain while their situation is being assessed.

Family Reunification

Family is central to the world of a child. Children have a right to family life through family reunification under Article 10 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Bill should provide migrants with the right to family reunification; and establish an independent appeals mechanism. Furthermore, it should provide a statutory entitlement for children granted refugee status to apply to be reunited with their siblings or other relatives as appropriate (in addition to their parents). The Bill should address the recommendations to Ireland of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to:

*(a) Consider reviewing the definition of family in the Refugee Act of 1996 to better correspond to the developing understanding of the family; (b) Consider establishing a legal framework for family reunification outside situations under the Refugee Act; and (c) Ensure that the principle of the best interests of the child is always a primary consideration when making decisions involving children under any legal or administrative procedures.*⁶

4 The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child provided authoritative guidance on the role of such guardians in its (2005) *General Recommendation No. 6 on the Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children outside Their Country of Origin*.

5 UNHCR and Save the Children, Separated Children in Europe Programme (2004) *Statement of Good Practice*, Third Edition, Copenhagen and Geneva.

6 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006), *Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Ireland*. U.N. Doc. CRC/C/IRL/CO/2.

Key Recommendations on the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, 2008

1. Children must be protected from Trafficking

Unfortunately, child trafficking is a reality in Ireland. The trafficking of children is, however, not an inevitable event and measures can be put in place to identify, prevent and protect those at risk of trafficking and to support victims. The Alliance believes the current draft of the Bill is a missed opportunity to address the specific vulnerability of child victims of trafficking and to put in place effective protections.

Recommendations

- *Responsible Adult:* Amend Section 24(1)(b) to *require* verification that adults accompanying children are in fact *authorised* to take responsibility for the child concerned. The current provision is too weak; it only provides that an officer *may* require the person to verify that he or she is taking responsibility for a child. The provision must be strengthened to empower immigration officers to undertake an assessment to satisfy that the individual accompanying the child, who is not the parent or legal guardian of the child, is acting in the best interests of the child.
- *Residency:* Grant all child victims of trafficking renewable temporary residency on humanitarian grounds, regardless of whether the child is able or willing to co-operate with the authorities in relation to the investigation and prosecution of their traffickers. Article 39 of the UN Convention provides that all necessary steps be taken to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim (who has experienced any form of abuse). This right is not subject to a child's ability or willingness to assist with prosecutorial matters. Decisions regarding the granting and renewal of such residency should be made in the best interest and safety of the child. A child victim must be allowed to remain legally in Ireland while they recover from their experience, which is likely to have been traumatic.
- *Role of the HSE:* Despite numerous references to notification being made to the HSE in relation to a separated child, the Bill fails to identify the HSE's statutory responsibilities in relation to the child. At present, separated children may be taken into care under either Section 4 or 5 of the Child Care Act, 1991 (depending on which area of the HSE they reside).⁷ Any provision or amendment to the 1991 Act must ensure that separated children are provided with the same protection and entitlements as other children in State care.
- *International Standards:* Put in place measures to facilitate the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Actions against Trafficking in Human Beings, which Ireland signed in April 2007; and the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, which Ireland signed in September 2000.⁸
- *Expand Proposed Provisions:* Extend the provisions relating to victims of trafficking (S.124) to include EU/EAA nationals. Extend the recovery and reflection period (S.124) from 45 days to six months with the possibility of an extension in appropriate cases.

⁷ Child Care Act, 1991; Section 4 is a voluntary care order and places responsibility on the HSE for the care needs of these children. Section 5, however, is an order made in respect of children who are homeless and provides merely for the child's accommodation needs. Section 5 does not offer appropriate legislative protection and support, and should not be used in relation to separated children.

⁸ Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and its Explanatory report http://www.coe.int/T/E/human_rights/trafficking/PDF_Conv_197_Trafficking_E.pdf (accessed 07/04/08) and Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/protocolchild.htm> (accessed 07/04/08)

2. Child must not be detained for reasons related to their immigration status

The Alliance is concerned that the increased powers of detention, contained in the Bill, create the possibility that a child could be arrested and detained while seeking protection.

Detention pending removal from the State: Section 55 provides for the arrest and detention of foreign nationals for the purpose of their removal from the State. While S.58 states that this provision does not apply to a person under 18, this exemption from detention does not apply where a child has failed to comply with the conditions set out in S.56(1) (a)-(c). One or more of these conditions can be imposed on a child pending their removal from the State. Where one of these conditions is breached, such as reporting to a Garda Station at specified intervals, or remaining in a place specified in the direction given, the young person can be detained. These are onerous conditions to place on a child, particularly given the additional language and cultural barriers that may exist, and detention is a disproportionate response for failure to comply with such conditions. There is no maximum period of detention specified in relation to this section. Furthermore, S.60(2) provides that a parent may be liable for reasonable expenses incurred in the minor's detention, accommodation, removal and maintenance while being detained and removed.

Separation of Families: Under Section 58(3) if a parent or guardian is detained under S.55, the HSE will be informed as soon as practicable. Clarity is needed to how children will be cared for in circumstances where their parents/guardians are detained. Are children to be separated from their family and taken into State care or detained by immigration officials? Will the absence of an out-of-hours social work service increase the possibility that a child may be detained before the HSE can be notified? How will this provision impact on the principle of family unity and the right of the child to the care and company of his or her parents? Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will" unless such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child.

Children applying for protection: Under S.70(1) children can be detained where it is not practicable to issue them with a protection application entry permit. Section 71(3)(a) states that such persons will be detained in a prescribed place, being a prison or other place of lawful detention in the charge of a Governor, an immigration officer or member of the Garda Síochána.

Section 71(7) states that children are excluded from the provisions relating to the arrest and detention of foreign nationals in certain circumstances which are specified in section 71(1). However, if their parents are detained under this section, section 71(9) states that where a person under 18 years is in the parental custody of a foreign national detained under this section, the immigration officer is required to inform the HSE without delay. Due to the inadequacies of our current social work out-of-hours services, this leaves open the possibility of children being detained in such circumstances.

The Bill places no time limits on this period of detention nor does it provide a right to challenge such detention. Such detention would be a violation of Article 37 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which holds that detention must "be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time"; and of Article 3, the best interest principle. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has stated that "separated children should not, as a general rule, be detained" and that "Detention cannot be justified solely on the basis of the child being unaccompanied or separated, or on their migratory or residence status, or lack thereof."⁹

⁹ UNHCR, (2005), *General Comment No. 6 on Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children outside their Country of Origin*. [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(symbol\)/CRC.GC.2005.6.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(symbol)/CRC.GC.2005.6.En?OpenDocument)

Furthermore, the Guidelines of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recommends that “minors who are asylum seekers should not be detained”; and that detention “should not be used as a punitive or disciplinary measure” for failure to comply “with administrative requirements” or breach of reception centre, refugee camp or other institutional restrictions.¹⁰

The Alliance holds that it is unacceptable to detain a child seeking protection for immigration related reasons and calls for alternatives to detention to be found. If detention is to take place, it must meet the requirements of necessity and proportionality. Furthermore, a child should not be detained in a prison or Garda station but in a centre with appropriate facilities for children and their families.

Recommendations

- Exclude children from the powers of detention under Section 70(1) - (3) and Section 56(1)(a) - (c).
- Delete S.60(2) which provides that a parent may be liable for reasonable expenses incurred in the minor’s detention, accommodation, removal and maintenance while being detained and removed.
- Include a provision in the Bill that the detention of children will be avoided and where used will only be used as a measure of last resort. Where such detention cannot be avoided, the Bill should further specify that it will be for the shortest possible period of time and will be subject to prompt review. The Bill should provide for detention facilities which are appropriate for children who are seeking protection.

3. Children must have an individual right to seek asylum

The Bill provides that an application for protection of a parent with dependant children will be deemed to be made on behalf of all the dependant children under 18 years, “whether present in the State at the time of the making of the application or born or arriving in the State subsequently” (S.73 (13)).

Every individual, including a child, has a right to seek asylum under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees or the 1967 Protocol, and should not be removed from the State until their individual protection claim has been assessed. A child’s refugee application should be determined in accordance with the principle of family unity, which “operates in favour of dependants, and not against them”.¹¹ The UNHCR has stated that where “the head of the family is not a refugee, there is nothing to prevent any one of his dependants, if they can invoke reasons on their own account, from applying for recognition as refugees.”¹²

A child may have individual grounds, apart from those of their parents, upon which to seek protection. These grounds may include “acts [of persecution] of a gender-specific or child-specific nature”, as provided for under S.64 (2)(f).¹³ Furthermore, as this provision applies to children who subsequently join their parents in Ireland, it may be the case that the child has experienced

10 UNHCR, (1999) *Revised Guidelines on Applicable Criteria and Standards relating to the Detention of Asylum Seekers*, <http://www.unhcr.org.au/pdfs/detentionguidelines.pdf> (accessed 07/04/08)

11 UNHCR, (1992), *Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees*, HCR/IP/4/Eng/REV.1 Reedited, Geneva, January 1992, UNHCR 1979. Para. 182 - 188.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Examples of child and gender specific forms of persecution may include force recruitment of children to armed services or female genital mutilation.

additional persecution following their parents' departure from their country of origin. It is essential that these experiences are taken into account.

This provision appears to go against the 2007 Supreme Court decision in *A.N. & ors - v – Minister for Justice & Anor* in which the deportation orders in respect of a mother and her five children were found to be invalid.¹⁴ The court found that although the Minister had correctly considered and refused the application of the mother, the decision did not apply to her dependent children and a deportation order could thereby not be executed as the basis on which the Minister was deporting the minors did not exist. At no stage in the asylum process was reference made to applications on behalf of the children. Taking guidance from the UNHCR Handbook, the court held that, under the principle of family unity, if the head of a family meets the criteria of the definition of refugee, his dependants are normally granted refugee status. However, if this application is unsuccessful, the minor is entitled to apply for refugee status based on his/her own circumstances and reasons. The Supreme Court held that the principle of family unity operates for the benefit of the minor and not against him.

Recommendation

- Delete Section 73(13) to ensure that each child has the right to seek asylum.

4. Children must not be denied access to public services, regardless of their or their parents; legal status

Section 6 of the Bill provides that any person who is unlawfully present (undocumented) in the State is not entitled to any services or benefits provided by a Minister of Government, a local authority, the HSE or other bodies. These provisions will have a particularly damaging effect on children who may find that they or their parents become unlawfully present in the State. All foreign nationals, regardless of their status, should be entitled to access public services and essential benefits without discrimination. The idea that a foreign national, who can become unlawfully resident in the State for a variety of reasons, would not have access to essential public services and financial support is extremely worrying and is a particularly draconian measure in relation to children. For example, under the Bill, a child may be denied access to a social worker, to legal aid in circumstances where there is domestic violence or abuse, or to seeking information or assistance from public bodies such as the Ombudsman for Children or the Human Rights Commission. Furthermore, access to free medical treatment will be denied unless it is essential and the parents of the child are deemed not to have sufficient funds to pay for such treatment.

Exceptions in relation to the restricted access to public services

The exceptions to this restriction in the Bill are very limited and are also means tested so that such persons will only be able to access very limited services. If implemented, this provision would necessitate bodies, such as schools and A&E departments, to means test children: this is an inappropriate and unworkable proposal.

Public Education: There is an exception in relation to access to public education for children under sixteen, but only where their parents are deemed to have insufficient funds to pay for such education. This will require schools to take on the new, and additional, role of determining whether a child of a foreign national is residing unlawfully in the State and whether the parents have sufficient resources to pay for the child's education. This is a breach of the right to education and contradicts the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the provisions of the Equal Status Act 2000,

¹⁴ [2007] IESC 44.

Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This provision is also in contravention of the freedom from discrimination provision under Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and could also breach the non-discrimination provision of the ECHR on grounds that it is not a proportionate interference with the right to education under Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the ECHR.¹⁵

Medical Care: There is also an exception in relation to essential medical care and to medical and other services necessary for the protection of public health. However, the fact that this is limited to essential medical services only and that the means test clause also applies to this exception has serious implications for children who may be in need of medical care. It could also create a climate of fear whereby foreign national parents may be reluctant to seek medical treatment for their child if they are unsure as to whether they are entitled to do so. In addition, it will create a situation where providers of public services will be entitled, and indeed required, to enquire into the lawfulness of a person's residency before they can facilitate access to benefits and services, which may promote a culture of racism.

Social Welfare: A person who is unlawfully in the State will not be entitled to any social welfare payments, except emergency supplementary welfare allowance and a once-off "exceptional needs" payment. While the Bill provides that other benefits, "of a humanitarian nature", can be provided by later regulation and that certain essential services be excluded from the remit of Section 6, it is not clear what services individuals deemed unlawfully present in the State will have access to.

Recommendation

- Delete Section 6 or amend the section to ensure that foreign nationals, and in particular children, are entitled to full access to all public services and to essential benefits and financial support. At a minimum, the Alliance calls for the removal of the means test clause from S.6(2)(iii) and for the word "essential" to be deleted from section 6(2)(a)(i).

5. Humanitarian considerations must be a criteria when seeking protection

The criteria for seeking protection from the State should allow for the determination of applications based on "humanitarian considerations".

The current procedure for determining applications which are refused refugee and subsidiary protection under humanitarian grounds has been abolished under the Bill. Currently, where foreign nationals are refused refugee and subsidiary protection and receive notification of deportation, they can make an application to the Minister for leave to remain in the State on humanitarian grounds.¹⁶ The criteria which must be considered by the Minister in making such a decision have a profound relevance to families with children and aged out minors who receive notification of deportation. Included among the current considerations is the age of the person; the duration of residence in the State; family and domestic circumstances of the person; humanitarian considerations; the common good and any representations duly made by or on behalf of the person. Such applications made on behalf of children allow the Minister to gain an understanding of the situation in which the child, who has sought protection, is living in Ireland. This may include, for example, their integration into their community or any difficult circumstances relating to the child such as the presence of a disability or illness.

¹⁵ For further analysis see ICCL *Submission to the Joint Committee on the IRP Bill 2008*, March 2008, p.14-16.

¹⁶ Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

The Bill replaces this system with a single application procedure for persons seeking protection from the State. While S.79(2)(c) make provision for the Minister to grant a residence permit to a person who is refused refugee status or subsidiary protection, S.83(1) provides that the Minister will not make such a determination unless he is of the opinion that there are “compelling reasons” to do so. However, S.83(2) sets out two factors which the Minister shall consider in deciding whether such compelling reasons exist.

Firstly, under S.83(2)(a), the Minister shall consider whether the presence of the applicant in the State would give the applicant an unfair advantage compared to a person not present in the State but in otherwise similar circumstances. This would appear to be an attempt to close off any applications on humanitarian grounds or to make the threshold for success impossible to surmount.

Secondly, under S.83(2)(b), the Minister shall not be obliged to take factors into account which do not relate to the reasons for the applicant’s departure from his or her country of origin or that have arisen since that departure. This excludes the conditions and developments in the country of origin since the applicant left, as well as the personal circumstances of the applicant since their arrival. Thus, the Minister is not obliged to consider, for example, where the applicant has become the parent of an Irish born citizen or the circumstances, health and wellbeing of a child who has sought protection since his or her arrival in Ireland. This is particularly detrimental in the case of separated children now over 18 years (aged out minors) who have been refused asylum and subsidiary protection but may have spent up to six years living in Ireland awaiting a decision on their application.

Furthermore, while S.84 provides for a limited appeal mechanism for applicants who have been refused asylum or subsidiary protection, there is no appeal against a refusal of a residence permit under S.79(2)(c) or S.79(2)(d).

This provision appears to be incompatible with Ireland’s obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) as it fails to provide for a consideration of whether the decision to deport an applicant is compatible with the provisions of the ECHR, and in particular Article 8 which provides for the right to respect for family life. Under Article 8(2) of the ECHR, any interference with this right should be in accordance with the law, pursue a legitimate aim, be necessary and proportionate. An application of the principle of proportionality in this context will include consideration of the applicant’s ties with the State and the extent to the disruption in his or her family life.

Recommendations

- Amend the Bill to include a procedure whereby an applicant who has been refused asylum or subsidiary protection can make an application, within a reasonable timeframe, to remain in the State on humanitarian grounds. Set out criteria for the consideration of such applications which are similar to S.3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999.
- At a minimum, delete S.83(2)(a) and S.83(2)(b). Amend S.84 to provide for an appeal of a refusal of a residence permit under S.79(2)(c) and S.79(2)(d).

Information Note on Separated Children in Ireland

Separated children

All children in Ireland, including separated children, are entitled to the rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Under Article 22 of the UN Convention, refugee children and asylum seekers who are minors - whether accompanied or not - are entitled to special measures of protection and assistance provided by the State. They also have rights under Article 20 which provides for a child deprived of his or her family environment.

Separated children are children under 18 years of age who are outside their country of origin and separated from both parents or their previous legal/customary primary caregiver.¹⁷ Separated children are an extremely vulnerable group. Many have experienced war, violence, lost parents, or have been trafficked or smuggled into Ireland. Some separated children are reunited with family in Ireland, some enter the asylum process and others do not.

Over 5,000 separated children have been identified in Ireland between 1998 and 2008. Of these, nearly 60% were reunited with family members living in Ireland, the majority of whom were under the age of twelve years. Statistics indicate that the number of separated children presenting to the HSE has diminished significantly since figures peaked in 2001 (1,147 in 2001 and approximately 340 in 2007). There are approximately 230 separated children currently in the care of the HSE.

Research has indicated that the majority of separated children are not identified at ports of entry; and may have been in Ireland for some time before they come to the attention of the statutory agencies. Of those separated children known to the authorities and taken into State care, more than 350 have gone missing from their care placement in recent years. The HSE has not made public any information about these children – such as, how and why separated children go missing from care and what happens to them afterwards. Some recent cases, reported in the media and in domestic and international research, have documented that children have been trafficked to, within and from Ireland for exploitative purposes, including sexual exploitation, domestic servitude and as forced brides.

The Alliance has repeatedly called for improvements to ensure that the quality of care and accommodation provided to separated children is on a par with that provided to other children in State care. The majority of separated children in the care of the HSE are accommodated in private, profit-making unregistered hostels run by mostly untrained staff. The quality of care and accommodation provided to separated children in hostels is significantly below that provided to other children living in residential care. There is an inadequate level of adult supervision, security or support available to these children. There are no care staff on-site. The inadequate level of care provided to separated children has been directly linked to instances of vulnerable children going missing and being trafficked for exploitation. There is an absence of social work services accessible outside of office hours and available at points of entry (ports and airports) to assist in the identification, assessment and referral of separated children.

From January to August of 2007, 125 separated children were reunited with their families. This represents 57% of all referrals to the HSE for that period. There have been documented instances where the reunifications have been 'false' and have led to the child being exploited (including for the purpose of sexual exploitation and domestic slavery). In order to guarantee the safety and well-being of children who have been reunited with their families, there is an urgent need to provide adequate checks at the initial placement and through periodic follow-up visits.

¹⁷ UNHCR and Save the Children, Separated Children in Europe Programme (2004) *Statement of Good Practice*, Third Edition, Copenhagen and Geneva.

Children's Rights Alliance

The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of over 80 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working to secure the rights and needs of children in Ireland, by campaigning for the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It aims to improve the lives of all children under 18, through securing the necessary changes in Ireland's laws, policies and services.

Our Membership

The Alliance was formally established in March 1995. Our membership, from which Board Members are elected at the Alliance's AGM, consists of a diverse range of groups, including child welfare agencies and service providers; child protection groups; academics; youth organisations; family support groups; human rights organisations; disability organisations; parent representative organisations; community groups and others interested in children's rights. The Alliance's policies, projects and activities are developed through ongoing collaboration and consultation with our member organisations.

Our Aims

- Bringing about a shared vision that will realise and protect children's rights in Ireland
- Securing legislative and policy changes to give meaningful effect to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Securing the effective implementation of Government policies relating to children.

Our Experience

- The Alliance is recognised for its participation in the international monitoring and reporting process of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the publication of two shadow reports critically evaluating progress made by the Irish State to implement the Convention's provisions into domestic law, policies and services
- In 2006, the Alliance was the sole Irish NGO commentator reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
- The Alliance is a designated Social Partner within the Community and Voluntary Pillar
- The Alliance has played an important role in influencing the development of several key initiatives for children, including the publication of a National Children's Strategy; the establishment of the Office for the Ombudsman for Children; and the inclusion of children's rights in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The Children's Rights Alliance is a registered charity – CHY No. 11541

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