

**Submission by the
Children's Rights Alliance
to the
National Plan for Women (2001-2005)**

15 February 2002

1. Introduction

The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of 68 non-governmental organisations concerned with meeting the needs and safeguarding the rights of children in Ireland. The Alliance works to secure the full implementation in Ireland of the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Ireland is a State Party.

The Alliance appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the National Plan for Women (2001-2005). We welcome, in particular, the inclusion of the elimination of all forms of discrimination against girl children as a strategic objective within the proposed National Plan. The National Plan is a unique opportunity to focus attention on the specific rights and needs of girls.

In this submission, the Alliance focuses on some of the key issues facing the girl-child in Ireland today, with reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the *Concluding Observations* of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child following the examination of the First National Report of Ireland in 1998, and commitments outlined in the National Children's Strategy (2000) and other government policies.

The well-being of the girl-child is closely linked to the well-being of children and women in society generally, and to the well-being of the family. This submission recognises and reflects the fact that the realisation of the rights of girls in many cases depends on the realisation of the rights of children in general. There are, however, areas where the rights of the girl-child need special attention as they are violated or threatened through gender discrimination and inequality. It should be noted that a thorough analysis of the well-being of the girl-child is hindered by a lack of gender-based analysis and gender-disaggregated information.

The Beijing Platform for Action notes that the "girl-child of today is the woman of tomorrow". Gender inequality, discrimination and abuse against women are often rooted early in the life experiences of girls. Although the elimination of all forms of discrimination against girl children is identified as one of twelve strategic objectives, it is crucial that appropriate measures to eliminate gender discrimination at an early stage of a girl's life be integrated in a holistic manner into the National Plan for Women.

2. Ethos and Framework of the National Plan

2.1. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The National Plan for Women should be drawn up in line with the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention lays out the minimum standards necessary for the well-being of every child. It views the child not solely as a dependent, pupil, consumer or person in need of protection, but as an individual with his or her own set of human rights. Under the Convention, all children have a range of basic human rights, incorporating civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and the right to protection from abuse and exploitation. The Convention also sets out specific ways in which these rights should be respected by governments and realised by children.

Four principles are basic to the implementation of the Convention as a whole:

- The right of all children to enjoy all the rights of the Convention without discrimination of any kind
- Respect for the best interests of the child
- The right to life, survival and development
- The right of all children to express their views freely on all matters affecting them.

Article 2 of the Convention is central to any discussion regarding discrimination against the girl-child as it stipulates that a child's right must not be violated on the grounds of gender. It states that all children are entitled to all the rights in the Convention "without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status". It calls on governments to "take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination".

2.2. National Children's Strategy

The National Plan for Women should incorporate the ethos, goals and objectives of the National Children's Strategy (2000). The Strategy lays out a ten year set of goals and objectives to improve the quality of life for all children, with a series of specific objectives to meet three National Goals:

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

2.3. Voice of the Child

The National Plan should "give girls a voice" by empowering them to be active participants in policy development on matters which affect them. This principle is in line with the National Children's Strategy and Article 12 of the UN Convention which obliges States to assure "to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." Structures should be established to ensure that girls are encouraged and enabled to participate in the development and on-going monitoring of the implementation of the National Plan.

3. Defending and Promoting Children's Rights

The Ombudsman for Children Bill was published in February 2002; the proposed Office will have two main functions:

- To promote the rights and welfare of children
- To examine and investigate complaints against public bodies and against schools and voluntary hospitals.

An independent Ombudsman will play a central role in furthering the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child through monitoring, promoting and protecting children's rights. It will provide children and their parents or guardians with a powerful ally to ensure that government agencies live up to their responsibilities to promote the rights and best interests of all children, including girls. The Alliance calls on the National Plan to

endorse the establishment and adequate resourcing of an Office of Ombudsman for Children and to explicitly recognise the role it should play in promoting and protecting the rights of girls.

4. The Right of the Child to an Adequate Standard of Living

The right of the child “to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development” is a fundamental right enshrined in the UN Convention (Article 27). In respect of this right, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its *Concluding Observations* on Ireland’s performance in implementing the Convention, urged the Irish Government to “take immediate steps to address the problem of child poverty and ensure that all families have adequate resources and facilities”.

Poverty in childhood hinders the ability of children to reach their full potential development, negatively affecting their health, education and life chances. Poverty is often concentrated in specific areas and communities and hence the child’s life chances may be affected not just by his or her own family circumstances but by the deprived environment of their communities. Children growing up in poor families may experience intergenerational cycles of disadvantage and cumulative disadvantage leading to marginalisation and making them more vulnerable to undergoing traumatic life events such as homelessness, addiction and experiencing state care or juvenile detention.

Despite recent economic growth, increases in Child Benefit payments and the introduction of the minimum wage, a significant proportion of Irish children, including girls, remain in poverty. Although child poverty has been on the decline, one in eight children (12%) are in consistent poverty. During the boom years of the Celtic Tiger economy, families with children have been the slowest group to move out of poverty. Research has shown that children are at greater risk of experiencing poverty than adults, and that children of the unemployed and children in lone parent households are at an increased risk of poverty. An increasing number of children are growing up in lone parent households. The vast majority (91%) of lone parents with children under 15 years of age are women. Female lone parents have been found to be more likely to experience poverty than their male counterparts. One in three lone mothers is at risk of poverty compared to one in 10 lone fathers (Nolan & Watson, 1999).

The Alliance suggests that ending child poverty should be a key priority within the National Plan for Women. The National Children’s Strategy pledges that “children will be provided with the financial supports necessary to eliminate child poverty”. The review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, which is due to be published shortly, may include targets and timetables for the elimination of consistent child poverty. The National Plan should acknowledge the multi-dimensional nature of ending child poverty, which entails the provision of adequate income, education, health and housing for all children, without discrimination. The Plan should outline measures to address child poverty among girls and endorse steps to guarantee the provisions of an adequate income, education, health and housing for all girls.

(Attached is a copy of a 2001 Submission to the NAPS Review Working Groups from the Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative, of which the Children’s Rights Alliance is one of eight participating organisations. This submission lays out in detail the Alliance’s position on the broad range of policies needed to effectively end child poverty).

5. Health

5.1. Breaking the Link between Health and Financial Status

The UN Convention calls for the right of children “to the highest attainable standard of health” and recognises the right of access to health services and requires government to ensure that “no child is deprived” of this right (Article 24).

The Chief Medical Officer has noted that “poverty is the most powerful aspect of the social context associated with ill-health in children” (Annual Report, 2000). The current two-tier system of health care continues to discriminate against children by providing or denying access to care not on the basis of need, but on the grounds of ability to pay.

The disparity between the speed of access to services for children dependent on the public hospital system – the majority – and those whose parents can afford private health care insurance is not in keeping with Article 2 of the UN Convention which asserts the right of all children to enjoy all rights set out in the Convention on the basis of equality.

The cycle of ill health will not be broken without addressing the health needs, in terms of affordability and access, of children and young people in poor communities, in which women and children are over-represented. The Alliance calls on the National Plan to support the call for Medical Cards to be provided for all children and young people under the age of eighteen.

5.2. Breastfeeding

In 1998, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern at the “low rate of breastfeeding... and the lack of awareness of its positive impact on children’s health”. The rate of breastfeeding is particularly low among mothers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The Alliance supports the Committee’s recommendation that the Government implement the World Health Organisation Assembly resolution on infant feeding which would promote an increase in the number of breastfeeding mothers. The Alliance welcomes the appointment of a National Breastfeeding Co-ordinator and calls for a review of the National Breastfeeding Policy as provided for in the National Children’s Strategy.

6. Health Behaviours: Drugs, Alcohol and Smoking

The lifestyle choices and health behaviours of children and young people can have a direct impact on their health and social well-being, both in childhood and in later life. The UN Committee expressed “concern about the incidence of teenage suicide... [and] the lack of adequate programmes addressing adolescent health-related problems, such as drug and alcohol abuse and early pregnancies”.

Despite various initiatives in health education and promotion, there remains a disturbingly high incidence of smoking, alcohol and drug use among children and young people.

Up to the age of 15, Irish children compare favourably with the average in other European countries for many risk indicators such as smoking, alcohol consumption and exercise. However, there appears to be a comparative deterioration in the pattern of health risk behaviour in the latter teenage years, for both girls and boys.

6.1. Smoking

Tobacco is the biggest single cause of preventable premature death in Ireland claiming nearly 7,000 lives each year. The numbers of teenage girls smoking is of particular concern, given the harmful health implications of smoking. Studies have pointed to a high rate of smoking among girls. Findings show girls are smoking more than boys. In a recent study, 42% of girls compared to 32% of boys reported smoking in the previous 30 days (ESPAD report, 1999).

The Regional Tobacco Control Strategy (2001) and Tobacco Free Policy Review Group (2000) identify the protection of children as strategic objectives. The Review Group called for a distinct focus on the need to “assist children who are addicted to tobacco and to provide an effective system of protection for non smoking children”.

6.2. Alcohol Use

Recent studies have highlighted the high levels of alcohol consumption in Ireland generally with an increase of some 41% being reported over the past ten years. This upward trend is mirrored in the statistics relating to children and young people. Studies showed the proportion of children reporting alcohol consumption (ten times or more in the previous 30 days) was 16% for girls and 18% for boys (ESPAD, 1999). Disturbingly, the study found that the reported alcohol consumption among girls had almost doubled from 9% in 1995 to 16% in 1999. A marked increase since 1995 was also reported in the proportion of children reporting drunkenness three times or more in the previous 30 days (27% for boys and 13% for girls).

6.3. Drug Use

Among the participating ESPAD countries, Ireland has one of the highest proportions of young people who have tried illicit substances. Thirty seven percent of Irish 16 year olds reported having taken cannabis, as compared to the European average of 12%. Irish participants reported easier access to illicit drugs than participants in any other country (ESPAD, 1999). The figures for drug use among young people in Ireland and the trend to experiment with drug use at an earlier age are worrying. Of particular concern is the reported low age at which young people are first using heroin, by either smoking or injecting the drug.

Recommendations

In addition to the addiction and health implications of alcohol and drug use there are other associated risks and dangers which may leave girls vulnerable to abuse, violence and sexual assault. Drug and alcohol use may also be associated with at risk behaviour such as unsafe sex practices, and higher incidences of accidental injuries and deaths, and hepatitis and HIV infection.

The National Plan should urge the full implementation of the recommendations and commitments that relate to children that have been made in the Health Strategy, the National Alcohol Strategy, the Regional Tobacco Control Strategy and by the Tobacco Free Policy Review Group. The National Plan should lay out specific gender targets and goals to enable the effective implementation review of these policies and commitments from a gender perspective.

Various recent initiatives to tackle smoking, alcohol use and drug use are welcome, but the Alliance would emphasise the need for more innovation and resources in relation to prevention, specialised addiction treatment and after-care services aimed at young people both in and out of the school setting.

7. Education

The UN Convention includes two Articles on the child’s right to education, Article 28 and 29, which state the right of children to participate in education on the basis of equality of opportunity and define the goal of education in a broad sense including enabling the development of each child’s personality and talents and fostering respect for basic human rights.

Educational success, particularly at second level, has a major impact on the employment, income opportunities and general life chances of children, including girls. The National Plan should endorse the full implementation of the Education (Welfare) Act and support the

establishment of a tracking system to monitor the progress of each child within the education system. Such a system would facilitate the monitoring of children's progress and would help highlight the need for additional attention to be devoted to, for example, teenage mothers, children with disabilities and members of ethnic and racial minorities.

Gender bias within the education system must be tackled to ensure the right to education be respected without discrimination, as required by the UN Convention. ESRI research has shown how school timetabling can hinder girls' access to traditionally male subjects, such as metalwork and technical drawing.

The National Plan should support a human rights and anti-bias perspective to be embraced by the education system, where learning experiences counter racism and promote awareness and understanding of gender, ethnic and cultural diversity. The National Plan should support the full implementation of the Education Act, 1998, in which the principles of pluralism and diversity are enshrined.

7.1. Early Childhood Education

While acknowledging the need for an integrated approach and co-ordination between the relevant Government departments, progress in developing early childhood education needs to be accelerated. A national plan for early childhood education must be developed which is based on a holistic approach to the developmental needs of all children and on the principle of equality of opportunity of access. The plan must provide for the establishment and enforcement of minimum standards for ensuring that appropriate care and education are provided and for the provision of appropriate training for all staff in the delivery of early childhood education.

8. Play, Recreation and Sport

The right of all children to play and recreational facilities, guaranteed under the UN Convention, has been identified as a priority issue by the National Children's Strategy. A great many children and young people in Ireland lack appropriate or adequate play, recreation and sporting opportunities because they are in some way disadvantaged. Access is also hindered by factors including gender, ethnic background, disability and poor health. A child's access may also be affected by where the child is living, for example, in a rural area, a local authority housing estate, a halting site, a care setting, a juvenile detention centre or hospital. The National Plan should ensure that the specific needs of girls, especially those who are disadvantaged, are included in the development of the National Play and Recreation Policy.

A worrying statistic regarding sporting activity is the gender divide in relation to regular exercise. Exercise is more common among boys than girls and declines with age particularly for girls. The percentage of school children who reported exercising twice a week or more was 59% of 15 year old girls compared to 81% of 15 year old boys (WHO, 2000). The Plan should also point to the need for research and analysis on the participation of girls in sporting activities in general. Special attention must be paid to ensuring that adequate and non-discriminatory levels of support and resources are provided to ensure that girls are enabled to participate in sports and sports programmes on a full and equal basis.

9. Girls with Special Needs

Certain groups of children have special needs and thereby require protective measures and additional supports and services. Girls with disabilities, young mothers, those at risk of abuse or neglect and girls in state care are all in need of additional state support to guarantee that their rights are realised. The National Plan should take particular note of the rights of girls with special needs as it is often their rights to education, adequate income, housing,

protection and care which are violated.

9.1. Girls with Disabilities

Article 23 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises that a child with a physical or learning disability has a right not just to specialised services but to “enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community”.

Support services, therapies, assessment and development services are needed for children with disabilities to reach their full potential. However, significant geographical variations exist in relation to the availability of these services which are often urban-based. The lack of accessible transport, financial hardship and stigmatisation all hinder the inclusion of children with disabilities in their communities. The National Plan should support the recommendations of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, improved access to service and the development of programmes to facilitate the active participation of children with disabilities in society. The National Plan should also explicitly recognise the rights of people, including girls, with disabilities, and not merely identify their needs.

9.2. Young Mothers

Motherhood during adolescence creates challenges for both the child and the mother. Children of young mothers are at higher risk of a variety of health and social problems in childhood and later life. Teenage mothers face an increased risk of poverty and welfare dependency and are likely to have poor educational attainment. A key area in improving the life chances of teenage mothers is the elimination of barriers which presently impede the education of pregnant teenagers and young mothers, such as access to childcare, income support and more flexible educational options. Hence, the National Plan should contain measures to facilitate the right of young mothers to continue in education and to access an adequate level of income.

9.3. Girls at risk of abuse or neglect

Article 19 of the UN Convention outlines the State’s obligation to protect children from all forms of maltreatment perpetrated by parents or others responsible for their care, and to undertake preventive and treatment programmes in this regard. The National Plan should call for the implementation of commitments in the National Children’s Strategy aimed at protecting children from abuse and exploitation. These commitments include the full implementation of the Children First guidelines and the expansion of treatment and counselling services for children who have suffered abuse. The National Plan should ensure the implementation of commitments under the Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action aimed at combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Plan should also call for the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography which came into force on the 18th of January 2002 and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict which came into force on the 12th of February 2002.

9.4. Family Violence and Abuse

Research has shown that the impact of witnessing violence and abuse in the home can have devastating effects on the emotional and physical well-being of children and young people. The witnessing of abuse denies the child the right to live in safety and without fear. Studies have also highlighted a close relationship between domestic violence perpetrated against adults and abuse of children. In a recent study in the Mid-Western Health Board, domestic violence featured in some form in 27% of child protection referrals (Ferguson, 1997).

The National Plan should support the development and expansion of service responses to domestic violence and the development of a strategy to protect children from domestic violence. Specific services for children affected by domestic violence are needed, such as

skilled child care workers within refuges, group based programmes and specialised counselling services for children damaged by witnessing domestic violence. Research is also needed to examine the direct experience and impact of domestic violence among children, including girls.

9.5. Girls in Alternative Care

A total of 4,216 children are recorded as being in alternative care (December 1999 figures). The National Plan should call for research on the impact of the care experience on these children, their siblings, parents and communities, in particular the impact on the mother and the mother's future ability to parent her child. The National Plan should also support the allocation of resources to ensure the provision of appropriate care placements and comprehensive aftercare services to all those who leave care.

Over 60% of the children in care are from households comprising separated, widowed and lone parent families. Over half of these children were admitted to care because the parents were ill or unable to cope (30%), the parents were addicted to drugs or alcohol (16%) or the children were abandoned or rejected (5%). To minimise the need for children to be moved into alternative care, families must be supported to provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. The National Plan should provide for the expansion and adequate financing of family support services, mental health services and addiction services to support families, particularly mothers, in fulfilling their parenting role.

The National Plan should ensure the full implementation of the Children's Act, 2001. If Ireland is to meet the requirements of Article 37 and 40 of the UN Convention, improvements are needed in relation to the provision of appropriate detention facilities for female offenders under 18 years of age who are considered a danger to themselves or society.

The number of children who present to the courts with extreme behavioural difficulties has highlighted the inability of the care system to respond appropriately to the needs of these children before their behaviour has reached a 'crisis point'. The National Plan should encourage the introduction of innovative community-based early intervention services and structured programmes for the identification, assessment and treatment of children with emotional and behavioural problems, as provided for in the National Children's Strategy.

9.6. Unaccompanied Girls Seeking Asylum

A relatively new category of children in care are unaccompanied children seeking asylum. The majority of these children (90%) are placed in adult hostels, although some may be as young as 14 years of age. They are allocated a social worker or project worker who refers them to schools and other appropriate services. They shop and cook for themselves and spend their leisure time unsupervised and unsupported (Social Services Inspectorate, 2001). There is a need for research on the well-being of these children and for the provision of appropriate accommodation and support services, which may need to be gender-specific. The National Plan should highlight the vulnerable position of the unaccompanied girl-child and support the provision of a more appropriate response to her needs by the social services.

9.7. Homeless Girls

The large number of children and young people who drift in and out of homelessness is inconsistent with the rights recognised by the UN Convention and with the provisions of the Child Care Act, 1991. The number of children in families who find themselves homeless continues to rise. Focus Ireland found that 1,202 families with 1,260 children were accommodated in emergency Bed and Breakfasts in Dublin in 1999. ERHA statistics (2001) recorded that 1,019 children stayed in refuge accommodation in 2000. The National Plan should include measurable targets and timetables for the quickest possible end to the practice of homeless children being accommodated in B&Bs and refuges.

Given the hidden and fluid nature of youth homelessness, few reliable statistics exist on the true extent of the problem or on the gender breakdown. The Youth Homelessness Strategy (2001) recorded that more girls than boys presented themselves as homeless to health boards in 2000. Once homeless, even for a short period of time, young people tend to lose contact with families, schools and support networks. Survival on the streets often requires young people to engage in begging, petty crime and prostitution. They may become “encultured” into a street life closely linked to drug use and criminal behaviour. There is evidence of widespread sexual exploitation of young people by male adults, leaving young women vulnerable to abuse (Kelleher et al. 2000)

The National Plan should call for the realisation of the objectives laid out in the Youth Homelessness Strategy and support innovative locally-based responses to assist young people who become homeless. These responses must offer safe accommodation, intensive support and counselling.

10. Children from Ethnic Minority Communities

Children who belong to a community which faces racial discrimination may encounter additional barriers to accessing education, housing, health and other services. Children who are particularly vulnerable to such disadvantage include those who belong to the Traveller, refugee and asylum-seeker or ethnic minority communities. Special measures are needed to protect and promote the rights of girls who live within these marginalised communities.

10.1. The Travelling Community

A progress report on the Task Force on the Travelling Community reported in 2001 that there has been no “real improvement” in the day-to-day lives of Travellers over the past five years and that about a quarter of all Traveller families continue to live out their lives “in very poor conditions”. Children from the Travelling Community experience particular barriers to accessing health, education and other services. Half the Traveller population is under 15 years of age. The needs of Traveller children should be viewed as a priority issue.

Pavee Point describes Traveller children as “suffering all the ill effects of inadequate accommodation, poor living standards and discrimination experienced by their parents”, which leads to “restricted opportunities in society and has a detrimental effect on self-esteem and on pride in Traveller culture”. They note that a large majority of these children live in conditions that are far below the minimum required for healthy child development. Travellers suffer poor health, high mortality and infant mortality and poor educational attainment, with few children advancing beyond primary school. Approximately half of these children are girls.

The National Plan should endorse the recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community and set out specific targets regarding the well-being of Traveller girls. Innovative methods of supporting young Traveller girls are needed to improve their accommodation and life chances. Traveller girls should have the right to celebrate and live in accordance with their culture and identity without fear of discrimination and marginalisation, as stipulated by Article 30 of the UN Convention.

10.2. Children of Asylum-Seekers

Article 22 of the UN Convention states that children who are refugees or asylum-seekers shall “receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance” to ensure the realisation of their rights under the Convention and other international human rights instruments.

Recent research has documented the negative impact of the present system of ‘direct provision’ on the integration, social and educational development of asylum-seeking children. Interviewees reported that material deprivation was causing health problems,

including weight loss among children, ill health among babies and malnutrition among pregnant women (Fanning et al., 2001). These findings are particularly worrying when seen in light of a recent study which found significantly higher mortality rates for newborn babies of asylum-seeking and refugee mothers than among infants born to Irish mothers (Lalchandani et al., 2001). The National Plan should call for reform of the 'direct provision' system to ensure asylum-seeking children enjoy the same basic rights as other children living in Ireland, in line with the principle of non-discrimination outlined in the UN Convention.

11. Information and Research

There is a dearth of information and research available on the qualitative experiences of children in Ireland. What do girls think of their schools, neighbourhoods and family life? How do they experience traumas such as discrimination, abusive relationships, violence and neglect? How does gender and ethnicity impact on the day-to-day life of marginalised girls?

There is a clear need for the disaggregation of information and data related to children in the health, education and other sectors by sex, age, disability and membership of an ethnic minority. This information is crucial in monitoring girls' well-being and to inform a gender perspective in the planning, implementation and monitoring of services to children.

The proposed gender equality indicators outlined in the draft National Plan provide a good basis from which to compile information on the girl-child. Under the National Children's Strategy goal to understand children's lives better, various measures are proposed, including improving information systems, establishing child well-being indicators, producing a state of the nation's children report and child impact statements. The National Plan should ensure that these measures incorporate a gender perspective.

12. Conclusion

The National Plan for Women has an important role to play in promoting and protecting the rights of girls and eliminating all forms of discrimination against girl children. Raising the status of women in society by confronting gender discrimination and inequality is crucial to the elimination of discrimination against girls. The Plan must ensure that policies and practices are gender-proofed to ensure that they impact positively on women and girls. The girl-child is best supported by the promotion and safeguarding of children's rights and by strengthening the capacity of families to support their children, both financially and emotionally. Gender-based analysis, understanding and gender-disaggregated information are required to allow for a more thorough analysis of the specific steps needed to improve the well-being of girl children. Gender equality and well-being indicators should be designed to contribute to the development of time-bound and measurable targets to eliminate discrimination against girls.

Relevant Legislation, Reports and References

Legislative Acts which impact on the rights of the child

- Adoption Act, 1991
- Child Care Act, 1991
- Child Trafficking and Pornography and Act, 1998
- Children Act, 2001
- Domestic Violence Act, 1996
- Education Act, 1998
- Education (Welfare) Act, 2000
- Equal Status Act, 2000
- Family Law (Divorce) Act, 1996
- Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act, 1996
- Refugee Act, 1996
- Sex Offenders Act, 2001

Reports containing government commitments which impact on the rights of the child

- Children First - National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 1999
- National Alcohol Policy, 1996
- National Children's Strategy: Our Children - Their Lives, 2000
- National Breastfeeding Policy for Ireland, 1994
- Quality and Fairness: A Health System for You - Health Strategy, 2001
- Regional Tobacco Control Strategy 2001-2005: Action Plan for Dublin, Wicklow and Kildare.
- Report of Tobacco Free Policy Review Group, Ireland - a Smoke Free Zone: Towards a Tobacco Free Society, 2000
- Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities: A Strategy for Equality, 1996
- Review of the Task Force on the Travelling Community, 2001
- Strengthening Families for Life, 1998
- Youth Homelessness Strategy, 2001
- National Report on Follow-up to the First World Summit 1990-1999: National Children's Office, 2001

Legislation / reports in development

- Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy
- National Play and Recreation Policy
- Ombudsman for Children Bill (2001)

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