



BETTER OUTCOMES BRIGHTER FUTURES

The national policy framework
for children & young people

2014 - 2020

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for children & young people
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Active &
Healthy



Achieving



Safe



Economic
Security



Connected
& Respected

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FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

A Policy Framework for Improved Outcomes for Children and Young People

Our vision is for *Ireland to be one of the best small countries in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future.*

TRANSFORMATIONAL GOALS



STRENGTHENS THE SUPPORT SYSTEM AROUND THE CHILD AND YOUNG PERSON

BETTER OUTCOMES



CROSS-CUTTING

BRIGHTER FUTURES

DRIVING IMPLEMENTATION, ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY



FOREWORD BY THE TAOISEACH

Making sure that the State serves and protects our children and young people is a top priority for this Government. For the first time ever, we have a Minister for Children and Youth Affairs who will oversee vital reform of child and family services, and drive the commitments of the 2011 Programme for Government.

The Child and Family Agency, formally established in January 2014, represents the most comprehensive-ever reform of child protection, early intervention and family support services in Ireland. Responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children across the country, the Agency will provide a better, more effective service – one that is transparent in its operations, responsive to the needs of the young people and families it serves, and accountable politically, publicly and professionally.

This National Policy Framework sets out how we can best achieve optimum outcomes and bright futures for all children and their families.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures is a whole-of-Government policy and a clear, comprehensive statement setting out how we intend to do our best to achieve the best for children, young people and families.

Not alone will this Framework operate across all Government departments and agencies; it will also extend to statutory and non-statutory organisations that work with, and for, children and young people.

A central theme of the Framework is implementation. The arrangements will be put in place to enable Government and interagency collaboration, to connect infrastructure, to guarantee standards and to make the best possible use of public money in the service of the State, its children and families.

Enda Kenny, TD
Taoiseach

FOREWORD BY THE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, it is my great pleasure to bring forward *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

This document sets the Government's key commitments to children and young people up to the age of 24. It is rooted in a determination to make Ireland a good place to be a child.

Our vision is for ***Ireland to be one of the best small countries in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future.***

There are two strong messages in this vision. Firstly, our commitment to protect the rights of children and to listen to them: past failings are not to be repeated. Secondly, we value and support our children and young people for who they are today, as well as for what they will become in the future. Our vision is for all children and young people to enjoy growing up in Ireland, to enjoy school, play, family and community.

Childhood is precious

Our commitment is to cherish each and every one of these children and young people. We want the best possible outcomes now and the brightest possible future for each young person. As a country, we must ensure that they enter adulthood confident and equipped to meet life's challenges and opportunities.

Children and young people are Ireland's future

Our commitment to children is also in our collective economic and social interests. The estimated total population of children and young people (aged 0-24 years) in Ireland is 1.54 million, or 34% of the total population. This represents an increase of 6% since 2002, with the greatest growth in the 0-4 age group which saw an increase of 32% over the same period. At a time when other Western countries are experiencing reducing birth rates, Ireland's population of children and young people is growing. The Government's *Medium-Term Strategy for Growth* rightly recognises that '*our increasing child and youth population is a significant resource for our country ...*' and that '*ensuring the best possible outcomes for this group is therefore an important element in our future economic planning*'.

Supporting childhood is building for Ireland's future

Growing body of evidence

Ensuring that the road to a better future for Ireland's children is not just paved with good intentions means basing investment in evidence-based policies. This is why the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has invested €35 million in the national longitudinal study of children, *Growing Up in Ireland*, conducted by the ESRI and TCD. This study is delivering data about what works, which in turn is guiding where we put resources.

Through our investment in the Prevention and Early Intervention Programmes and other initiatives, we have emerging Irish evidence as to what works in supporting children and young people and their parents to achieve better outcomes. This is guiding decisions on where we put our money. The evidence tells us that investment in early years care and education reaps significant dividends throughout a child's life and to society as a result of better outcomes. The evidence confirms the importance of parents particularly in the early years of a child's life and the importance of friendships as children grow into adolescence.

Most of our children are doing well overall and are happy and thriving

The *Growing Up in Ireland* study has found that the majority of 9-year-olds are developing well, without any significant social, emotional or behavioural problems. That is positive – and it is important to focus on what we do that leads to that positive situation.

However, a significant minority of children (15%-20%) were classified as showing significant levels of emotional or behavioural problems. Similarly, while most children are healthy, 25% are overweight or obese. While 92% of children complete secondary education, only 13% of Traveller children do. While most children live safe lives, we have over 40,000 referrals to child protection services annually. These figures are very concerning.

We want all children and young people to achieve the national outcomes, not just the 80%

It is therefore equally, if not more, important to focus on what makes some of our children slip through our fingers, to suffer disadvantage and damage that can cripple their capacity to learn, grow, have a healthy life and productive relationships. For the 20% that need additional support, we need to identify them and intervene early. This requires good quality universal systems open to all, like our schools and primary healthcare services, backed up by additional targeted services and income supports to give 'at risk' or vulnerable children and young people the extra help they need to keep up with their peers and lift more children out of poverty, aiming to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage. This Policy Framework identifies the factors behind such disadvantage and damage, and points to solutions.

Significant progress made

Compared to our peers in Europe, Ireland is doing well in relation to retention in school, with 9.7% of young people leaving school early compared to an EU average of 12.7%. We are above the average in the areas of maths, reading and science (according to the PISA surveys). Over the past decade, we have made substantial progress in reducing teen pregnancy (down 36% between 2007 and 2011), in increasing the number of young people who have never smoked (from 50.8% in 1998 to 73.5% in 2010) and in increasing the number of young people under 18 who have never had a drink (from 40% in 2002 to 54.1% in 2010).

Changing our approach

This Government has already commenced a shift in policy, putting early intervention into action, through:

- reform of child protection and welfare services in response to learning from past reports through the establishment of the Child and Family Agency and the referendum on Children's Rights;
- investment in early years care and education, including maintaining the free pre-school year and implementing measures to support and regulate improvements to the quality of Early Years and childcare services;
- the introduction in 2014 of Free GP care for those aged 5 years and under;
- placing a focus on health and wellbeing with the launch of *Healthy Ireland* and implementation of follow-up measures and campaigns with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention in a range of areas, including tackling obesity and youth mental health;
- the ongoing implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and reform of the Junior Cycle;
- the expansion of an area-based approach to tackling poor outcomes for children and young people to 13 areas of high disadvantage.

Priorities for the next seven years

Better support parents and families

Raising a family has never been easy. But contemporary parenthood faces many diverse pressures and challenges, from managing a work–life balance to trying to understand and access information on the changing aspects of childhood and matters of topical concern. In addition, protecting children and supporting families are goals that must go hand-in-hand.

Research in Ireland and internationally is increasingly pointing to the benefits of positive parenting and supportive home environments in aiding childhood development and influencing future prospects and social mobility.

This Framework seeks to ensure that parents in Ireland are equipped and supported to raise their families, to play their role as their children's primary carers, to promote the best possible outcomes for their children and to meet all challenges that may arise.

This priority will be delivered through commitments made to increase the provision of supports to all parents through universal access to good-quality parenting advice and programmes, and access to affordable quality childcare, as well as targeted, evidence-based supports to those parents with greatest needs.

Focus more on children's early years

Research in Ireland and internationally is increasingly pointing to the returns that can accrue from investing in the early years – from supporting children's early cognitive, social and emotional development, to enhancing school readiness and to generating longer term returns to the State and society.

This Framework seeks to promote a shift in policy toward earlier intervention and to ensure the provision of quality Early Years services and interventions, aimed at promoting best outcomes for children and disrupting the emergence of poor outcomes.

This will be achieved through commitments made to continue to raise the quality of early years care and education, to introduce a second free pre-school year subject to resources becoming available and the provision of free GP care for those aged 5 years and under.

The publication of Ireland's first-ever National Early Years Strategy will provide a detailed roadmap for the enhancement and coordinated provision of Early Years services and supports.

Work together to protect young people at risk

Some young people face significant challenges in life and may require the attention or care of the various State services, from child protection and welfare to youth justice to adolescent mental health.

This Framework seeks to make sure that young people who are marginalised or 'at risk' or who demonstrate challenging or high-risk behaviour have access to an integrated range of supports and services to help them achieve their best possible outcomes. It also seeks to ensure that no young person falls through the cracks because of fragmented services.

This will be achieved through commitments made to ensure that the Child and Family Agency succeeds and provides a continuum of care supports and interventions for 'at risk' children and young people and their families, in partnership with other statutory and community services. This will include a review of the scope of functions of the Agency, having regard to the recommendations in the *Report of the Taskforce on the Child and Family Agency* and the experience of the Agency's initial operations.

The development of a new Youth Strategy in 2014 will seek to address the changing needs and challenges facing both young people in general and specific groups in particular, and ensure an effective response to these needs, including through quality youth work services.

Enhance job opportunities for young people

This Framework confirms a cross-Governmental approach to seek to increase the number of job opportunities available in Ireland for young people seeking employment, while putting in place education, training, and placement programmes to enhance the employability of all young people, including those further away from the labour market.

This will be achieved through commitments made to implement the Youth Guarantee, enhance the employability skills of young people, promote work experience and entrepreneurship, and increase the number of good-quality job opportunities.

Tackle child poverty

This Framework confirms a cross-Governmental approach to seek to adopt a multifaceted approach to tackling child poverty.

This Framework sets a target of lifting at least 70,000 children out of poverty by 2020.

This will be achieved through commitments to improve rates of parental employment and reduce the number of jobless households, and increase investment in evidence-based, effective services that can improve child poverty outcomes.

Promoting positive influences for childhood

There is growing concern that the space of childhood is shrinking and that children are being increasingly bombarded with negative sets of messages about behavioural norms and expectations. At the same time, rapidly evolving forms of digital media are featuring more and more in our children's lives.

This Framework seeks to better understand and respond to the increasing influences on childhood of new technologies, digital media, sexualisation and commercialisation; to ensure that children, young people, parents and society in general are best equipped to respond to these influences; and to foster a culture that promotes positive influences for childhood.

This will be achieved through commitments made to increase the digital literacy of parents and young people, to build their skills and understanding about being safe online, and to continue to address the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood with retailers and others.

Improving childhood health and wellbeing

This Framework confirms a cross-Governmental approach, in line with the goals of *Healthy Ireland*, to seek to improve all aspects of health and wellbeing, and to reduce risk-taking behaviour in children, with a particular focus on promoting healthy behaviour and positive mental health and in disrupting the emergence of poor outcomes such as diet-related non-communicable diseases arising from childhood overweight and obesity.

This will be achieved through commitments made to promote healthier lifestyles, improve mental health literacy and early intervention services, and increase the number of children and young people with a healthy weight, engaging the whole community in healthier more active lifestyles.

In conclusion

We stand at an extraordinary point in the history of childhood in Ireland. We have drawn a line in the sand between the present and times past, when children were not protected and cherished. Of course, there remains an ongoing challenge and we cannot be complacent about the dangers posed to children. It is much easier to condemn the failings of the past than it is to take the present and future and make them work for children. But that is our task. The urgency of that task must not be diluted by the enormity of the task. The one inescapable truth about childhood is how fleeting it is. We must seek to make it a happy, productive and enriching time for each and every one of the nation's children. This Framework is a first – concrete – step.

It lays out what it is that we, as a Government, want for children and young people. It seeks, in doing so, to provide a shared commitment and accountability for better outcomes and a brighter future. It recognises the primary role of parents and families, and the importance of community engagement and support. It recognises that Government is one among many actors and that in the supports and services it offers it needs to take the lead, so that we really give current and future generations the best chance to reach their potential, now and in the future.

Frances Fitzgerald, TD

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

March 2014

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The five national outcomes that we want for all our children and young people are that they:

1. Are active and healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing.
2. Are achieving their full potential in all areas of learning and development.
3. Are safe and protected from harm.
4. Have economic security and opportunity.
5. Are connected, respected and contributing to their world.

Through the implementation of this Framework and supporting strategies, the Government aims to achieve the following 'shifts' over the 7-year period 2014-2020 to support the achievement of better outcomes for all children and young people:

1. Support parents

- Parents will experience improved support in the important task of parenting and feel more confident, informed and able.

2. Earlier intervention and prevention

- Lift over 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020.
- Children's learning and development outcomes will have been assisted through increased access to high-quality, affordable early years education.
- A focus on health and wellbeing will have permeated throughout society and positive progress will be made, in particular in relation to childhood obesity and youth mental health.
- Emphasis and resources will have been rebalanced from crisis intervention towards prevention and earlier intervention, while ensuring an effective crisis intervention response at all times.

3. A culture that listens to and involves children and young people

- A culture that respects, protects and fulfils the rights of children and young people will be evident and the diversity of children's experiences, abilities, identities and cultures will be respected.
- The views of children and young people will be sought and will influence decisions about their own lives and wellbeing, service delivery and policy priorities.
- Ireland's democracy will actively seek the contribution and engagement of young people.

4. Quality services – outcomes-driven, effective, efficient and trusted

- Government investment in children will be more outcomes-driven and informed by national and international evidence on the effectiveness of expenditure on child-related services, with the aim of improving child outcomes and reducing inequalities.
- Resource allocation within services will be based on evidence of both need and effectiveness, and services that are not working will be decommissioned.
- Irish education will stand up to international benchmarks and our young people will be leaving school with critical life skills, resilient, confident and adaptable to the changing world.
- Agencies charged with safeguarding the welfare of children will be trusted and their contribution to improving the lives of children valued.

5. Effective transitions

- Transitions at key developmental stages and between child and adult services will have been strengthened.
- Young people's prospects will have improved and the trend of significant outward emigration stemmed through a coordinated programme supporting youth employment opportunities.

6. Cross-Government and interagency collaboration and coordination

- The public sector will have reformed substantially, resulting in improved implementation, greater cross-Government collaboration and coordination, increased accountability and resource efficiency.
- The State and its partners will work better together and plan service provision in a way that is child-centred and benefits from interagency and multidisciplinary working.

TERMINOLOGY AND ACRONYMS

The National Policy Framework has adopted the definitions set out below to clarify the meaning and scope of key terms used throughout this document:

Child: A ‘child’ is defined as any person under the age of 18 years, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Young Person: A ‘young person’ is defined as any person between the ages of 15 and 24 years, in line with the definition used by the United Nations.

Parents: ‘Parent’ or ‘parents’ are defined as a person or persons with parental authority or responsibility. Parenting refers to all roles undertaken by parents or others acting *in loco parentis* in order to bring up children.

Family: ‘Family’ is defined in its widest sense, including parents, those acting *in loco parentis*, siblings, grandparents and extended family members. It recognises the complexity of contemporary family structures.

School : For the purposes of this document, references to ‘school’ should be read, where appropriate, to encompass all educational settings, including pre-school, early years settings, primary, post-primary and centres of education such as Youthreach centres.

Acronyms used

Note: Where a Government department or agency is given in **bold**, this indicates that it is the **lead agency** for the commitment specified.

AGS	An Garda Síochána	DJEI	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
CFA	Child and Family Agency	DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
CSO	Central Statistics Office	DSP	Department of Social Protection
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	DTTS	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
DAHG	Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	HIQA	Health Information and Quality Authority
DCENR	Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources	HSE	Health Service Executive
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
DECLG	Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government	NCSE	National Council for Special Education
DES	Department of Education and Skills	NOSP	National Office for Suicide Prevention
DF	Department of Finance	ODPC	Office of the Data Protection Commissioner
DH	Department of Health	OCO	Ombudsman for Children’s Office
DJE	Department of Justice and Equality		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our vision is to make Ireland the best small country in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future.

Almost all policy areas have a direct or indirect effect on children and young people's lives. **The purpose of this framework** is to coordinate policy across Government with the five national outcomes and to identify areas that, with focused attention, have the potential to improve outcomes for children and young people (0-24 years) and to transform the effectiveness of existing policies, services and resources. The commitments in the document are drawn from all of Government: many are current commitments, others are new. The Framework provides a means of ensuring their effective and coordinated delivery. The Framework is a recognition by Government of the need to **'connect'**, nationally and locally, if we are to use effectively all of the resources available to support our vision for children and young people, and a recognition also that we need to do more within the resources we have.

The Policy Framework

1. Aligns Government commitments to children and young people against the five national outcomes for children and young people.
2. Identifies six areas that have the potential to improve outcomes and transform the effectiveness of existing policies, services and resources in achieving these national outcomes.
3. Commits to measuring progress across the outcomes, with some key indicators selected to benchmark progress on key policy areas.
4. Establishes new cross-Government structures to support implementation and monitoring of the Framework and, as a result, realise improved coordination of policies and services for children and young people. These structures provide a fora for external advice and oversight from experts in the field and from children and young people themselves.

The development of the Framework was guided by the following key principles. These principles will, in turn, guide the implementation and monitoring of the Framework.

Children's rights: The rights of children as outlined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are recognised and child-centred-approaches are adopted.

Family-orientated: The family is recognised as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and wellbeing of children.

Equality: The diversity of children's experiences, abilities, identities and cultures is acknowledged, and reducing inequalities is promoted throughout the Framework as a means of improving outcomes and achieving greater social inclusion.

Evidence-informed and outcomes-focused: To be effective, policies and services must be supported by evidence and focused on the achievement of agreed outcomes.

Accountability and resource efficiency: Clear implementation, monitoring and accountability mechanisms and lines of responsibility for delivery are in place to drive timely and effective policy implementation.

The case for support – A capital investment in children and young people

One-third of our population is under the age of 25.¹ The evidence base for a life course approach is strong. What happens early in life affects health and wellbeing in later life. Improving health and wellbeing, raising education levels and reducing inequality bring significant economic returns to society.

The majority of our children and young people are doing well, but we have some significant challenges to face as a society. For example, 39% of adults are overweight and 25% are obese² (SLÁN, 2007), and the number of children who are significantly overweight has trebled over the past decade³. The direct and indirect costs of overweight and obesity in 2009 were estimated at €1.13 billion.⁴ One in 4 people in Ireland will suffer from mental health problems at some stage in their life and 75% of the first onset of poor mental health occurs under the age of 25. The overall economic cost of mental health problems was estimated at just over €3 billion in 2006.⁵

The roots of many of these issues can be traced to childhood and adolescent experiences. To reverse these trends, a greater focus on investing in the early years and in earlier intervention and prevention across the life cycle is required. Research in Ireland and internationally is increasingly pointing to the returns that can accrue from investing early. In the UK, for example, research has found that for every £1 invested in targeted interventions designed to catch problems early and prevent problems from re-occurring, between £7.60 and £9.20 worth of social value is generated.⁶

Research in Ireland and internationally also points to the benefits of positive parenting and supportive home environments in aiding childhood development and influencing future prospects and social mobility.

Investment in children and young people is a social responsibility and it makes good economic sense, but it needs to be guided by a medium to long-term perspective. Investment in children and young people is akin to a capital investment from which significant returns flow. Hence the focus in this Policy Framework on an agreed and enduring set of outcomes to guide decisions and measure progress.

Five national outcomes for children and young people

This Policy Framework has adopted an outcomes approach based on five national outcomes for children and young people. These outcomes are interconnected and reinforcing. Four aims have been identified for each outcome (see diagram below)

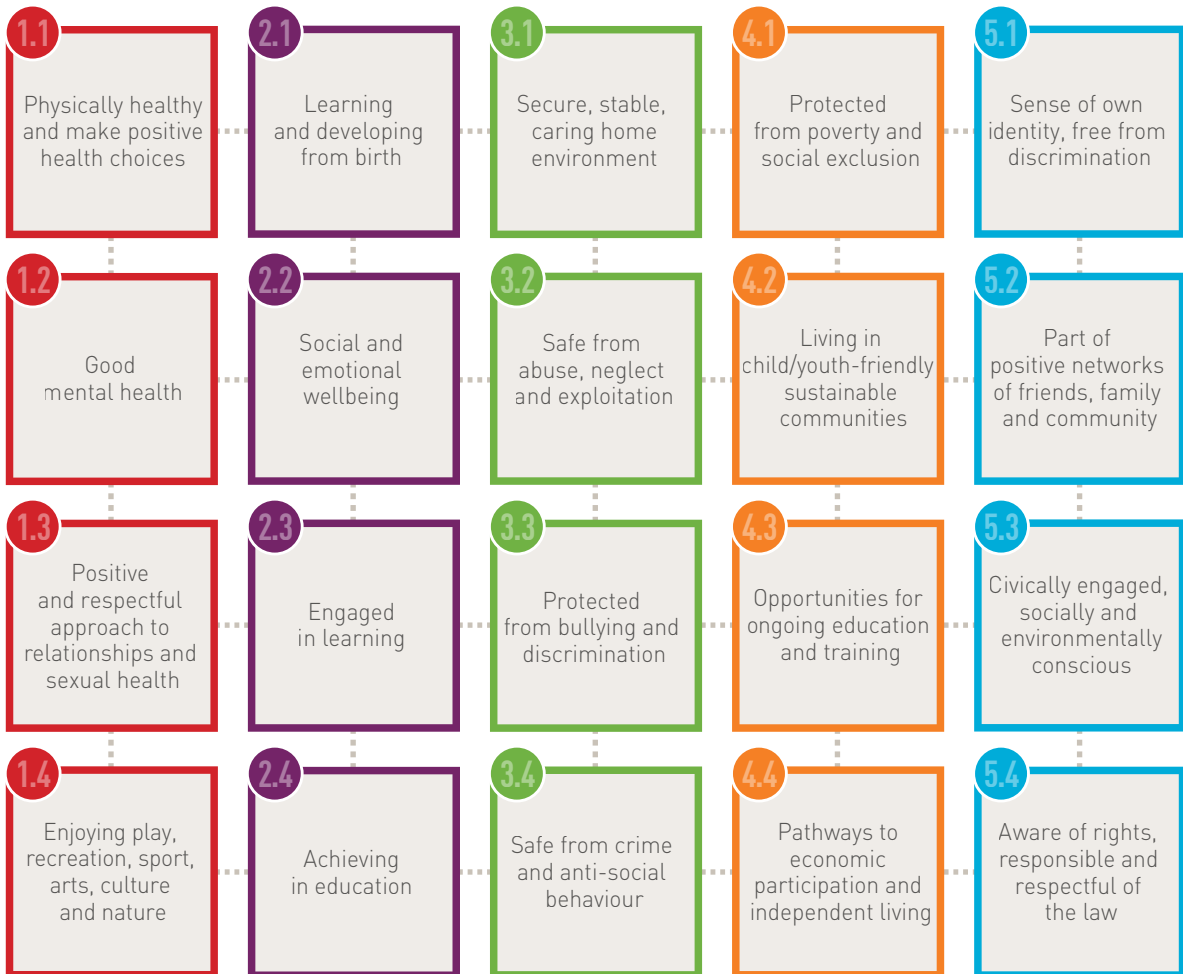
VISION

Our vision is to make Ireland the best small country in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future.

NATIONAL OUTCOMES



AIMS: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE, AND OR HAVE...



1 Outcome 1: Active and healthy

Being active and healthy is a significant contributor to overall wellbeing. The majority of children and young people in Ireland enjoy good health. However, we have some significant health challenges, including obesity, substance misuse and mental health:

- 6% of 13-year-olds are obese⁷ and a further 20% are overweight;
- 20% of 16-year-olds are weekly drinkers;⁸
- 75% of mental health disorders emerge before the age of 25.⁹

The aims are that all children and young people are physically healthy and able to make positive health choices, have good mental health, have a positive and respectful approach to relationships and sexual health, and that their lives are enriched through the enjoyment of play, recreation, sports, arts, culture and nature.

Specific Government commitments relating to this outcome are outlined in Section 2, Part 2 under 'Outcome 1' (*see pp. 57-59*).

2 Outcome 2: Achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development

The vast majority of young people in Ireland enjoy learning, with 92% completing second-level education and over 60%¹⁰ going on to third-level education. However, there are also some stark statistics – only 13% of young people in the Traveller community complete the Leaving Certificate. Children and young people with special needs, those whose first language is not English and those who have experienced social exclusion need additional supports to achieve their learning potential. Learning starts from birth and goes beyond formal schooling. Engagement in education is a significant protective factor against negative outcomes.

The aims are to ensure that all children get the best foundation in learning and development, have social and emotional wellbeing, and are engaged in and achieving in education.

Specific Government commitments relating to this outcome are outlined in Section 2, Part 2 under 'Outcome 2' (*see pp. 69-72*).

3 Outcome 3: Safe and protected from harm

Keeping children and young people safe and protected from harm is the responsibility of everyone in our society. Children and young people themselves must be educated and made aware of dangers and how to protect themselves from harm and harmful or risky behaviour.

The aims are that all children and young people have a secure, stable and caring home environment; that they are safe from abuse, neglect and exploitation; that they are protected from bullying and discrimination; and that they are safe from crime and anti-social behaviour.

All children and young people need safeguarding. The Government recognises, however, that specific groups of children and young people are particularly at risk and so need additional support and protection.

Specific Government commitments relating to this outcome are outlined in Section 2, Part 2 under 'Outcome 3' (*see pp. 80-83*).

4 Outcome 4: Economic security and opportunity

The Government recognises that young people want to work and progress in life, and need to be given opportunities to do so. Poverty, sub-standard housing and social exclusion have a significant impact on a person's life outcomes and efforts must be made to promote social inclusion and reduce inequalities for children, young people and their families.

The aims are that all children and young people are protected from poverty and social exclusion; that they are living in child-/youth-friendly sustainable communities; that they have opportunities for ongoing education and training; and that they have pathways to economic participation and independent living.

Specific Government commitments relating to this outcome are outlined in Section 2, Part 2 under 'Outcome 4' (*see pp. 93-95*).

5 Outcome 5: Connected, respected and contributing

Children and young people should be supported and encouraged to play a full role in society recognising that they themselves, through their choices and determination, can heavily influence their own lives now and in the future. Measures are needed to create a society in which all children and young people are valued and respected for who they are, so that they can freely express their identity.

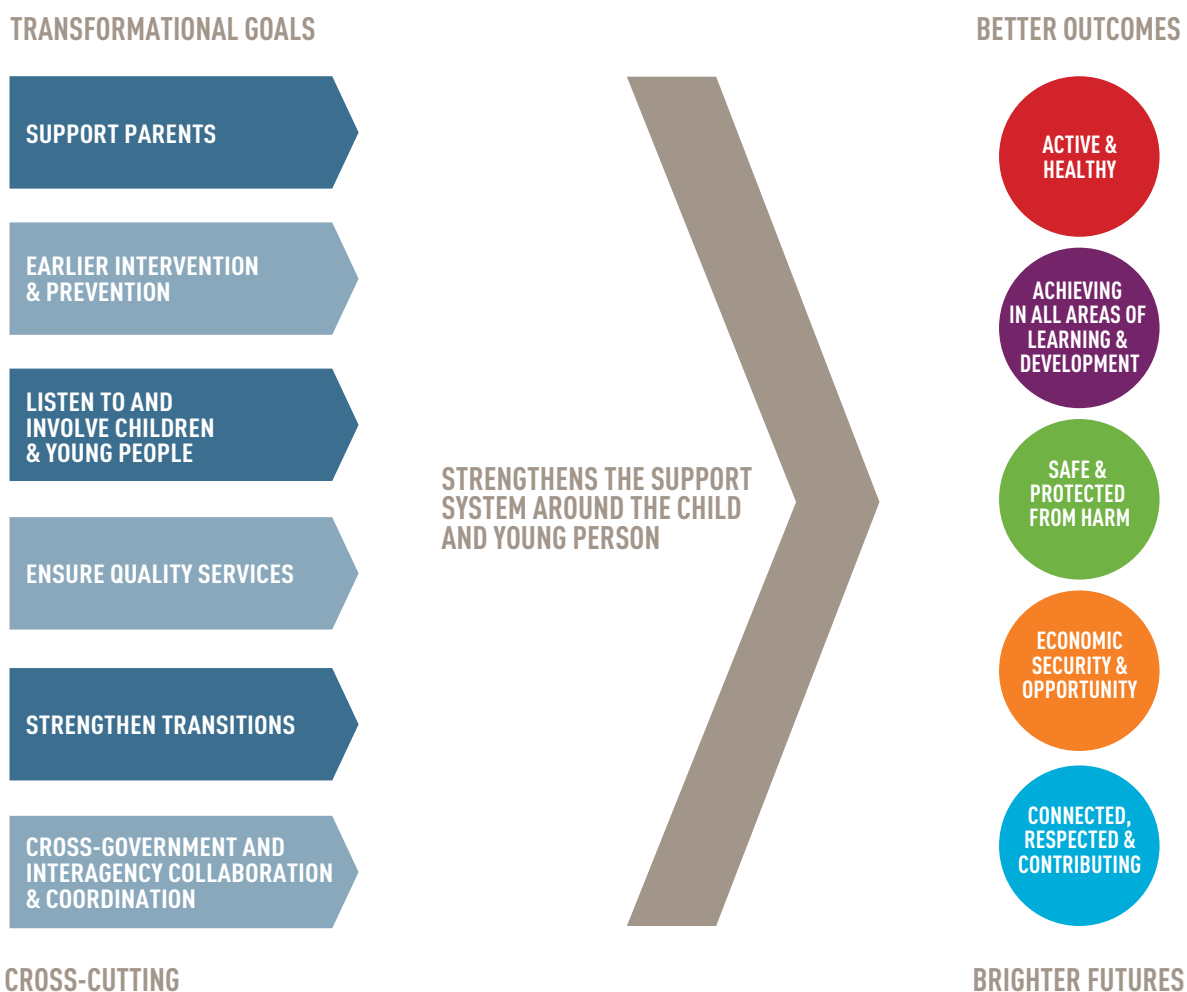
The aims are that all children and young people have a sense of their own identity, are free from discrimination and are part of positive networks of friends, family and community; furthermore, that they are civically engaged, socially and environmentally conscious, and are aware of their rights as well as being responsible and respectful of the law.

Specific Government commitments relating to this outcome are outlined in Section 2, Part 2 under 'Outcome 5' (*see pp. 104-105*).

Six Transformational Goals for achieving better outcomes

To ensure more children and young people achieve these outcomes, we have identified six transformational goals that need focus over the next seven years. These goals have been identified as key areas that, with focused and collective effort, have the potential to transform the effectiveness of existing policies, services and resources (see *diagram below*).

The 6 transformational goals for achieving the national outcomes



GOAL 1 Support parents

Parents are the foundation for good child outcomes and have significant influence, particularly in the early years of children's lives. Effective parenting support can ameliorate some of the more negative impacts of intergenerational poverty. The Government is committed to supporting parents to parent confidently and positively, and sees this as one of the primary, universal and most effective supports that the State can provide along the continuum of family support.

Specific Government commitments relating to this goal are outlined in Section 2, Part 1 under 'Goal 1' (see *p. 28*).

GOAL 2 > Earlier intervention and prevention

Prevention and early intervention means intervening at a young age, or early in the onset of difficulties, or at points of known increased vulnerability, such as school transitions, adolescence and parenthood. Universal services are the main providers of prevention and early intervention. Prevention and early intervention is cost-effective. The Government is committed to rebalancing resources to place a greater emphasis on prevention and earlier intervention, the aim of which is to gradually transfer resources over time from crisis to earlier points of intervention.

Specific Government commitments relating to this goal are outlined in Section 2, Part 1 under 'Goal 2' (*see p. 30*).

GOAL 3 > Listen to and involve children and young people

Children and young people have a right to have a voice in decisions that affect them, both individually and collectively. Failure to listen to children and young people in the past resulted in a failure to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect. The Government is committed to strengthening efforts to ensure that children and young people have this right and that they are supported to express their views in all matters affecting them and to have those views given their due weight, including those of 'seldom-heard' children.

Specific Government commitments relating to this goal are outlined in Section 2, Part 1 under 'Goal 3' (*see p. 32*).

GOAL 4 > Ensure quality services

A quality approach to supports and services must prevail in addressing the full range of children and young people's needs and be provided in child-/youth-friendly settings and delivered in ways that are accessible to all children and young people. The Government is committed to improving the quality and timeliness of services, ensuring that State-funded programmes and services are outcomes-focused and can clearly demonstrate improved outcomes over time.

Specific Government commitments relating to this goal are outlined in Section 2, Part 1 under 'Goal 4' (*see p. 34*).

GOAL 5 > Strengthening transitions

Children and young people experience a number of key transitions in their journey from childhood to adulthood. These transitions include those from pre-school to primary school; from primary to secondary school; from living in care to independent living, or transitioning from child to adult health services. For some, these transitions can be destabilising and upsetting, and can place vulnerable groups at further risk. Planning for and providing coordinated support at key moments of transition can help ensure better outcomes, in particular for those with special needs or those who have a disability or those who have experienced care or detention. The Government is committed to bringing a stronger focus on effective transitions, particularly within the areas of education, health, child welfare and youth justice.

Specific Government commitments relating to this goal are outlined in Section 2, Part 1 under 'Goal 5' (*see p. 36*).



GOAL 6 > Cross-Government and interagency collaboration and coordination

This Policy Framework is aimed at all of Government, the added value of which will be derived through greater collaboration and coordination across Government departments and agencies, both nationally and locally, in order to drive implementation and achieve better outcomes. A focus on implementation is a central theme of the next seven years.

This requires:

- leadership, investment in people, culture change and workforce development;
- connecting infrastructure, organisations and systems across traditional boundaries;
- evidence and data analysis, information-sharing and national tracking of outcomes;
- leveraging available resources effectively towards what works and targeting identified need.

The Government is committed to improving cross-departmental and interagency coordination. This will be driven at the most senior level, by the Cabinet.

Specific Government commitments relating to this goal are outlined in Section 2, Part 1 under 'Goal 6' (see p. 39, 40, 41 and 43).

Measuring progress

Government will assess the effectiveness of the implementation through tracking progress over time. A small number of key indicators have been identified, which will be used to measure progress in several key areas. A more extensive set of indicators will be developed during 2014 (see Appendix 4).

Ensuring accountability

Accountability for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* is to Cabinet, the Oireachtas and, ultimately, the people. Each Government department has its own assigned responsibilities for which it is individually accountable. Through the establishment of the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium, cross-Government commitment and accountability for shared actions will be achieved. The Consortium will lead in demonstrating and implementing the outcomes approach and cross-Government coordination, ensuring regular reporting, planning and reviews to keep the policy progressing and evolving over the course of the Framework.



Section 1: CONTEXT

Introduction

‘There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.’

Nelson Mandela

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People sets out the Government’s agenda and priorities in relation to children and young people aged under 25 years over the next 7 years – up to 2020. It represents a whole of Government effort to improve outcomes for children and young people, and recognises the shared responsibility of achieving these results and the importance of doing so within existing resources. It is rooted in the State’s commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This Policy Framework has adopted an outcomes approach, based on five national outcomes for children and young people. These outcomes are that they:

1. Are active and healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing.
2. Are achieving their full potential in all areas of learning and development.
3. Are safe and protected from harm.
4. Have economic security and opportunity.
5. Are connected, respected and contributing to their world.

The outcomes approach adopted here will underpin all subsequent interrelated strategies.

This Policy Framework builds on the National Children’s Strategy, *Our Children – Their Lives* (2000-2010), which was the first strategic statement by Government that children’s lives required a coherent and common approach across policy domains. The Policy Framework incorporates the extensive learning from the past decade and responds to the substantial public consultation that took place in 2012 to inform the Government’s direction over the next 7 years. This consultation included 66,705 responses from children and young people, and over 1,000 submissions from stakeholders and the general public. There was input from across Government, from the National Children’s Advisory Council and the National Youth Work Advisory Committee (both bodies comprising representatives of Government departments), statutory bodies and non-Governmental organisations (NGOs).

The aim of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Framework is to move policy development and service delivery beyond the present scenario – where children and young people are viewed primarily within narrow organisational responsibilities – to a whole of Government response and a clear picture of overall need and the progress required to achieve improved outcomes. This shift in thinking is intended to lead to a more seamless approach between a range of child, youth and adult services, and provides a unifying policy focus on children and young people. The Framework will be followed in 2014 by several key strategic documents

that will lay out in greater detail the programme of work in particular areas. These will include Ireland's first national *Early Years Strategy* and a national *Youth Strategy*. It will also include *Tackling Youth Crime – A Youth Justice Action Plan* and policies on *Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* and *Parenting and Family Support*.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures recognises that children and young people live and interact in multiple connected spheres (nested contexts, such as families, peer groups, schools, clubs, etc) and that a continuum of investment is necessary across the life course for all children and young people, with additional support for 'vulnerable' groups, including those living in poverty. It recognises that investment in the early years, and in prevention and early intervention across the life course will pay additional dividends for all children and young people, and is especially important in breaking intergenerational cycles.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures seeks to improve the lives and life chances of children and young people aged under 25, addressing child poverty, social exclusion, wellbeing and well-becoming. It puts forward an integrated and positive approach to creating and sustaining a nurturing environment that reduces risk and enhances protective factors, and one in which there are roles and responsibilities: for children and young people; for parents and families; for communities and neighbourhoods; for service providers; for schools; for policy-makers; and for society.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures works from an evidence base that identifies what these risk and protective factors are, the mediating roles different stakeholders can play in these and the policy levers necessary to create change.

Investing in children and young people to reach their potential across the five national outcomes involves addressing inequalities within society, breaking cycles of intergenerational disadvantage and ensuring that supports, services and societal expectations strengthen children and help support them to achieve a full life experience.

This Policy Framework strongly supports the EU 2020 Strategy and the Commission's Recommendation on 'Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage', in which the 3 pillars of investment identified are: access to adequate resources; access to affordable quality services; and the inclusion of children and young people.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures is aligned to the Government's *Strategy for Growth, 2014-2020*¹¹, which seeks to hasten the country's emergence from the deepest economic crisis in our history, including 'by giving opportunities to our children to live and work at home, including those who had to emigrate'. The economic strategy aims to promote the economic security of families through increasing the number of parents in employment and it rightly recognises that 'our increasing child and youth population is a significant resource for our country ...' and that 'ensuring the best possible outcomes for this group is therefore an important element in our future economic planning'. The ambition is for Ireland to be the best small country in the world in which to bring up children.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures and *Healthy Ireland*¹² are complementary policy frameworks. While *Healthy Ireland* addresses the determinants of health across the population, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* reflects this with an emphasis within and across the population of 0-24 year-olds. *Healthy Ireland* is the overarching policy for health

and wellbeing and its actions are reflected in Outcome 1 of this Framework ('Active and healthy') and across the whole policy framework. Similarly, this Framework is consistent with other sectoral strategies as they relate to children and young people.

The State alone cannot achieve the national outcomes set out here for children and young people. Children and young people have to achieve them for themselves. However, the State and many other actors will be required to work together to support children and young people to reach their potential. This will be achieved through ensuring that there is better coordination and collaboration, better supports for parents, that the reform agenda is implemented, that investment is made in quality early years care and education, that interventions are made at key times that support the building of resilience, supporting all children and young people in dealing well with what life brings them.

The case for supporting children and young people

The five national outcomes speak to what we want for our children and young people now and as they mature to adulthood and become parents themselves. Investment in children and young people is a social responsibility and, while making good economic sense, requires a medium to long-term perspective. Investment in children and young people is akin to a capital investment from which significant returns flow.

One-third of our population is under the age of 25.¹³ In 2011, Ireland had the highest birth rate in the EU (16.3%) and the highest proportion of young people aged between 0-14 (21.6%).¹⁴ The majority of children and young people in Ireland are healthy¹⁵ and happy with their lives¹⁶. However, a small but significant proportion of children and young people need targeted supports to ensure that they get the most out of their lives.

Ireland aspires to have a society where children and young people occupy a special place. As a nation, we seek to support their wellbeing, happiness and health. We want childhood to be a precious time of exploration, excitement, joy and wonder. This requires focusing on what can make their lives 'go well' in addition to attending to what can go wrong. As children develop through adolescence into young adulthood, we want them to have a strong basis from which to develop the skills needed to thrive. This can be achieved through the provision of universal supports for children and young people with a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the level of challenge they face.

Government policy can help in closing the gap between what we are currently achieving and what we aspire to achieve.

The Government's *Strategy for Growth, 2014-2020* notes that our increasing child and youth population is a significant resource for our country. It also highlights that there is clear international evidence that investing in children during their early years pays significant dividends for individuals and society as a whole. Ensuring the best possible outcomes for children and young people is an important element in our economic planning.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures envisions an Ireland where all of our youth are happy, healthy and engaged. It seeks to ensure that all children and young people have the opportunity to develop into adults with the skills and attitudes needed.

The early years

The brain develops at an astonishing rate in the early years of life. Its capacity to adapt and develop slows with age. This is one of the reasons why earlier intervention yields greater returns.¹⁷ Early experiences determine whether a child's developing brain architecture provides a strong or weak foundation for future learning, behaviour, and physical and mental health. Investment in the very early years (0-3) yields the highest returns, with significant returns incurred throughout childhood and early adulthood.¹⁸ Across OECD countries, expenditure on early childhood education accounts for, on average, 0.5% of the overall GDP. However, in Ireland less than 0.1% of GDP is spent on early childhood educational institutions.¹⁹ All children will benefit from investment in early years care and education. Indeed, children in early years care and education are shown to outperform those without it as evidenced in the PISA 2012 report on the achievements of 15-year-olds, which notes that *'having attended pre-primary school for one year vastly increases average maths scores at age fifteen'*; it also finds that *'the disadvantage for students who did not attend pre-primary school at all is indisputable'*.²⁰ Further, disadvantaged children have the greatest potential to benefit from early childhood care and education because their abilities are less developed when they start school and so they have more scope to catch-up.²¹ The early years are also a key time for identifying and intervening early to support children with disabilities or special educational or health needs.

'The foundation for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual and emotional, are laid in early childhood. What happens in these early years (starting in the womb) has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and wellbeing.'

Marmot Health Inequalities Review (2010)

Investing during childhood and adolescence

There is a strong case for investing across the life course, in particular throughout childhood and adolescence. The experiences, knowledge and skills acquired in adolescence have important implications for an individual's prospects in adulthood. Positive experiences during adolescence can also somewhat counter negative experiences or deficiencies during childhood, thus reinforcing its importance as a key stage for interventions of all kinds, including 'second chances'²².

While there may be factors in a child or young person's environment or background that increase the probability that they may get into trouble, there are also protective factors that can shield them from harmful influences. Such factors promote resilience, which is the achievement of good outcomes despite serious threats to adaptation or development.²³

Resilience is promoted in young people when they have self-esteem, relationships that offer care, love and trust within and outside the family, and when they grow and develop in supportive communities.²⁴ Resilience in children and young people is promoted when they have particular intellectual skills, self-regulation skills, positive thoughts about themselves and their abilities, and a sense of meaning in life. Resilience is also promoted through positive relationships children and young people have with others, especially caregivers

and other nurturing adults, and friends who are supportive and pro-social. The wider social and cultural context can also promote resilience through offering services and supports for families and children, and promoting positive social norms.

Social and financial return on investment

The case for investing in children and young people on both social and economic grounds is supported by a body of international evidence, across a range of policy areas, using a variety of evaluation methods and spanning different policy interventions.²⁵ Consider the social and financial return on investment in the following examples:

- A euro (€1) spent on pre-school programmes generates a higher return on investment than the same spending on schooling.²⁶
- Chicago Child-Parent Centres study found that society saves \$7 for every \$1 invested in pre-school.²⁷
- Across OECD countries, students who attended pre-school for one year or more scored more than 30 points higher in reading than those who did not.²⁸
- OECD work on the Social Outcomes of Learning shows that high-quality early childhood education and care brings a range of social benefits, including better health, reduced likelihood of engagement in risky behaviours and stronger civic and social engagement.²⁹
- In the UK, research has found that for every £1 invested in targeted interventions designed to catch problems early and prevent problems from re-occurring, between £7.60 and £9.20 worth of social value is generated.³⁰
- One estimate puts the lifetime cost of behavioural problems at more than £1 million for one person.³¹

Data for Ireland also illustrates the economic benefits of investing in children and young people:

- €2.20 return for every €1 invested in youth work.³²
- €7 return for every €1 invested arising from the provision of one year, universal quality pre-school service.³³
- €3 return for every €1 invested in the Headstrong Jigsaw model of Youth Mental Health services.³⁴

The words of Frederick Douglass, African-American social reformer (1818-1895), speak volumes in this context:

‘It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.’

The cost of *not* investing in children and young people

More physically and emotionally healthy individuals benefit society through lower costs associated with risky behaviours, such as the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, or obesity. It follows that the cost of inaction during childhood and youth to society is great. As an example, the *Growing Up in Ireland* national longitudinal study has found that one-quarter of children are overweight or obese. If uninterrupted, childhood overweight and obesity

will invariably lead to increasing rates of diet-related non-communicable diseases among children and young people, which will follow them into adult life. Obesity accounts for 5% of heart attacks and stroke, 10% of osteoarthritis, 20% of hypertension, 30% of cancers and 80% of type 2 diabetes.

In Ireland:

- The direct and indirect costs of overweight and obesity in 2009 were estimated at €1.13 billion; 35% were direct costs (e.g. hospital in-patient, out-patient, GP and drug costs).³⁵
- 6%-15% of the total health budget is spent on treating tobacco-related disease.³⁶
- The estimated overall cost to society of problem alcohol use was €3.7 billion in 2007, not including the human or emotional costs involved.³⁷
- The cost of detaining a young person in 2012 was €281,000 per annum, while the cost of detaining an adult prisoner was €65,404 (not including education spend³⁸), compared to the cost per person of €2,200 of a Garda Youth Diversion Project.³⁹

The roots of many of these issues can be traced to childhood. For example, anti-social behaviour in childhood and early school-leaving have been shown to be major predictors of how much an individual will cost society, with the costs falling on many agencies. By age 28, the cost to society for individuals at age 10 with conduct disorders was 10 times higher than for those with no conduct problems and 3.5 times higher than for those with some conduct problems.⁴⁰

We invest in children and young people because it is intrinsically a good thing to do. It also happens to make sense for the good of society and for the long-term benefit of the economy.

Making progress

The National Children's Strategy (2000-2010), *Our Children – Their Lives*, was launched in 2000.⁴¹ It was well received and made a distinct and valuable contribution to policy development in subsequent years. It was one of the first such strategies internationally and placed Ireland at the forefront of whole-of-Government approaches to children. Its emphasis, including during its own development, on consultation with children and usage of research evidence became central to the policy approach in subsequent years.

An independent review of the National Children's Strategy by the Children's Rights Alliance in 2011 found that progress was impressive in relation to two of the three national goals, namely 'Children will have a voice' and 'Children's lives will be better understood'.⁴² Specific achievements in the areas of children's participation and research included the establishment of *Dáil na nÓg* and *Comhairle na nÓg* at national and county level, and the commencement of the national longitudinal study on children, *Growing Up in Ireland*. During this period, a significant investment was made in data and research in order to achieve a better understanding of children's lives, included the development of a National Set of Child Well-being Indicators and the biennial publication of the *State of the Nation's Children* report. On the other hand, the Children's Right Alliance considered that progress on the third goal, 'Children will receive quality supports and services', had been more limited. This assessment has informed the focus of the present Policy Framework, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, with an emphasis on transforming policies and services through stronger implementation and coordination across Government.

The institutional structure related to children also saw major change during the life of the National Children's Strategy. Positive developments included the establishment of the National Children's Office, which subsequently became the Office of the Minister for Children and since 2011 has been the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). The piloting of Children's Services Committees was undertaken to achieve improved coordination of services at a local level. There were also wider organisational developments during the course of the Strategy's 10-year life that could not have been envisaged when it was developed, including the replacement of the regional health boards with the national Health Service Executive (HSE).

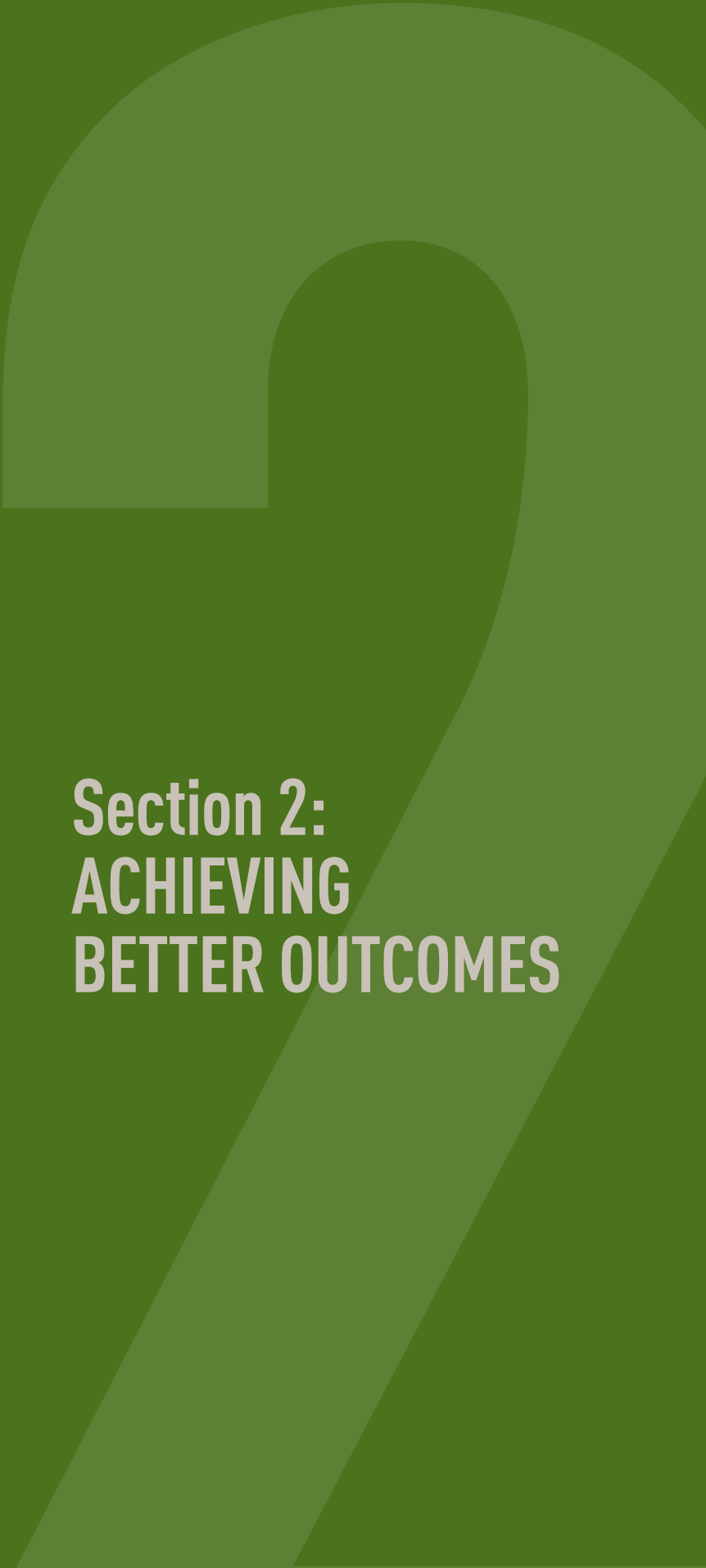
The publication of the National Children's Strategy in 2000 provided impetus for a shift in attitudes to children and recognition of the importance of a more integrated, life cycle approach to policy development. Its implementation has provided much practical learning on the complexity of intersectoral working at national and local level. The period since 2000 has had two distinct phases. During the first phase, up to 2007, Ireland was on the crest of an economic wave. Taxes were cut and there were significant increases in public expenditure. Over 40,000 childcare places were created, using Exchequer and EU co-funding; Child Benefits increased substantially; and there were reforms in the Education and the Youth Justice System aimed at improving outcomes for children and young people. Government efforts to improve interagency work in child and youth services included piloting and evaluating evidence-based programmes in areas of disadvantage, to learn what interventions would improve child outcomes in an Irish context.

In the second phase, from 2007, the economic downturn was very sudden and the need to make drastic savings saw all public expenditure come into greater focus. A free pre-school year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) was introduced in 2010, at about one-third of the cost of the previous cash-based Early Childcare Supplement. This programme has ensured almost all children attend pre-school regardless of their backgrounds and has allowed the State to promote higher standards in that sector, as well as assisting parents with childcare at a key point in the economic cycle of the family.

In 2011, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs was established, with a full Cabinet Minister for the first time in the history of the State. The Children's Referendum was approved by a majority of voters in November 2012, based on a wording that proposed the incorporation of specific children's rights into the Constitution of Ireland. And from 1st January 2014, a new Child and Family Agency was established, putting the welfare of all children at the centre of its work.

While it is anticipated that we are approaching the end of the severe fiscal adjustments, we will need to continue to control Government expenditure and find further savings, even if there is no further global economic downturn. That is why the Government is looking at reforming how we, as a State, do business, how we set priorities and how we deliver services to ensure that in meeting the economic challenges facing us, the vulnerable in our society are supported.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures sets out the policy context in which we will improve outcomes for children and young people. It identifies the approaches, principles and priorities that will allow us deliver on these aspirations.

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Section 2: ACHIEVING BETTER OUTCOMES

Vision

Our vision is for Ireland to be one of the best small countries in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future.

Guiding principles

The development of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was guided by the following key principles. These principles will, in turn, guide the implementation and monitoring of the Policy Framework. The following definitions include characteristic outcomes associated with the application of each principle.

Children's rights

Principle: The rights of children, as outlined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989)⁴³, are recognised and child-centred approaches are adopted. It is acknowledged that children have developmental and age-appropriate needs that change over time, and that children are sometimes vulnerable and largely dependent on adults for their care and needs.

Outcome: The development of laws, policies and services take into account the needs, rights and best interests of children and young people. Efforts are made to involve children and young people in policy and decision-making processes.

Family-orientated

Principle: The family is recognised as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and wellbeing of children. It is acknowledged that parents have the primary responsibility for their child's upbringing and development, and that the State has a duty to assist parents in fulfilling their child-rearing responsibilities.

Outcome: External interventions support and empower families within the community. Children are only taken into care as a measure of last resort, to secure the child's safety and welfare.

Equality

Principle: The diversity of children's experiences, abilities, identities and cultures is acknowledged and reducing inequalities is promoted throughout *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* as a means of improving outcomes and achieving greater social inclusion.

Outcome: Inequalities are addressed across all sectors, including health, education and justice. Children and their parents do not face discrimination of any kind, irrespective of membership of the Traveller community, race, colour, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, civil status, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. All children in need have equality of access to, and participation in, a range of quality public services.

Evidence-informed and outcomes-focused

Principle: To be effective, policies and services must be evidence-informed and outcomes-focused.

Outcome: The needs of children and young people are placed at the centre of Government decision-making. Policies and services for children, young people and their families are based on identified need; informed by evidence from knowledge, practice and research; and focused on achieving results to agreed standards and timeframes in a targeted and cost-effective manner. The decision-making process and the objective basis for decisions are clear.

Accountability and resource efficiency

Principle: Clear implementation, monitoring and accountability mechanisms and lines of responsibility for delivery are in place to drive timely and effective policy implementation.

Outcome: All Government departments and publicly funded agencies are accountable for decisions relating to policy and practice affecting children and young people. All Government departments and agencies accept responsibility for ensuring the most efficient and cost-effective use of resources to secure better outcomes and demonstrate a commitment to evidence-based strategies for improvement.

Five National Outcomes

The *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Policy Framework identifies five national outcomes necessary to progress our vision for children and young people. Each outcome has four aims (see Figure 1). The outcomes and associated aims are interconnected and in many instances reinforcing. For example, being protected from poverty and social exclusion significantly supports Outcome 1 ('Active and healthy') and Outcome 2 ('Learning and development'). Similarly, having a stable and caring home environment is a key foundation for all Outcomes 1-5.

The Framework adopts both a universal and a targeted approach. It focuses on the situation of all children and young people, while also identifying and giving priority to marginalised and disadvantaged groups. It recognises that to promote greater equality of outcomes for all, some children and young people will require additional support and particular inequalities or structural challenges will need to be tackled.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child set out in 2004 a (non-exhaustive) list of marginalised and disadvantaged groups of children, to include: '*... girls, children living in poverty, children with disabilities, children belonging to indigenous or minority groups, children from migrant families, children without parental care, children living in institutions, children living with mothers in prisons, refugee and asylum-seeking children, children infected with, or affected by HIV/AIDS, and children of alcohol- or drug-addicted parents.*'⁴⁴

The Framework also takes into consideration children's evolving capacity, how their rights are fulfilled and their needs met. Hence the Framework explores issues affecting a child or young person at different stages of their lives.

Figure 1: The Outcomes Framework, with 5 national outcomes and 4 aims for each



Six Transformational Goals

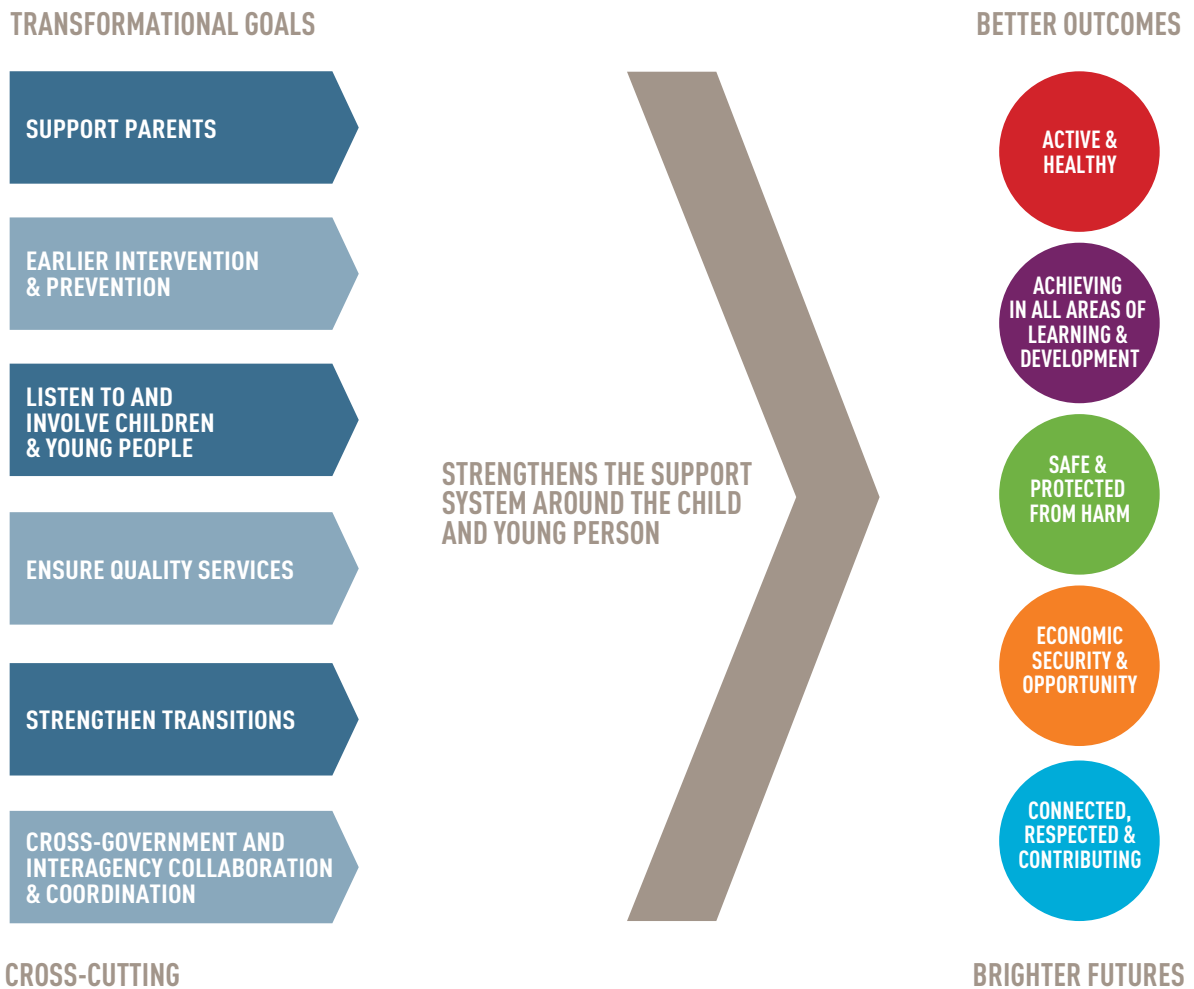
To deliver better outcomes for children and young people, and so increase the number of children and young people who achieve across the five national outcomes, a number of **cross-cutting themes that require strengthening** have been identified and prioritised. These are termed 'transformational goals' because they are core to ensuring policies and services are made more effective in achieving better outcomes. These goals will be a core focus for collective attention and improvement within the lifetime of this Policy Framework.

The 6 identified transformation goals (see *Figure 2*) are:

1. Support parents.
2. Earlier intervention and prevention.
3. Listen to and involve children and young people.
4. Ensure quality services.
5. Strengthen transitions.
6. Cross-Government and interagency collaboration and coordination.

Paying attention to each of these goals will lead to a significant improvement in the quality and timeliness of support to children and young people and to the effectiveness and responsiveness of policy and service provision. Some of the goals require cultural change, some require rebalancing of resources and others require attention to planning and better communication. All are important in strengthening the system of supports around the child and young person to achieve better outcomes now and in the future.

Figure 2: The 6 transformational goals for ensuring more children and young people achieve the national outcomes



Each transformational goal is explored in further detail in **Part 1** of this section, with key findings from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study and Government commitments over the period to 2020 identified and responsibilities assigned.

Part 1: TRANSFORMATIONAL GOALS

1
SUPPORT
PARENTS

2
EARLIER
INTERVENTION
AND PREVENTION

3
LISTEN TO
AND INVOLVE
CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE

4
ENSURE
QUALITY
SERVICES

5
SUPPORT
EFFECTIVE
TRANSITIONS

6
CROSS-GOVERNMENT
AND INTERAGENCY
COLLABORATION
AND COORDINATION

1

Support Parents

Parents are the primary carers of children and young people. Effective parenting can provide a loving, secure home; encourage learning and healthy living; promote the child's development of social networks; and support young people in taking steps towards greater independence and engagement in the world around them. Ensuring all parents are appropriately supported and resourced to care for their children is central to realising the rights of all children and young people, and preventing child abuse and neglect. Supporting parents to parent confidently and positively is one of the primary, universal and most effective supports that the State can provide along the continuum of family support.

Findings from *Growing Up in Ireland, National Longitudinal Study of Children*

- 35% of the mothers of 9-month-old infants did not have any family living locally (Special Report, 2013).
- 15% of the mothers of 9-month-old infants had no help or not enough help from friends and family, and 6.5% had no family in the country (Special Report, 2013).
- Parents of 3-year-olds tended to have a positive view of themselves in their parenting role. Just under 40% of mothers and 27% of fathers rated themselves as 'average', with the majority feeling they were either 'better than average' or 'very good' (2013).
- Among fathers of infants, greater parental relationship satisfaction was associated with lower levels of parenting stress, which in turn had a positive effect on their feelings towards the infant. Furthermore, among both mothers and fathers of 9-month-olds, increased parental relationship satisfaction was associated with lower levels of conflict and higher levels of closeness in their relationship with the infant (2012).
- At age 3 and 5 years, most parents described high levels of warmth and low levels of conflict in the parent-child relationship (2013).
- Approximately 85% of infants in the Infant Cohort are living in a two-parent family, while 78% of children in the Child Cohort are living in a two-parent family. For both cohorts, about 4% of children changed from a one-parent to a two-parent family structure, and vice-versa, in the 4-year gap between data collections (2012).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child places a duty on States to respect the rights and responsibilities of parents (Article 5) and to support them with their child-rearing responsibilities (Article 18).

The Government recognises:

- Almost all aspects of public policy impact on some dimension of parenting, including healthcare, education, housing provision, employment law and social welfare payments.
- Parents are the foundation for good child outcomes and have significant influence, particularly in the early years of children's lives.
- The importance of maternity, adoptive, parental and carer's leave in enabling parents to be with their children in the early days and at critical times.
- What parents *do* is more important than *who* they are.⁴⁵ How children are parented has a larger influence on a child's future than wealth, socio-economic class, education or any other common social factor.⁴⁶
- Macro-economic* and structural factors impact on a person's ability to parent, creating parental stress. Other factors that influence the parenting approach include mental health, culture and social exclusion.
- Neglect or abuse by a parent, or an inability to parent due to substance misuse or addiction, a disability, mental health difficulties, homelessness or domestic violence are key factors leading to children being placed at risk and potentially entering the care system.
- Effective parenting support can ameliorate some of the more negative impacts of intergenerational poverty.⁴⁷
- A supportive home learning environment is positively associated with children's early achievements and wellbeing, and influences social mobility.
- Parents are key mediators in developing and supporting desirable health-related behaviours among children and young people and in addressing undesirable behaviours.
- Parents need support at each stage of a child's development, from pre-natal to early childhood and on to adolescence.
- Effective parenting supports should encourage positive parenting and discipline approaches. Programmes and interventions used should be proven to increase parenting skills, confidence and capacity; reduce parental stress; improve child wellbeing and behaviour; and increase the enjoyment of, and satisfaction in, parenting.
- Some children may require additional supports, such as full-time parental care, which can place an additional burden on the family.
- Some young people become parents and such 'teen parents' may need additional supports to access education, employment and housing, and to support their own parenting.

* There are also structural and macro-level barriers and enablers (macro-economic including income, employment and labour market dynamics, demographic, societal, cultural, political, etc.) that can inhibit or promote well-being and well-becoming. Addressing the additional barriers faced by children and families living in poverty and experiencing disadvantage *as well as* enhancing enablers for *all* children is critical.

- The State, as corporate parent to children in care, has a responsibility to ensure that supports are prioritised to facilitate these children and young people to reach their full potential across the five national outcomes.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

[**Note:** Government department/agency responsible for action in brackets, with lead agency indicated in **bold**]

- G1.** Develop a high-level policy statement on Parenting and Family Support to guide the provision of universal evidence-informed parenting supports. This should address parental and familial factors impacting on parenting capacity and family functioning (e.g. mental health and substance abuse) and identify responses required for 'at risk' children, families and communities. (**DCYA**)
- G2.** Ensure planning and coordination of parenting supports at local level through Children's Services Committees. (**CFA**, DCYA, DJE, HSE, Local Government)
- G3.** Continue to support parents financially with the costs of rearing children through the provision of Child Benefit. (**DSP**)
- G4.** Evaluate current policy in relation to maternity and parental leave with a view to giving consideration to the introduction of paid paternity leave. (**DJE**, DCYA, DJEI, DPER)

2

Earlier intervention and prevention

Prevention and early intervention means intervening at a young age, or early in the onset of difficulties, or at points of known increased vulnerability such as school transitions, adolescence and parenthood.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child puts a duty on States to work towards the prevention of discrimination (Article 2), child abuse (Article 19) and other forms of exploitation (e.g. Articles 33 and 34), and to develop preventive healthcare education and services (Article 24). Early intervention is often a determining factor in the realisation of children's rights. For example, a successful early intervention which keeps a child in school will help fulfill their right to education (Article 28) and may also protect them from drug misuse (Article 33) and entering the justice system (Article 40).

The Government recognises:

- Prevention and early intervention initiatives aim to address the early indicators of developing problems and to support a trajectory to more positive outcomes, with a focus on breaking intergenerational disadvantage.
- Universal services are the main providers of prevention and early intervention, therefore Early Years services, schools, youth, community and health services need to be inclusive and accessible.
- Effective universal services can build essential social and emotional foundations for children in their early years. Targeted effective interventions can support children at risk to build their competencies, leading to better health, educational attainment and greater resilience, impacting on future outcomes, such as better mental health, better parenting skills and reduced youth crime.
- Prevention and early intervention is cost-effective. The lifetime costs associated with personal difficulties, such as early school-leaving⁴⁸, and behavioural problems are borne by a wide range of agencies, underlining the need for a partnership approach to planning and funding of prevention and early intervention services.
- Since many of the savings from prevention and early intervention actions are realised in the long term, a commitment to future planning and cost-benefit analysis is required.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

[**Note:** Government department/agency responsible for action in brackets, with lead agency indicated in **bold**]

- G5. Work towards rebalancing resources to place a greater emphasis on prevention and earlier intervention. (**DCYA, DH**, DES, DJE, CFA, HSE)
- G6. The HSE and the Child and Family Agency will explore the provision of an enhanced maternal ante-natal and early childhood development service, building on the review of the Community Nursing Services and related developments in family support provision (including home visiting⁴⁹), incorporating the learning from the *Growing Up In Ireland* study and the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme. (**HSE**, CFA, DH, DCYA)
- G7. Provide and commission both universal and targeted evidence-informed parenting supports and ensure early identification of 'at risk' children and families to strengthen families and reduce the incidences of children coming into, and remaining in, care. (**CFA**)
- G8. Continue to increase investment in high-quality early years care and education for all children, prioritising families on low incomes. Introduce a second free pre-school year within the lifetime of this Framework, once the required quality standards are achieved and subject to resources becoming available. (**DCYA**, DES, CFA, DSP)
- G9. Introduce universal GP services and continue to roll out Primary Healthcare Teams, to promote early diagnosis and treatment of ill-health. (**DH**, HSE)
- G10. Support quality youth work, both as a protective factor contributing to the young person's overall development and in reaching out to young people at risk of crime or anti-social behaviour. (**DCYA**)
- G11. Training and up-skilling of professionals across formal and non-formal educational settings to be in a position to identify potential child welfare and mental health issues, and to provide preventative and early intervention support. (**DCYA**, DH, DES, CFA, HSE)
- G12. Profile key risk factors for poor outcomes for children and young people and develop practice tools to assist professionals in identifying and – working with families – mitigating these risks. (**DCYA**, DES, DH, CFA, HSE)
- G13. Implement the Area-Based Childhood Programme to address the impact of child poverty and improve child outcomes in 10 or more areas of disadvantage and mainstream the learning from the programme to services throughout the country. (**DCYA**, DES, DH, LCDC)

3

Listen to and involve children and young people

Listening to and involving children and young people is a fundamental social inclusion process through which children and young people are empowered to become actors in the decisions that affect their lives and to be socially included, active citizens in their own right.

A general principle of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is that the child's view must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting him or her, in accordance with their age and maturity (Article 12). Better outcomes for children and young people require that they are listened to, and involved, in relation to decisions that affect them.

The Government recognises:

- Children and young people have a right to have a voice in decisions that affect them, both individually and collectively.
- The importance of children and young people having a voice in decisions made in their local communities, in their schools and in the wider formal and non-formal education system.
- The importance of children and young people having a voice in decisions that affect their lives regarding the health and social services delivered to them and having a voice in the Courts and legal system.
- From birth onwards, children have an evolving capacity to participate in the decisions that affect them and adults have a key role in enabling and facilitating their voice to be heard.
- Supporting children to express themselves is about developing from an early age the child's capacity to be reflective, critical citizens in the present as well as in the future.
- Failure to listen to children and young people in the past has resulted in a failure to protect them from abuse and neglect.
- Participation is a process, a way of working that engages children and young people on matters that concern them, individually and collectively. The process itself is respectful of the dignity of children and young people and the contribution they have to make, based on their unique experiences and perspectives.
- Promoting the participation of children and young people in decision-making involves taking their views and opinions seriously and acknowledging and responding to them appropriately.
- 'Seldom-heard' children (e.g. children with disabilities) are harder to reach and hear, but their voices are no less important and certain accommodations and supports are required to ensure that they are heard.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

[**Note:** Government department/agency responsible for action in brackets, with lead agency indicated in **bold**]

- G14.** Consult with children and young people on policies and issues that affect their lives. (**DCYA**, All)
- G15.** Develop and implement a National Policy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making to strengthen efforts to ensure children and young people are supported to express their views in all matters affecting them and to have those views given due weight, including those of 'seldom-heard' children.⁵⁰ (**DCYA**, All)
- G16.** Strengthen participation in decision-making for health and wellbeing at community level. (**HSE**, CFA, Local Government and others as relevant) *Outcome 1*
- G17.** Create mechanisms to provide children and young people with the opportunity to be heard in primary and post-primary schools and centres for education through Student Councils or other age-appropriate mechanisms. (**DES**, DCYA) *Outcome 2*
- G18.** Create mechanisms to provide children with the opportunity to be heard in judicial proceedings affecting them, including through independent representatives where appropriate.⁵¹ (**DJE**, DCYA) *Outcome 3*
- G19.** Facilitate children and young people in care to have meaningful participation in their care planning and decision-making, including through training and support of the professionals. (**CFA**, DCYA) *Outcome 3*
- G20.** Ensure the views presented by children and young people in participatory forums and consultations are taken into account by the formal political and policy-making process, and that feedback to the young people is always provided in return. (**DCYA**)
- G21.** Establish a Children and Young People's Participation Hub to support Government departments and agencies in the implementation of the National Policy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making. (**DCYA**)

4

Ensure quality services

Quality, effective supports and services address the full range of children and young people's needs; they are provided in child-/youth-friendly settings and are delivered in ways that make them accessible to all children and young people.

The Government recognises:

- The evidence indicates that for services to be high quality and effective, they must:
 - be outcomes-focused and informed by evidence;
 - address multiple aspects of need, be of sufficient intensity to be effective and build on strengths and empower families;
 - work with the child or young person as an individual and as part of a family and a community;
 - be rooted in and work in partnership with the community, and have a strong commitment to participation and actively engage with children, young people and families;
 - be delivered by well-trained and supported staff and volunteers;
 - have effective quality assurance systems in place;
 - have strong leadership and appropriate organisational structures, culture and clear strategic direction;
 - have interagency working and active collaboration and communication.
- The importance for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with disabilities of having timely and affordable access to quality, inclusive services and supports.
- Children and young people in rural and island communities may face particular difficulties in accessing services.
- The need for a collective and shared responsibility for the welfare and protection of children across all professionals working with children and young people, and that an individual professional's commitment to the child/young person has a significant impact on the outcomes achieved, expressed through the quality of their interactions and professionalism.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

[Note: Government department/agency responsible for action in brackets, with lead agency indicated in **bold**]

- G22.** Achieve effective child and family support services through the establishment of the Child and Family Agency and implementation of the National Service Delivery Framework for child welfare and protection services, with agreed thresholds and outcome measures. (**DCYA**, CFA) *Outcome 3*
- G23.** Review the scope of functions of the Child and Family Agency, having regard to the recommendations of the *Report of the Taskforce on the Child and Family Support Agency*⁵² and experience from the Agency's initial operations. (**DCYA**, DH, CFA, HSE)
- G24.** Work towards a common assessment approach within all agencies working with children and young people, and ensure that, where necessary, assessment and decision-making regarding children coming into care are undertaken in a timely and comprehensive manner. (**CFA**, HSE, DES, DCYA, DH)
- G25.** Continue to improve the quality and timeliness of services for children and young people, ensuring that State-funded programmes and services are outcomes-focused and can clearly demonstrate that they improve outcomes. (DCYA, DH, DES, DSP, DECLG, HSE, CFA)
- G26.** Ensure that health and social planners, commissioners and funding programmes prioritise community-based programmes for those most at risk, experiencing the greatest disparities and with the greatest opportunity for impact and mainstreaming.⁵³ (**DH**, DCYA and others as relevant) *Outcome 1*
- G27.** Support the monitoring and full implementation of National Standards in relation to children (child and family services, health and disabilities services, early years, education and youth work). (DCYA, DH, DES, DJE)
- G28.** Support independent inspection and public reporting by bodies such as HIQA and the CFA, ensuring compliance with National Standards in children's services, such as child protection, foster care, residential care, disability, detention schools and pre-schools. (DCYA, CFA, DH, HSE, HIQA)
- G29.** Develop quality standards and training for all professionals working directly with children and young people, ensuring a highly trained, supported and professionally aligned workforce. (DCYA, DH, DES, HSE, CFA)
- G30.** Support early childhood practitioners, teachers and educationalists* through the provision of continuous professional development, the establishment of peer-learning networks and the development of teaching, learning and assessment activities that utilise new technology effectively. (**DES**, DH, DCYA, HSE, Local Government) *Outcome 2*
- G31.** Reconfigure services for children with disabilities under 18 years in line with the HSE's national programme on 'Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0-18)'. (**DH**, HSE). *Outcome 1*
- G32.** Deliver better and more cost-effective public services through greater use of alternative or innovative service delivery models. (**DPER**, All)

* The term 'educationalists' refers to educators in both the formal and non-formal sectors, including Youthreach.

5

Support effective transitions

Children and young people experience a number of key transitions in their journey from childhood to adulthood – from home to early years setting, from pre-school to primary school⁵⁴, from primary school to post-primary school, leaving school, and from living within the family home to living on their own or with others. Some children may transition from living at home to living in a care setting and then leaving that care setting (disability centre, foster or residential care or detention). Others may transition from child to adult health or mental health services. These transitions are underpinned and potentially reinforced by developing their own identity (Outcome 5, Aim 5.1) and a positive sense of wellbeing (Outcome 2, Aim 2.2).

The Government recognises:

- Some children and young people experience these transitions as destabilising and upsetting.
- Vulnerable groups of children can be placed at further risk during times of transition.
- Planning for and providing coordinated support at key moments of transition can help ensure better outcomes, in particular for vulnerable groups such as those with special needs, a disability or who have experienced care or detention.
- The value of strong social networks developed through involvement in youth, sporting and cultural activities in providing stability in times of transition, particularly important for vulnerable young people.
- The transition from primary to post-primary school is a time of triple transition⁵⁵ – as children negotiate the move from childhood to adolescence; from one institutional context to another with different regulations, teacher demands and teacher expectations; and the journey from established social groups into new social relations.
- The importance of the transition from post-primary education to higher education, training or employment.
- The challenge for many young people with a disability of transitioning from dependent to independent living.
- The challenges for many young people leaving care. In the absence of good planning, this transition can be severe and abrupt, with a high risk of social exclusion and a higher rate of youth homelessness than peers not in care. Successful transitions from care rest on pre-care experiences, the quality and stability of the care experience, and the quality of planning and aftercare supports.⁵⁶

- The challenge for many young people making the transition from detention to the community, given the increased risk of re-offending and homelessness.
- Effective transitions require greater forward planning and:
 - better coordination of supports and services available;
 - better collaboration between professionals;
 - better graduated transitions, where appropriate.
- Supporting effective transitions is cost-effective and beneficial to the individuals themselves.⁵⁷

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

[**Note:** Government department/agency responsible for action in brackets, with lead agency indicated in **bold**]

- G33.** Bring a stronger focus on effective transitions, particularly within education, health, child welfare and youth justice services. (**DCYA**, DES, DH, DJE)
- G34.** Research and adopt strategies to strengthen transitions through the educational system (into primary, from primary to second-level, from second-level into higher or further education, employment or, in the case of early school-leavers, to Youthreach), including ensuring coherency of curriculum approach, school connections and promoting in-school practices such as the adoption of peer-to-peer support programmes. (**DES**) *Outcome 2*
- G35.** Increase opportunities for young people to enter employment through the promotion of work experience opportunities at second and third level. (**DES**, DSP) *Outcome 4*
- G36.** Strengthen the transitions between child and adolescent and adult services in the areas of physical and mental health services. (**DH**, HSE) *Outcome 1*
- G37.** Ensure all young people leaving care, detention or residential disability settings are adequately prepared and supported to negotiate the system and transition to stable independent living, further education, training or employment through the development and implementation of a quality aftercare plan and the development of protocols in relation to accessing housing, education and training.⁵⁸ (**DCYA**, CFA, DH, HSE, DECLG) *Outcome 4*

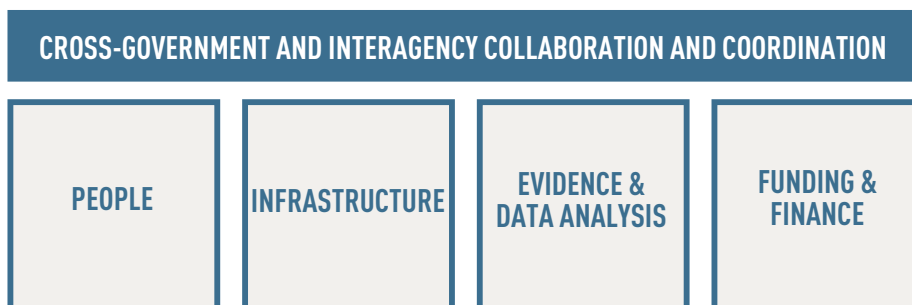
6

Cross-Government and interagency collaboration and coordination

This is a framework for all of Government, the added value of which will be derived through greater collaboration and coordination across Government, both nationally and locally. A focus on implementation is a central theme of the next 7 years. The challenge is transferring policy into practice and informing practice with the evidence of what works.

Better outcomes, more efficient use of resources and improved satisfaction among parents, children, young people and professionals are just some of the benefits of working together and putting the needs of the child or young person at the centre.

A central enabler for implementation of this Framework is cross-Government and interagency collaboration and coordination, which runs horizontally across people, infrastructure, evidence and data analysis, and funding and finance, as well as running vertically, from national to local level. Action is required across all these dimensions to meet the implementation challenge.



The Government recognises that delivering cross-department and interagency coordination and collaboration requires:

- leadership, investing in people, culture change and workforce development;
- connecting infrastructure, organisations and systems across traditional boundaries;
- evidence and data analysis, information-sharing and national tracking of outcomes;
- leveraging available resources effectively towards what works and targeted identified need.

6.1 People

Changing behaviour is all about people. *‘Implementation is synonymous with coordinated change at system, organisation, programme and practice level ... The essence of implementation is behaviour change.’*⁵⁹ Change requires leadership, changing culture and workforce development.

The Government recognises:

- Bringing about change requires significant leadership at all levels of the system, locally and nationally, politically and professionally. Internal and external ‘champions’ and role models are required. These leaders need to share a vision of what improved services and supports for children and young people will look like.
- Active involvement of the professionals themselves, working across professional boundaries, is essential to addressing improvements in systems, processes and decision-making.
- Politicians, policy-makers, educators, health professionals, youth workers, the Gardaí, the judiciary and legal professions, social workers and all who work with children and young people need to:
 - work collaboratively across boundaries;
 - create a culture that respects and progresses the rights of the child;
 - involve and consult with children and young people;
 - develop a culture of accountability to achieving results.

This requires everyone to work and think differently.

- Better outcomes for children and young people are realised through the quality of the people who surround the child or young person. To bring about the culture change outlined above requires new ways of working, supporting leaders throughout the system and ensuring that the professionals and volunteers working with children and young people are skilled, valued and motivated.
- The importance of a fit-for-purpose workforce, with strong links to qualifying colleges.
- Improved cross-Government working for children and young people forms part of an overall reform agenda for public services and publicly funded services. The Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016 and the Civil Service Renewal Initiative are key drivers of this overall Government reform programme and implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* will contribute to and exploit this wider reform programme.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

[**Note:** Government department/agency responsible for action in brackets, with lead agency indicated in **bold**]

- G38.** Support the development of interdisciplinary and interprofessional training programmes which encourage leadership and collaboration for professionals working with children and young people across the range of service delivery. (**DCYA**, CFA, DH, HSE, DES, DJE)
- G39.** Develop and implement a multidisciplinary workforce development plan on a phased basis for all professionals working with children and families, including staff within the Child and Family Agency and other key professionals.⁶⁰ (**DCYA**, CFA, HSE, DES, DJE)
- G40.** Collaborate with universities to ensure social work graduates are well equipped to enter practice, having had the experience of good quality undergraduate student placements. (**CFA**)
- G41.** Build the required project and change management capabilities to implement this Framework. (**DCYA**)
- G42.** Implement the Senior Public Service Leadership Development Strategy, 2013-2015⁶¹ within the civil service and extend these initiatives to senior levels of the wider public service, paying particular attention to the opportunities and challenges associated with cross-Government working. (**DPER**, All)
- G43.** Strengthen the performance culture within the public service through continuous improvement of performance management systems and the management of under-performance. (**DPER**, All)
- G44.** Promote the provision of customer service training for key front-line staff in all public bodies. (**DPER**, All)

6.2 Infrastructure

Physical organisational boundaries must not become implementation barriers. Better coordination and integration of policy and services is enabled through supporting infrastructure that is integrated or connecting, so that it can reinforce work practice and put the child or young person at the centre.

Many of the structures required to improve outcomes for children are in development, being formed or being reframed. This includes the Child and Family Agency, which was formally established in January 2014, and Children's Services Committees (CSCs), which have been established in 16 Local Authority areas to bring together key agencies to engage in joint planning and coordination of services for children and young people. CSCs will contribute to and inform national policy on children and young people, and provide a national dissemination channel for policy, shared practice, learning and effective supports. Significant developments are underway in relation to child welfare and protection, including

the implementation of the *Children First* national guidance and the development of a new service delivery model led by the Child and Family Agency. Critical to the success of these new structures is to embed coordinated and integrated working. Budgets and accountabilities need to reinforce and promote integrative, collaborative behaviour.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

[**Note:** Government department/agency responsible for action in brackets, with lead agency indicated in **bold**]

- G45. Resource the Child and Family Agency to implement the change agenda effectively and to deliver better outcomes for children and young people. (**DCYA**, DH, DPER)
- G46. Adopt an effective interagency approach in relation to cases of child welfare and protection, establishing information and coordinating protocols (including Hidden Harm protocols) between agencies serving children and young people and adult-focused addiction, domestic violence and mental health services. (**DCYA**, DH, DES, HSE, CFA, others as relevant) *Outcome 3*
- G47. The roll-out nationally of Children’s Services Committees (CSCs) in a coordinated fashion, connecting them with Local Government and the Child and Family Agency. (**DCYA**, CFA, LCDCs, Local Government)
- G48. Put in place an agreed resourcing framework for Children’s Services Committees, drawing on existing financial support from the CFA, Local Government and DCYA. (**DCYA**, CFA, Local Government)
- G49. Establish integrated services or ‘hubs’ for children and young people at community level (examples include Primary Care Clinics, Family Support/Resource Centres and Jigsaw Youth Mental Health Centres) and, where appropriate, bring health and therapeutic services into schools. (**DH**, DCYA, HSE, CFA, Local Government) *Outcome 1*
- G50. Build on existing good practice around clustering of schools to enable better access to educational supports, particularly for children with special educational needs, and explore the potential for further development of cluster arrangements, to encourage greater connections between schools and community and State services, including sharing infrastructure. (**DES**, DH, HSE, CFA, Local Government) *Outcome 2*
- G51. The establishment of new Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in each county/city, bringing a more strategic, joined-up approach to local and community development. (**DECLG**)
- G52. Streamline planning and decision-making structures at local level, including Children’s Services Committees, to be consistent with the Government’s public sector reforms, and specifically the alignment of local Government and Local Community Development Committees. (**DCYA**, CFA, Local Government, DECLG)
- G53. Review structures for delivery of non-acute health and social care services, having regard to Local Authority administrative boundaries where appropriate. (**DH**, HSE) *Outcome 1*

6.3 Evidence and data analysis

Understanding the lived experience of children and young people is a critical input to informing policy, practice and resourcing. Knowing how our children and young people are developing (and how they fare in relation to international peers) is an important check on the effectiveness of policy. Significant strides have been made over the last decade to meet the information gap on the lives of children and young people in Ireland, through:

- implementation of the *National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives, 2011-2016*;
- publication every 2 years of the *State of the Nation's Children* report on child wellbeing;
- the *Growing Up in Ireland: National Longitudinal Study of Children*, which provides a wealth of information on children's lived experiences;
- the annual CSO/EU *Survey on Income and Living Conditions* (EU-SILC), in particular the thematic modules on child-specific deprivation;
- the European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC).

Building analytical capacity and the understanding of data are both critical. Many stakeholders, including children and families, can contribute to evidence-informed policy, which will support buy-in for driving implementation. It is important to understand not only 'what works', but why it works, when, where and by whom.

The next critical step is better collection, coordination and use of real-time data to inform decision-making, planning, resourcing and policy. With better use of data, we will be able to be more responsive to changing demographics and emerging needs, and to ensure decision-making is based on evidence. Combining learning from research studies conducted in Ireland and internationally on 'what works' (and in what circumstances) should enable more efficient and effective use of resources and lead to better outcomes for children and young people.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

[**Note:** Government department/agency responsible for action in brackets, with lead agency indicated in **bold**]

- G54.** Address information-sharing issues across sectors and strengthen the integration of data systems, including, where appropriate, through utilisation of the Public Sector Identifier for children to support greater use of data to inform policy, planning and service development. (**DPER**, DCYA, DH, DES, DSP, HSE, CFA)
- G55.** Develop information protocols to assist the sharing of information, where appropriate, in respect of particular children who are vulnerable and at risk. (**DCYA**, DES, DH, ODPC, DJE, AGS, CFA)

- G56. Develop a comprehensive set of indicators to support the Framework and to track progress across the aims of each of the 5 national outcome areas. (DCYA, DH, DES, DSP, DECLG)
- G57. Disaggregate data and indicators by important demographic characteristics to allow for improved evidence-based policy-making, implementation and monitoring, and in the delivery of services.⁶² (DCYA, CSO, DPER)
- G58. Implement the *National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives, 2011-2016*. (DCYA, others as relevant)
- G59. Extend Ireland Stat, the citizen-focused public service performance information website, to all Government departments.⁶³ (DPER, All)
- G60. Improve legislation, policy and technological support for data use and sharing, including open data for citizens. (DPER, All)
- G61. Develop shared systems for coordinating and facilitating statistical analysis from across Government.⁶⁴ (DCYA, DES, DH, CSO and others as relevant)
- G62. Deliver the County-level Data Analysis Initiative to support the Children's Services Committees. (DCYA)
- G63. Develop integrated Social Impact Assessments as a feature of policy development and policy impact analysis, ensuring a focus on the impact of policy on children. (DSP, DH, DCYA, DPER, DF)
- G64. Strengthen data capture to enhance our knowledge and understanding of abuse and children's experience of the Court system, through development of the National Child Care Information System and informed by the Child Care Law Reporting Project. (DCYA) *Outcome 3*

6.4 Funding and finance

A key lever for delivering improved outcomes for children and young people is funding – choosing what gets funded, how it is funded and how much it is funded. This is particularly challenging at a time when expenditure increases are limited by fiscal conditions and the new fiscal rules that apply in an EU context. It is the role of Government to ensure alignment across departments and its implementing agencies in the effective and efficient use of resources.

The Government recognises the need for:

- Alignment on funding priorities for children and young people.
- Greater utilisation of data to ascertain need and resource allocation in a transparent manner.
- More use of research and evaluation as to what services and income supports are effective.
- A plan to address the rebalancing of resources over time, from remedial to early intervention.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

[**Note:** Government department/agency responsible for action in brackets, with lead agency indicated in **bold**]

- G65.** Explore the development of cross-Government estimates for expenditure on children and young people, and update these annually thereafter. (**DCYA**, DPER, DF)
- G66.** Ensure resource allocation is based on current evidence of need and directed towards services and programmes that have evidence of effectiveness in improving outcomes. (**DCYA**, CFA)
- G67.** Improve the effectiveness of overall expenditure on children in achieving better child poverty outcomes.⁶⁵ (**DPER**, DCYA, DH, DES, DSP)
- G68.** Use the intelligence from Children's Services Committees in relation to local need and priorities to inform the allocation of national and local funding streams. (**DCYA**, DECLG, DH, CFA, HSE, AGS, Local Government)
- G69.** Introduce the commissioning of services by the Child and Family Agency,⁶⁶ moving away from a grants system to outcome-based contracts, and offer support to build capacity within the children and youth sector to respond to the new approach effectively. (**CFA**, DCYA)

Part 2: NATIONAL OUTCOMES

In Part 1, the Framework addressed 6 identified cross-cutting transformational goals, which will be prioritized over the next 7 years to enable better outcomes. In Part 2, the Framework focuses on each of the 5 National Outcome areas and captures current and new Government commitments to improving policy and services in relation to each.



Active &
Healthy



Achieving



Safe



Economic
Security



Connected
& Respected



**Active &
Healthy**

Outcome 1

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Achievement of Outcome 1 will further Ireland's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Relevant Articles include:

- **Article 6:** Children have an inherent right to life and the State has an obligation to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.
- **Article 24:** Children have a right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health possible and to have access to health services and the State is obliged to take steps to combat disease and develop preventative health care.
- **Article 31:** Children have a right to rest, engage in leisure, play and recreational activities, and participate in cultural and artistic activities.
- **Article 33:** Children have a right to protection from illicit drug use and involvement in drug production and trafficking.
- **Article 23:** Children with a physical disability or learning difficulties have the right to special care, education and training designed to help them to achieve the greatest possible self-reliance and to lead a full and active life.

1

Active & Healthy

Physical and Mental Wellbeing

INTRODUCTION

The aims for all children and young people are that they:

- 1.1** Are physically healthy and make positive health choices.
- 1.2** Have good mental health.
- 1.3** Have a positive and respectful approach to relationships and sexual health.
- 1.4** Are enjoying play, recreation, sports, arts, culture and nature.

Being active and healthy is a significant contributor to overall wellbeing. The majority of children and young people in Ireland enjoy good health. We need to build on this through education, health literacy, building personal resilience and promoting protective factors, as well as empowering young people to be responsible for their own good health. From the consultation with children and young people, we know that they are concerned about binge drinking, pressure to smoke and use of drugs.

The Government recognises that children born with, or who later develop, poor health must be supported to achieve the highest attainable standard of health possible and that poverty, social exclusion, substandard housing and membership of a minority group may significantly impact on a person's health outcomes. In addition, attaining good mental health may be hindered by traumatic life experiences or personal stress.

Identified Lead Government departments and agencies



Other key contributing Government and agency partners are noted in brackets after each commitment.

Key Facts

- 12.3% of in-patient discharges and 4.4% of in-patient bed days were in the 1-14 age group.⁶⁷
- 6.26% of young people aged 0-19 have a disability.⁶⁸
- In 2012, there were 62 deaths by suicide to young people aged 24 and under⁶⁹, and 3,724 cases of hospitalised self-harm by young people aged 24 and under⁷⁰.
- In 2012, 16,664 children (1.45% of population under 18 years) were availing of Community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
- Over half of 16-year-old children have been drunk and 1 in 5 is a weekly drinker.
- 27% of children aged 15-17 reported that they have had sex.

Findings from *Growing Up in Ireland*, National Longitudinal Study of Children

- The majority of children surveyed are in good health from birth to 9 years. Some 73% of 9-year-olds are considered very healthy, with no health problems. For those with problems, respiratory illnesses accounted for almost half (46%) of all chronic illnesses among 9-year-olds, with socio-emotional, learning and behavioural problems accounting for a further 19% (2009/2013).
- Breastfeeding initiation rates in Ireland are among the lowest in the world, at 55%, compared to 92% in Australia and 77% in Britain (2010).
- Breastfeeding rates strongly correlate to maternal education and social class, e.g. 79% with a third-level degree breastfed compared to 29% who left school at Junior Certificate level (2010).
- 99% of 9-month-old infants had their first 6-week check-up and subsequent vaccinations by 2 months of age (99%) and 4 months of age (98%). At 6 months, this fell to 92% (2010).
- Almost a quarter of 3-year-olds are overweight and 26% of 9 and 13-year-olds are overweight or obese (2009/2012/2013).
- 25% of 9-year-olds meet the recommended 60 minutes a day physical activity (2009).
- 91% of 13-year-olds have never smoked (2012).
- 15% of 13-year-olds have tried alcohol (2012).
- 1% of 13-year-olds have tried cannabis, 3% solvents or inhalants, and 0.4% have used other drugs, such as ecstasy and heroin (2012).
- 47% of 9-year-olds were involved in structured cultural activities, such as dance, ballet, arts and drama. More than twice the number of girls (65%) than boys (31%) took part in these activities. Participation was also significantly related to maternal education and family income (2009).
- 97% of 9-year-olds reported playing sport at least once a week. Boys were significantly more likely to play sport every day (61%) compared to girls (52%) (2009).
- Participation in structured sports or organised activities was related to social advantage at both 9 and 13 years of age (2012).

POLICY PRIORITIES

This section outlines the key Government priorities in relation to each of the four aims for Outcome 1 (Active and healthy, physical and mental wellbeing). A policy priority for Government is to increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life (*Healthy Ireland*, Goal 1). This means addressing risk factors and promoting protective factors at every stage of life – from pre-natal through childhood, adolescence, adulthood and into old age, to support lifelong health and wellbeing. A key part of achieving this outcome is to recognise the role of children and young people themselves as active agents in shaping and protecting their own health and wellbeing, and that they should be supported and encouraged to take action to improve their own health.

Aim 1.1: Physically healthy and make positive health choices⁷¹

Physical health is an essential part of an individual's overall health and wellbeing. One can be born with ill-health and life-limiting conditions, or one can develop ill-health or acquire a disability through illness, accident or injury. It is possible to protect and improve one's health through a good diet, plenty of exercise and a healthy lifestyle. Protecting our physical health, preventing illness and early diagnosis of health difficulties are critical for healthy outcomes.

For a growing number of children and young people, an unhealthy lifestyle is having a damaging effect on their health and overall quality of life. For example, overweight and obese children are likely to stay obese into adulthood and are more likely to develop diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular diseases at a younger age. Findings from the study by O'Shea (2006), entitled *The Obesity Challenge*, show that children who are obese between 6 months and 5 years of age have a 25% chance of becoming obese adults; if they are obese when they are over 6, the chance increases to 50% and obese adolescents are 80% more likely to become obese adults.⁷² Obesity, physical inactivity, smoking, alcohol and substance misuse among children and young people, their related diseases and their health and safety implications are among the most serious public health challenges of this century. Addressing and preventing these health issues is therefore a high priority for Government.

The Government recognises:

- The important role of parents and carers in ensuring that their child's health and development is on course, that the child meets their developmental milestones, is fully immunised and is overall well cared for and loved.
- The crucial role of the Public Health Nurse and General Practitioner (GP) in providing primary care and supporting parents to ensure that their children are healthy and developing appropriately, including through immunisation programmes and health and development screening.
- The importance of prevention and early intervention in addressing the health needs of children and young people.

- The benefits to children of improving breastfeeding rates among mothers.
- All those working with or caring for children have a role to play in promoting their health and wellbeing.
- A child's health needs change as they get older and therefore public policy, service provision and practice must accommodate the transitions from child to adolescent to young adult and the associated increase of personal autonomy.
- The importance of timely assessment and equity of access to appropriate treatment from therapeutic, mental health and disability services for children and young people with behavioural difficulties, alcohol and drug problems, and those in crisis.
- The importance of education as a protective factor against substance misuse.⁷³
- Certain groups of children and young people, such as early school-leavers,⁷⁴ Travellers⁷⁵ and those from migrant communities, have particular challenges in terms of health and must be regarded as priorities in terms of policy and provision.
- When children and young people become ill, proximity to family and the ability of parents to stay close to them is important.
- Girls and boys experience and deal with their health differently, so policies and strategies should reflect this.
- Youth and sporting organisations have an important role to play in developing the physical capacity and wellbeing of all children and young people.

For children and young people with high health or developmental needs, the Government recognises:

- Access to quality, affordable services that support children and young people in leading a full and varied life is critical to overall wellbeing and development.
- The pivotal role of parents and families in providing the additional care and support that children and young people with a disability or chronic illness may require.
- Children and young people with poor physical health, a disability or a chronic illness may need support to develop the skills required to maximise their independence and to develop their capacity to contribute socially, economically and culturally to society.
- For those with a long-term or permanent disability or illness, appropriate support arrangements should be put in place.
- Children and young people with palliative care needs, and their families, should be supported to maintain the highest attainable quality of life, including access to coordinated specialist services.

To promote healthy lifestyles among children and young people, the Government recognises:

- The essential role of parents and carers in ensuring a child has a healthy diet, sufficient exercise and is able to make good choices about healthy living.
- The challenge of food poverty, which refers to an inability to access a nutritionally adequate diet due to issues of affordability of, and access to, food and which has related impacts on health and social participation. Parental 'choice', too, may be limited by tight budgets and limited good quality affordable food on offer in local shops.
- The role of Early Years providers, schools and community groups in providing quality food to under-nourished children.
- The detrimental effect of a poor diet and food poverty on a child's developmental goals, their health now and as adults, and its impact on their education outcomes – all require a joined-up Government approach to promoting healthy choices and addressing harm related to alcohol and substance misuse.⁷⁶
- The need to take measures in the areas of food labelling, addressing availability, town planning, advertising, marketing and retail standards.
- Schools play a very important role in supporting children and young people to be physically healthy through education, the promotion of healthy eating policies, skills development and the integration of sports, exercise and physical activity into the school day.
- The role of community, sporting and youth organisations in health education and skill development, providing opportunities to be active and live a healthy life.
- The importance of the physical environment, facilitating and promoting access to safe green space, pedestrian and cycle-friendly streets, increasing community cohesion and enhancing community safety.

Aim 1.2: Good mental health

Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. Children and young people's mental health is the most important aspect of their social and cognitive development. Good mental health is a necessity if they are going to reach their full potential and truly live a life that is filled with positive experiences. The recent rise in demand for mental health services and the incidence of self-harm and suicide among children and young people is of significant concern.

The Government recognises:

- Parental mental health is critically important in supporting a child's early social and emotional development. The foundations of good mental health and wellbeing are laid down in the very early years of a child's life.
- There are a myriad of factors that can impact on a child or young person's mental health, both positively and negatively. Children and young people need support to build and develop protective factors, such as emotional resilience, having a sense of self-esteem, good social networks and participation in community, as well as an ability to address risk factors such as tackling bullying.
- The teenage years are a period of increased vulnerability. 75% of mental health disorders emerge before the age of 25.⁷⁷
- Young people, especially young girls, are particularly vulnerable to negative self-image and media pressure surrounding body image. It is therefore important to promote safe and healthy body image and self-worth.⁷⁸
- Having early diagnosis and access to support services in a timely manner is of critical importance. Services need to be integrated around the needs of the child or young person, and transitions between child and adult services need strengthening.⁷⁹
- The high level of early school-leavers and children and young people in care and detention with mental health needs.⁸⁰
- The importance of having 'one good adult' in a young person's life⁸¹ and that children and young people need positive role models and positive relationships with older adults. This is particularly important for children and young people in care.
- The importance of supporting children and young people to develop their mental literacy skills.

Aim 1.3: A positive and respectful approach to relationships and sexual health

Having good friends and positive relationships is an important protective factor for emotional wellbeing throughout childhood and the teenage years. The individual's experience during childhood and adolescence of positive relationships with family, other significant adults and their peer group will underpin their ability to go on to make successful and emotionally satisfying relationships as an adult, both with a partner and future children, as well as at work and in the community. Learning how to develop and nurture positive friendships is an important part of growing up. These skills can make coping with life's hardships easier.

Sexual health is a state of physical, mental and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility with maturity of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.⁸²

The Government recognises:

- Being able to interact positively with others is an essential skill for life.
- Families, schools and youth organisations and all who work with children and young people share responsibility for helping children and young people to learn socially responsible behaviours.
- Schools and youth organisations raise young people's awareness of issues that may impact on their social and emotional development and wellbeing, and help them develop the skills they need to build and maintain positive relationships.
- During adolescence, young people learn how to form safe and healthy relationships with friends, parents, teachers and romantic partners. Peers, in particular, play a big role in identity formation, but relationships with caring adults (including parents, teachers, youth workers, mentors or coaches) are also important for adolescent development.
- As young people become more aware of their sexuality, so too do they become more aware of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Many young people can face marginalisation, isolation and discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- The need to improve knowledge and awareness of sexual health and relationships through targeted communications campaigns, customised information and educational programmes and other initiatives since educating young people about their sexual health is a critical part of addressing the increasing rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- All children and young people need to be supported in addressing issues that impact on sexual wellbeing, such as stigma, homophobia, gender, ability/disability, mental health, alcohol and drugs.

Aim 1.4: Enjoying play, recreation, sport, arts, culture and nature⁸³

Play, recreation, sport, arts, culture and the natural environment are essential to the health and wellbeing of children and young people, and promote the development of creativity, imagination, self-confidence and self-efficacy, as well as physical, social, cognitive and emotional strength and skills.⁸⁴

The Government recognises:

- Play is important for all ages.
- Play, sports and recreation are an immensely important part of the lives of children and young people, and are highly valued by them.*
- Play is central to children's spontaneous drive for development and is very important in brain development, particularly in the early years.
- Play and recreation facilitate children's capacities to negotiate, regain emotional balance, resolve conflicts and make decisions.
- Through their involvement in play, recreation and the arts, children and young people learn by doing; they explore and experience the world around them; they experiment with new ideas and experiences and in so doing, learn to understand and construct their social position within the world.⁸⁵
- Through play and recreation, children explore new roles, activities and areas that can help to overcome gender-based stereotypes and gendered choices in education and career.
- The importance of sport in character formation as well as health.
- Early and ongoing exposure to art and culture lays a positive foundation for creativity, an essential component in critical thinking and innovation.
- The important role of youth, community and sporting organisations and volunteers in engaging with young people on their healthy development and overall wellbeing.
- Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and early school-leavers in particular, have lower levels of participation in play, recreation, sport, arts and culture, and are therefore a priority in terms of policy and provision.
- The role of the built environment and planning in relation to accessing nature and safe green spaces.

* In the consultation with children and young people, sport was the 2nd best thing about living in Ireland. Children and young people want more playgrounds; have playgrounds suited for older children; have monkey bars, swings and slides in schools; increased security in existing playgrounds to prevent vandalism; and have more time for play. Young people wanted to have more places to 'hang out' in a safe environment; more youth clubs and cafés; more adventure and skateboard parks; air-soft ranges and paintball facilities; and more fun places to go.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

- 1.1** Tackle the issues of childhood obesity and obesogenic environments through a mix of legislative, policy and public awareness activities⁸⁶ and will give active consideration to the introduction of fiscal measures to support healthy lifestyles in the context of the annual budgetary process. **(DH, DF, DES, DCYA, HSE, CFA and others as relevant)**
- 1.2** Support children, young people and their parents to make healthier choices through education, addressing food poverty and ensuring that all educational and State institutions providing food and drink to children, whether directly or through franchised commercial services on-site, have a Healthy Foods policy and provide food that meets basic nutritional standards. **(DES, DCYA, DSP)**
- 1.3** Continue to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the School Meals Programme and consider inclusion of DEIS schools not currently benefiting under the programme, subject to resources becoming available. **(DSP)**
- 1.4** Tackle inequalities in health outcomes for identified vulnerable groups, including Travellers, Roma, refugee and asylum-seeking children, migrants, young people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), those experiencing poverty, and children and young people who are the responsibility of the State, whether in care or detention.⁸⁷ **(DH, DCYA, DJE, HSE, NOSP, DES)**
- 1.5** Implement a new National Model of Paediatric Care⁸⁸ and complete the building of the new National Children's Hospital⁸⁹. **(DH, HSE)**
- 1.6** Continue to support accessible and affordable youth and sport activities, which encourage young people's overall personal and social development including healthy behaviours and engage young people who might be at risk of early school-leaving or engaging in criminal activity and anti-social behaviour. **(DCYA, DTTS, DH, HSE, CFA, AGS)**
- 1.7** Address the high rate of premature and risky alcohol consumption, use of illicit drugs⁹⁰ and the incidence of smoking⁹¹ among young people through a combination of legislative, regulatory and policy mechanisms⁹². **(DH, DCYA, DES, DJE, Local Government)**
- 1.8** Implement a Vision for Change as it relates to children and young people, in particular to improve access to early intervention youth mental health services and coordination of service supports, with a focus on improving mental health literacy and reducing incidents of self-harm and suicide. **(DH, HSE, NOSP, DCYA, DES, Local Government)**
- 1.9** Ensure there is equity of access to child and adolescent mental health services for all children, in particular those aged 16 and 17 years.⁹³ **(DH, HSE, DES)**

- 1.10** Combine mental health promotion programmes with interventions that address broader determinants and social problems as part of a multi-agency approach, particularly in areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation and fragmentation.⁹⁴ **(DH, HSE, NOSP, DCYA, CFA, DES and others as relevant)**
- 1.11** Complete and implement a National Sexual Health Strategy as a strategic framework for the sexual health and wellbeing of the population, ensuring access for young people to age-appropriate information and services about relationships and sexual health.⁹⁵ **(DH, DES, DCYA)**
- 1.12** Complete and implement the National Physical Activity Plan; support the full implementation of the schools' Physical Education Programme and encourage the Active Schools Flag Initiative. **(DH, DES and others as relevant)**
- 1.13** Enable hard-to-reach groups to access services by making health services (including mental health services) available in youth-friendly, accessible and inclusive environments. **(HSE, Local Government, DCYA, DH, DES)**
- 1.14** Enable greater access to sports, arts and culture for all children and young people, including through facilitating collaboration between sports, youth, arts and cultural organisations and schools and preschools to enrich the educational experience of all. **(DES, DCYA, DAHG, DTTS, Arts Council)**
- 1.15** Continue to develop play and recreation spaces for both children and young people, from playgrounds (for multiple age ranges) to youth cafés, sports and leisure centres, and where possible look to weatherproof these spaces.⁹⁶ **(DCYA, DECLG, DH)**

Commitments under Transformational Goals – Central to Outcome 1

Earlier intervention and prevention

- Bring a focus to healthy early development, prioritising the under-2 year-olds, strengthening pre-natal and ante-natal supports around the mother, addressing maternal health and wellbeing, and raising breastfeeding and vaccination rates in line with international norms. **(DH, HSE, DCYA, CFA)**.
- The HSE, in collaboration with the Child and Family Agency, will explore the provision of an integrated maternal ante-natal and early childhood development service, building on the review of the Community Nursing Services. **(HSE, CFA, DH, DCYA)**

Listen to and involve children and young people

- Strengthen participation in decision-making for health and wellbeing at community level. **(HSE, CFA, Local Government and others as relevant)**

Strengthen transitions

- Strengthen the transitions between child and adolescent and adult services in the areas of physical and mental health services. **(DH, HSE)**

Ensure quality services

- Reconfigure services for children with disabilities under 18 years in line with the HSE's national programme on 'Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0-18)'. **(DH, HSE)**

Key supporting policies

- Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing, 2013-2025 (Department of Health, 2013)
- National Breastfeeding Action Plan (Department of Health, 2013)
- Tobacco Free Ireland (Department of Health, 2013)
- Future Health. A Strategic Framework for Reform of the Health Service, 2012-2015 (Department of Health, 2012)
- Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0-18s) Programme, evolved from the Report of the National Reference Group on Multidisciplinary Services for Children aged 5-18 years (HSE, 2009)
- Steering Group Report on a National Substance Misuse Strategy (Department of Health, 2012)
- Irish Sports Council's Strategy, 2012-2014 (Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, 2012)
- Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (DCYA, 2011)
- Palliative Care for Children with Life-limiting Conditions in Ireland – A National Policy (Department of Health, 2010)
- The All Ireland Traveller Health Study (Department of Health, 2010)
- National Drugs Strategy, 2009-2016 (Department of Health, 2009)
- National Cycle Policy Framework (2009) (Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, 2012)
- Teenspace: National Recreation Policy for Young People (OMC, 2007)
- A Vision for Change: Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy (Department of Health and Children, 2006)
- Obesity: The Policy Challenges – The Report of the National Taskforce on Obesity (Department of Health and Children, 2005)
- Best Health for Children Revisited: Report from the National Core Child Health Programme Review Group to the Health Service Executive (HSE, 2005)
- Ready, Steady, Play! A National Play Policy, 2004-2008 (NCO, 2004)



Achieving

Outcome 2

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Achievement of Outcome 2 will further Ireland's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Relevant Articles include:

- **Article 28: Right to education as a progressive and equal right; the State is obliged to make primary education compulsory and free to all; to develop different forms of secondary education and make it available and accessible to all; make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity; take measures to encourage regular school attendance and reduce drop-out rates, and to ensure school discipline is administered consistent with the child's dignity.**
- **Article 29: Education should be directed at developing the child's personality and talents; fostering respect for human rights; own cultural, national values; and the environment.**
- **Article 14: Children have a right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, subject to appropriate parental guidance and national law.**
- **Article 23: Children with a physical disability or learning difficulties have the right to special care, education and training designed to help them to achieve the greatest possible self-reliance and to lead a full and active life.**

Achieving full potential in learning and development

INTRODUCTION

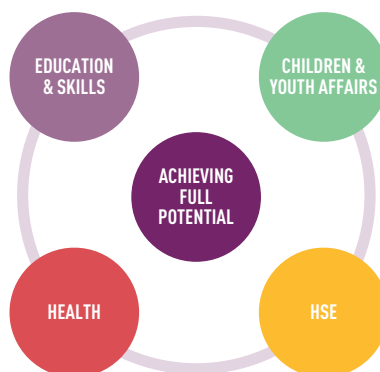
The aims for all children and young people are that they:

- 2.1 Are learning and developing from birth.
- 2.2 Have social and emotional wellbeing.
- 2.3 Are engaged in learning.
- 2.4 Are achieving in education.

The vast majority of young people in Ireland enjoy learning, with 92% completing second-level education and over 30% going on to third-level education. In the consultations with children and young people, 'education' was named as the best thing about living in Ireland. Given its centrality in their lives, it was also the No. 1 area for improvement, citing class sizes and more facilities.

The Government recognises that children with special needs, those whose first language is not English and those who have experienced poverty and social exclusion will need additional supports to achieve their learning potential. Other factors that may play a role in educational attainment are gender, absences from school due to ill-health, or experience of the care or justice systems.

Identified Lead Government departments and agencies



Other key contributing Government and agency partners are noted in brackets after each commitment.

Key Facts

- 95% of eligible children (68,000) avail of the free pre-school year.
- 3,300 primary schools with 526,422 pupils (2012/13).
- 723 secondary schools with 362,847 pupils (2012/13).
- 9.8% of young people leave school early.⁹⁷
- 12% of those under the age of 24 were born in a country other than Ireland (Census 2011).
- 13% of Travellers complete second-level education compared to 90% overall.⁹⁸
- Approximately 25% of children have special educational needs.

Findings from *Growing Up in Ireland*, National Longitudinal Study of Children

- 27% of 3-year-olds were in centre-based childcare (2013).
- Children aged 3 living in homes where somebody read to them every day had a mean score on the 'Naming Vocabulary' test that was 17 points higher than those in homes where there was no regular reading (2013).
- 95% of children who had started school in September 2012 availed of the free pre-school year (2013).
- 39% of families in the lowest income quintile said they would not have been able to send their child to pre-school had it not been for the free pre-school year (2013).
- 79% of children aged 5 said good things about school more than once a week. 5% complained about school more than once a week (2013).
- Most 13-year-olds had positive attitudes to school: 29% liked it 'very much' and 32% liked it 'quite a bit' (2012).
- The higher the educational level of the child's mother, the better the child performed on both Vocabulary and Maths tests at age 9: children of graduate mothers scored 63% in Maths and 78% in Vocabulary, compared to children whose mothers had lower secondary education or less, who scored 45% in Maths and 59% in Vocabulary (2009).
- Young people in their second year of second-level education were less positive about school than those in first year: 25% of second-year students liked school 'very much' compared with 36% of first-year students (2012).
- Teenage girls reported more positive interactions, and fewer negative interactions, with their teachers than boys. 30% of girls reported being praised by teachers 'very often' compared with 22% of boys. 64% of boys had been reprimanded for misbehaviour compared with 46% of girls (2012).
- There was a very strong and positive relationship between a mother's expectation of her child's progress in the education system and her own level of attainment. 39% of mothers of 9-year-olds who themselves left school with a Junior Certificate or less said they expected their child to graduate with a Degree, compared with 57% of those who themselves left with a Degree and expected their child to graduate with a Degree (Special Report 2013).
- At age 9, 98% of parents had attended a formal meeting with their child's teacher during the school year. This fell to 88% at age 13 (2009).

POLICY PRIORITIES

Learning goes far beyond formal schooling to embrace the broad range of life experiences and learning processes that enable children and young people, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities, and to live a full and satisfying life within society.

This section outlines the key Government priorities in relation to each of the four aims under Outcome 2 (Achieving full potential in learning and development). Achievement of this outcome is strongly connected to all other outcomes, in particular Aims 1.1 and 1.2 of Outcome 1 in relation to good physical and mental health; Outcome 3 (Safe and protected from harm); and Aim 4.1 of Outcome 4 in relation to being protected from poverty and social exclusion. Outcome 5 (Connected, respected and contributing) strongly supports Aims 2.3 and 2.4 of Outcome 2 in relation to being engaged in learning and achieving in education.

Commitments in relation to further education and training are captured under Outcome 4, Aim 4.3 (*see p. 91*).

Aim 2.1: Learning and developing from birth

Children are learning from birth. Their life chances are shaped and enhanced through support for their early learning and development. Their early experiences of parental love and attention lay the foundation for their future development. Children's capacity for learning depends on having caring adults who understand how to support their learning and development. The expansion of universal pre-school provision and investment in early years care and education during the first six years will work to support parents (as a child's first teacher) and will enable children to grow, develop and prepare for a life of learning.

The Government recognises:

- The importance of giving every child the best start in life and recognises that a child's social and emotional foundation is laid down for life in the early years.⁹⁹ There is a need for a special focus on the period that spans from the ante-natal period to 2 years of age, during which time the social and emotional architecture of the brain is being formed.
- Strengthening parental understanding of the importance of the ante-natal period is vital and the consequences of alcohol, drugs, smoking and poor diet in pregnancy.
- The importance of measures that tackle the conditions of poverty, substance abuse and parental stress, which may give rise to detrimental experiences for some children in their early years.¹⁰⁰
- The importance of early intervention strategies throughout the life cycle and through second-chance education to enable children to achieve across the five national outcomes.

- The need to support parents of young children early on to ensure the establishment of quality parent–child relationships. This includes supporting parents with their own mental health.
- The value of quality early childhood care and education in supporting children’s early cognitive, social and emotional development, capacities that are critical for effective learning, and enable inequalities to be addressed early on to ensure children are ready for school.
- The importance of love, attention, consistency and good nutrition for the child’s early development and the benefits of ‘positive parenting’ in building a child’s social and emotional capacities, instrumental to later development of resilience.
- Positive parenting practices can significantly support and protect a child from adverse environmental and contextual factors, such as poverty and poor housing.

Aim 2.2: Social and emotional wellbeing

A child or young person’s sense of wellbeing is fundamental to their ability to function in society and meet the demands of everyday life. Importantly, wellbeing drives better learning attainment. Social and emotional wellbeing includes the ability to self-regulate, to have empathy and to be emotionally resilient.

The Government recognises:

- The foundations of social and emotional wellbeing and resilience are laid down in infancy and can be strengthened and developed throughout life.
- A child or young person’s sense of wellbeing can be negatively impacted by life events and experiences, including the quality of family relationships and factors within the home.¹⁰¹
- Early Years settings, schools, youth and sports organisations play a vital role in the promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing, and can provide a safe and supportive environment for building life skills, emotional resilience and a strong sense of connectedness to school and community.

Aim 2.3: Engaged in learning

Fostering a commitment to, and love of, learning requires engaging students actively in self-directed and collaborative learning. The 21st-century school is about getting young people engaged positively with their learning, achieving better outcomes and retaining a commitment to learning beyond school. The Government has commenced a significant educational transformation, including the launch of the Junior Cycle Framework (DES, 2012) and the roll-out of high-speed Internet connections in all post-primary schools.

The Government recognises:

- The importance of engaging and inspiring children and young people in learning early on, and for school itself to instil a love of learning, to achieve good educational outcomes.
- The evolving role of the teacher, from 'purveyor of all knowledge' to a facilitator of learning and a learner themselves.¹⁰²
- True student participation, with real influence over strategic decision-making, has been shown to improve engagement and attainment, while also fostering important attributes such as social responsibility, cross-cultural sensitivity and emotional intelligence.¹⁰³
- The learner-directed approach is associated with the development of self-regulation, an important capacity relevant at all stages of learning and a driver of educational achievement influencing emotional control,¹⁰⁴ school completion¹⁰⁵ and drug misuse¹⁰⁶. Through project-based working, students acquire essential skills, such as independent thinking and problem-solving skills, collaborative working and effective communication.
- Strengthening relationships between schools, parents and communities enhances student engagement, behaviour and achievement, as well as building social capital in communities.
- The pace of technological development over the past few decades has been revolutionary. Information and communications technology (ICT) is integral to enabling more engaged learning, transforming teaching, learning and assessment.
- The need to support and improve recognition of the role of non-formal and informal learning, and in particular the contribution of youth work.

Aim 2.4: Achieving in education

How children do at school is a key determinant of their future success.¹⁰⁷ Education is a proven route out of poverty and is vital to improving children's life chances. The quality of teaching is a significant contributor to better learning outcomes. Quality encompasses leadership, positive school culture, applying active learning methods¹⁰⁸ and the integration of technology into learning. Priorities in this area are investment in teacher education, continuous professional development and supporting school principals to manage performance and lead school transformation.

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 emphasizes the promotion of school attendance, participation and retention: *'Schools will be expected to deliver a programme that will enable students to develop a wide range of skills, including critical thinking skills and basic skills such as numeracy and literacy.'*

The Government recognises:

- The value of the parents' role as the primary educators of their children, the connection between learning at home and learning at school, and the strong association between family involvement and students' educational achievements.
- The early foundations for academic achievement are laid by quality care and education access in the early years.
- The need to strengthen linkages between schools and other services at key points of transition to ensure better educational outcomes.
- The value support services, such as breakfast and after-school clubs, can have in supporting educational attainment.
- Education is not just about knowledge acquisition, but also about learning critical skills that can be applied across all life and career domains.
- Developing good literacy and numeracy skills, including digital literacy skills, among all children and young people is fundamental to the life chances of each individual and essential to the quality and equity of society. Improving literacy and numeracy standards is an urgent national priority.
- Particular attention needs to be paid to developing boys' literacy skills and the mathematical and science skills of girls in order to optimise career options, particularly in the high demand STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) and ICT (Information and Communications Technology) sectors.
- Investing in Early Years practitioner and teacher professional development is a significant lever for improving the quality of educational outcomes.
- The importance for a child or young person to have a sense of belonging within school and the community, and the fact that schools and youth organisations play an invaluable role in building inclusion, supporting them to feel part of their community¹⁰⁹ and creating stability in their lives.
- The contribution of informal and non-formal learning to supporting young people's academic education, skills development and their preparation for work.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

- 2.1 Develop and implement a National Early Years Strategy for all children aged 0-6 years, covering all aspects of children's experiences in their early years and their inclusion in Early Years care and education services. **(DCYA, DES)**
- 2.2 Strengthen the connections between pre-school and infant classes at primary level, including through the roll-out of Aistear and Síolta. **(DES, DCYA, CFA)**
- 2.3 Build children's emotional literacy¹¹⁰ in pre-school and primary school as a core foundation for educational attainment. **(DES, DCYA)**
- 2.4 Implement strategies to improve school engagement and reduce incidences of suspensions and expulsions and early school-leaving through engaging parents in schooling, strengthening transitions, promoting different styles of learning to better engage boys, and fostering inclusive school environments where all pupils flourish, irrespective of social and ethnic background or disability. **(DES, DCYA, CFA)**
- 2.5 Implement the Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life Strategy. **(DES, DCYA)**
- 2.6 Continue to implement the new framework for Junior Cycle, which is structured around a set of key principles and statements of learning and which will allow students to develop key skills, such as effective communication, collaborative working, independent thinking, problem-solving and analytical skills. **(DES)**
- 2.7 Continue to develop, evolve and implement curricula in the education system and to support initiatives in out-of school settings, to teach children knowledge and skills relating to information management, new technologies, coding and digital literacy. **(DES, DCYA, DCENR)**
- 2.8 Combat gender stereotyping in subject choices and promote the increased uptake of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects by young women, both in school and in higher education. **(DES)**
- 2.9 Implement a whole-school approach to health and wellbeing¹¹¹ to bring about a cultural focus on wellbeing as a basis for effective learning, strengthening the collaboration between the education, health, youth and social sectors to provide multidisciplinary supports when problems arise. **(DES, DH, DCYA, HSE, CFA)**
- 2.10 Ensure that equal treatment and equality are embedded into the Whole School Planning Development Process, for example, in mission and ethos, the curriculum, care and management of students and staff organisation, and staff development.¹¹² **(DES)**

- 2.11** Support and link existing partnerships, strategies and initiatives that aim to improve the decision-making capacity of children and young people through strengthening self-esteem, resilience, responses to social and interpersonal pressure, health and media literacy (including social media literacy).¹¹³ **(DH, DES, DCYA, DCENR, HSE and others as relevant)**
- 2.12** Support Early Years practitioners, teachers and educators* through the provision of continuous professional development, the establishment of peer learning networks and the development of teaching, learning and assessment activities that utilise new technology effectively. **(DES, DH, DCYA, HSE, Local Government)**
- 2.13** Continue to expand the provision of multi-denominational schools where parental demand exists.¹¹⁴ **(DES)**
- 2.14** Build on existing data collection systems and, using the public service identifier, strengthen the collection of data and information on primary and post-primary pupils in order to inform future policy-making. **(DES)**
- 2.15** Ensure quality learning environments for all through the Schools Building Programme and improved access to information and communications technology.¹¹⁵ **(DES)**

The Government recognises the need to provide additional supports to some children and young people to support their learning and development, and commits to:

- 2.16** Consider the recommendations of the review of the DEIS¹¹⁶ Programme and use it as a platform for the new initiatives to deliver better outcomes for students in disadvantaged areas.¹¹⁷ **(DES)**
- 2.17** Provide opportunities for early school-leavers to engage with further education and training within the framework of youth and educational welfare services, Education and Training Boards and SOLAS. **(DES, DCYA)**
- 2.18** Build on the cross-cutting arrangements in place between the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Skills, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to enhance collaboration across the three sectors on children's disability issues. **(DH, DES, NCSE, DCYA and HSE).**
- 2.19** In the context of the Early Years Strategy, develop a plan for the inclusion of children with a disability in mainstream pre-school and Early Years settings. **(DCYA, DH, DES and HSE).**
- 2.20** Continue to provide timely access to educational and therapeutic supports for children who are identified as having special needs.¹¹⁸ **(HSE, CFA, DH, DES and DCYA)**

* The term 'educators' refers to educators in both the formal and non-formal sectors, including Youthreach.

- 2.21** Prepare and implement a plan, guided by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) policy advice, on how aspects of EPSEN (Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs) can be implemented, including prioritising access to an individual education plan and implementing the recommendations of the NCSE Working Group on a new resource allocation model for schools. (DES, NCSE, DH)
- 2.22** Strengthen social inclusion measures and re-invigorate efforts to improve educational outcomes¹¹⁹ among, and integration of, Travellers, Roma and migrant children and young people, and all those with special needs, including gifted students, recognising an enhanced role for Early Years education in targeting these groups. (DES, DCYA, DJE, DECLG, Local Government)
- 2.23** Ensure quality education is available to all children and young people in detention and in hospital and respite settings, and that additional supports are available to help them overcome gaps in their schooling. (DES, DH, DCYA)

Commitments under Transformational Goals – Central to Outcome 2

Earlier intervention

- Continue to increase investment in high-quality early years care and education for all children, prioritising families on low incomes. Introduce a second free pre-school year within the lifetime of this Framework, once the required quality standards are achieved and subject to resources becoming available. (DCYA, DES, CFA, DSP)

Listen to and involve children and young people

- Create mechanisms to provide children and young people with the opportunity to be heard in primary and post-primary schools and centres for education through Student Councils or other age-appropriate mechanisms. (DES, DCYA)

Strengthen transitions

- Research and adopt strategies to strengthen transitions through the educational system (into primary, from primary to second-level, from second-level into higher or further education, employment or, in the case of early school-leavers, to Youthreach), including ensuring coherency of curriculum approach, school connections and promoting in-school practices such as the adoption of peer-to-peer support programmes. (DES)

Collaboration and coordination

- Build on existing good practice around clustering of schools to enable better access to educational supports, particularly for children with special educational needs, and explore the potential for further development of cluster arrangements to encourage greater connections between schools and community and State services, including sharing infrastructure. (DES, DH, HSE, CFA, Local Government)
- Review structures for delivery of non-acute health and social care services, having regard to Local Authority administrative boundaries where appropriate. (DH, HSE)

Key supporting policies

- Department of Education and Skills Statement of Strategy, 2011-2014 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011)
- Action Plan on Bullying, and Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2013)
- Wellbeing in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (Department of Education and Skills and Department of Health, 2013)
- SOLAS Action Plan (Department of Education and Skills, 2012)
- A Framework for Junior Cycle (Department of Education and Skills, 2012)
- Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011-2020 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011)
- Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing, 2013-2025 (Department of Health, 2013)
- National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016 (Department of Social Protection, 2007)
- The National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan (Department of Justice and Equality, 2013)
- Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010-2015 (Department of Education and Skills, 2010)
- Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2006)
- Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers (OMC, 2006)
- Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS): The Action Plan for Educational Inclusion in Schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2005)



Safe

Outcome 3

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Achievement of Outcome 3 will further Ireland's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Relevant Articles include:

- Children have a right not to be separated from their parents unless it is in their best interests. When they are separated from their parents, they have the right to maintain contact with both parents on a regular basis unless it is not in the best interests of the child (Article 9). The State is obliged to foster and enable family re-unification (Article 10).
- Children have a right to protection from all forms of abuse (Article 19) and exploitation (Article 36), including sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Article 34) and armed conflict (Article 38).
- The State has a duty to promote the recovery of child victims of abuse (Article 39) and to act to prevent child kidnapping (Article 11), abduction and the sale and/or trafficking of children (Article 35).
- The State is obliged to assist a child without a family (Article 20); children have a right to a periodic review of their care placement (Article 25); and adoptions should only be carried out in the best interests of the child (Article 21).
- The State is obliged to provide refugee children with appropriate protections (Article 22).
- Children have a right to protection from torture, degrading treatment or punishment; unlawful arrest or deprivation of liberty (Article 37). Children in detention should be separated from adult prisoners and have the right to maintain contact with family (Article 37). The State is obliged to promote alternatives to Court hearings and detention (Article 40).
- The State is obliged to ensure access to information from a diversity of media sources and to take measures to protect children from harmful materials (Article 17).

Safe and protected from harm

INTRODUCTION

The aims for all children and young people are that they:

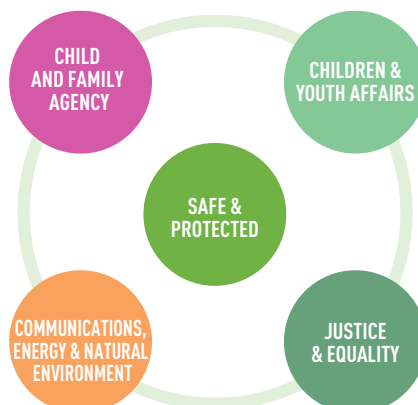
- 3.1 Have a secure, stable and caring home environment.
- 3.2 Are safe from abuse, neglect and exploitation.
- 3.3 Are protected from bullying and discrimination.
- 3.4 Are safe from crime and anti-social behaviour.

Keeping children and young people safe and protected from harm is the responsibility of everyone in society. Children and young people themselves must be educated and made aware of dangers and how to protect themselves from harm and harmful or risky behaviour.

In the consultation with children and young people, anti-social behaviour, crime, bullying and peer pressure were judged as among the worst things about life in Ireland.

All children and young people need safeguarding. The Government recognises, however, that specific groups of children and young people are particularly at risk and so need additional supports and protections. Vulnerable children include child victims of trafficking; those in care and whose families are not able to care for them; Traveller, Roma, migrant and asylum-seeking children; and children with special needs. Groups who may be particularly vulnerable to bullying and discrimination include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people, those in detention or in care, and children and young people from minorities.

Identified Lead Government departments and agencies



Other key contributing Government and agency partners are noted in brackets after each commitment.

Key Facts

- 15,383 people under 15 years were discharged following an admission to hospital for injury, poisoning or other external cause.¹²⁰
- In both 2012 and 2013, there were over 40,000 referrals to child welfare and protection services in Ireland.¹²¹
- There are presently 6,400 children in the care of the State. 90% of children in the care of the State in 2011 were in foster care, of which 32% were fostered with relatives.¹²²
- 62% of children admitted to care in 2011 were on a voluntary basis.¹²³
- 12,246 children (involving 24,069 incidents) were referred to the Garda Diversion Programme in 2011.¹²⁴
- 26% of the homeless population in 2011 were under 25 years. Of the 980 under 25 who were homeless, 20% (199) were between the ages of 0-4.¹²⁵
- The National Audit of Neglect Cases found that parental alcohol misuse was a factor in 62% of neglect cases and that domestic violence featured in almost two-thirds of the sample cases.

Findings from *Growing Up in Ireland, National Longitudinal Study of Children*

- The vast majority of the older children reported getting on 'very well' or 'well' with their mothers and fathers, and this was true at both 9 and 13 years of age. Both mothers and fathers reported very high levels of attachment to their infants at 9 months of age. Equally, at age 3 and 5 years, most parents described high levels of warmth and low levels of conflict in the parent-child relationship (2009, 2012, 2013).
- 24% of mothers reported that their 9-year-old child had been bullied in the last year, but a substantially higher percentage of children (40%) described 'being picked on' in the same period (2009).
- 1% or less of mothers used smacking 'regularly' or 'always' to discipline their children. Only about half said they 'never' smacked their children (2009, 2013).
- An 'authoritative' style of parenting, which balances controlling behaviour with high levels of warmth, is typically associated with better outcomes for children. Among 9-year-olds, a majority of both mothers (77%) and fathers (68%) tended towards this approach (2009, 2013).
- Almost one-third of mothers of 9-year-olds felt it was not safe to walk alone in their local area after dark; 9% felt it was not safe to play outdoors in their local area during the day; and 42% felt there were no safe parks, playgrounds and play spaces in their local area (Special Report, 2013).

POLICY PRIORITIES

This section outlines the key Government priorities in relation to each of the four aims under Outcome 3 (Safe and protected from harm). Aim 3.1 sets out the foundational protective factor of 'having a secure, stable and caring home environment', which is necessary for successful outcomes across the five national outcome areas. Preventable accidents are the greatest cause of injury and death in children and young people. Technology is a growing area of children and young people's lives, bringing great opportunities as well as threats to safety, wellbeing and a new avenue for bullying.

Aim 3.1: Have a secure, stable and caring home environment

Continuity and stability in family relationships strongly contribute to an individual's wellbeing and social stability, and are especially powerful for children. A caring home environment enables children's emotional needs for security, belonging, support and intimacy to be satisfied. The nature and quality of family life influences not only how a child copes with life growing up, but also helps determine the quality of their relationships, parenting and mental health in adulthood. Having caring relationships and experiencing love and trust builds resilience – a significant protective factor in enabling children and young people to get through difficult times.

The Government recognises:

- The importance of supporting parents¹²⁶ to provide a safe and secure, stable and caring home environment for their children.
- The majority of cases of injury and death in children and young people are avoidable accidents in the home, on the farm or on the roads.
- With the growing role of technology in children and young people's lives, parents need advice and information on how best to protect their children from harm online and in relation to social media and texting. Equally, children and young people need the guidance of teachers and parents to learn to manage and cope with this added dimension to modern life.
- The importance of recognising the life consequences of trauma experienced by children, for example, when their parents' relationship breaks down, when they experience bereavement or in circumstances where the child is abused, exposed to domestic violence or taken into care.
- The importance of security for every child, and that there is a clear legal relationship between the child and the adult(s) in their lives who is carrying out the parenting role.¹²⁷
- The majority of children in care are in stable, caring placements with caring foster families or in residential homes.
- On reaching 18 years of age, young people leaving care settings need to be supported in the transition to independent living.

Aim 3.2: Safe from abuse, neglect and exploitation¹²⁸

Childhood and adolescence is a very precious developmental period. Experiencing the trauma of neglect, abuse or exploitation may have a significant and permanent detrimental impact on an individual. It may alter their own life trajectory and that of their family. Abuse may involve neglect (intentional or unintentional), sexual, physical or emotional. Abuse can also arise from family substance misuse, the witnessing of parental substance misuse or domestic violence, exposure (even if inadvertent) to age-inappropriate or harmful material (particularly on the Internet) or being subjected to physical chastisement or female genital mutilation. Children and young people are also at risk of exploitation through pornography, prostitution, human trafficking, labour exploitation, forced marriage and domestic servitude.

The Government recognises:

- All forms of neglect, abuse, exploitation of or violence towards a child are unacceptable and the State has a duty to act to protect and support the child.
- Learning from past reviews and inquiries into cases where there were tragic outcomes highlights the need for standardised assessment, good communication between services and timely decision-making to ensure no child is left in an abusive environment.
- Keeping children and young people safe requires a whole-of-society response. Everyone, in particular those working directly with children or in a position of authority, has a responsibility to protect children from abuse.
- The importance of recognising 'hidden harm'¹²⁹ and ensuring that children living with parental substance misuse are identified and supported within the HSE's Addiction Services and by the Child and Family Agency.
- The need to ensure that systems for detection, assessment, therapy and criminal investigation and prosecution work in a coordinated way and take account of the trauma that victims of abuse and crime experience, with a view to preventing the re-victimisation of the child.
- The majority of instances of child abuse involve a family member or individual known to the child or young person.
- 37% of child abusers are themselves under 18 years of age¹³⁰ and there is a consequent need for an appropriate therapeutic response to children and young people who perpetrate abuse.
- Technological development provides a new vehicle for the creation and distribution of child pornography and has led to new threats to children, including online grooming.
- The majority of children and young people who are victims of human trafficking are from within the European Union area.

Aim 3.3: Protected from bullying and discrimination

Children and young people have identified bullying and peer pressure as among the worst things about being a child in Ireland. Bullying and discrimination can have a severe negative impact on an individual's mental health and may hinder their access to education, health and other life opportunities. 'Identity-based bullying' or 'prejudice-based bullying' acknowledge that racism, homophobia, sexism and able-ism are often the underlying causes of bullying. Working to create cultures where these prejudices are not accepted is key to combating bullying in general.¹³¹ Bullying and discrimination can range from inappropriate comments to cyber-bullying to institutional racism. This aim is linked to Aim 5.1 of Outcome 5: 'Sense of own identity, free from discrimination' (see p. 100).

The Government recognises:

- All forms of bullying and discrimination¹³² are unacceptable and must be challenged in schools, youth organisations, communities, at work or online, and the State has a duty to ensure its laws, policies and practices do not discriminate.
- Bullying is a behavioural problem that affects the lives of thousands of school children and their families. The humiliation, fear, frustration, social isolation and loss of self-esteem which children experience when bullied results in absenteeism from school, poor or deteriorating schoolwork, personality changes, illness, depression and sometimes suicide.¹³³
- Prejudice, including homophobia and transphobia, is a significant underlying cause of bullying among adolescents.
- The importance of the role of parents, significant adults and the wider community in creating a climate that does not tolerate or foster bullying (including cyber-bullying) or intolerance.
- Schools, youth and community organisations can play an important role in developing a positive culture of equality, inclusion, empowerment and achievement for all children and young people.
- The complex and multifaceted nature of cyber-bullying.
- The need to support children and young people perpetrating bullying behaviour and to understand the impact of their behaviour and change their ways.

Aim 3.4: Safe from crime and anti-social behaviour

Children and young people should feel safe within their community and be protected and diverted from being drawn into anti-social and criminal activity. The risks and dangers presented by online approaches to children and young people should be recognised. Such approaches may lead to the possession of or production of illegal images. Outcome 5 (Connected, respected and contributing to their world) is very important as a protective factor in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour. Involvement of young people in criminal behaviour can have a significantly deleterious effect on their life outcomes, bringing them into conflict with the law or endangering their health or life due to violence.

The Government recognises:

- The importance of providing safe, friendly recreational spaces for older children and young people.
- The essential role that parents, families and communities play in preventing and reducing crime (including online crime) and anti-social behaviour.
- The significant role that youth, community and sporting organisations play in building young people's participation and engagement in their community, and in building their self-esteem and other protective factors, including an awareness of their own safety.
- Alcohol and substance misuse are closely associated with anti-social and criminal behaviour. Youth work plays an important role in preventing, addressing and diverting young people from substance misuse and criminal and anti-social behaviour.
- Exposure to gambling poses risks to young people and the increased availability of online gambling can increase those risks.
- The success of Garda Youth Diversion Projects in diverting 'at risk' young people from crime and a criminal record and re-engaging them with a belief in their own potential.
- Underlying anti-social behaviour and criminal activity by a child or young person may be a care need related to an addiction, a disability, mental health or personal emotional difficulty, and the individual may have experienced some trauma.
- The stigma and life disruption experienced by many children and young people on the imprisonment of a parent. Research from other jurisdictions indicates high levels of intergenerational offending for this group.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

- 3.1** Learn from investigations and reviews on child protection*, implement relevant recommendations and continuously adapt policies and laws to ensure they meet required standards of child protection. **(DCYA)**
- 3.2** Review and reform, as necessary, the Child Care Act 1991. **(DCYA)**
- 3.3** Strengthen data capture to enhance our knowledge and understanding of abuse and children's experience of the Court system through development of the National Child Care Information System and the Child Care Law Reporting Project. **(DCYA)**

* These include the Child Death Reports, the Special Rapporteur's reports on child protection and case reviews such as the Roscommon Child Care Incest report.

- 3.4** Improve the nature of Court proceedings, reducing the potentially negative impact on children through reform of the Courts and reducing the adversarial nature through the introduction of child-friendly Court practice and encouraging greater use of mediation.¹³⁴ **(DJE)**
- 3.5** Prioritise access to health, education and therapeutic services for children in care. **(CFA, HSE, DCYA, DH, DES).**
- 3.6** Implement the *Children First* national guidance in full, including placing elements on a statutory footing, implementing sectoral plans, associated training and ensuring vetting requirements are met.¹³⁵ **(DCYA, All)**
- 3.7** Introduce and enact the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, which will address in a comprehensive way the interaction of migrant children with the immigration system and should provide for a speedier and more efficient protection determination system that will shorten the time families and in particular children spend in the Direct Provision system.¹³⁶ **(DJE)**
- 3.8** Support efforts to limit exposure by children to age-inappropriate material (including material of a sexual or violent nature, online gambling, etc) on the Internet, including via smartphones. **(DCENR, DJE)**
- 3.9** Continue to promote best practice among retailers, the media and the entertainment industry with a view to interrupting the sexualisation and commercialisation of childhood; and where appropriate to introduce legislation and/or regulation to control or restrict inappropriate practices. **(DCYA, DJE, DJEI, DCENR)**
- 3.10** Provide effective and timely protection and support services, including therapeutic services for victims of abuse and crime.¹³⁷ **(DCYA, DJE, DH, HSE, CFA)**
- 3.11** Ensure perpetrators of abuse, including those under 18, receive effective therapeutic support with the aim of reducing recidivism. **(CFA, HSE, Probation Service, DCYA, DH, DJE)**
- 3.12** Introduce consolidated and reformed domestic violence legislation to address all aspects of domestic violence, threatened violence and intimidation in a manner that provides protection to victims. **(DJE)**
- 3.13** Support all efforts, including EU and international efforts, to combat child sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking in all contexts, including through support for an online filtering system in relation to blocking online child abuse material and measures targeted at reducing the abuse and exploitation of children and young people through prostitution and labour exploitation. **(DJE, DJEI, DCENR, DCYA, AGS)**
- 3.14** Ensure that an appropriate legal and policy framework is in place relating to child victims of trafficking, setting out the rights and entitlements of trafficked children, including provisions on care, accommodation and safeguarding.¹³⁸ **(DJE)**
- 3.15** Have in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure the identification of all child victims of trafficking. Such mechanisms involve competent statutory and non-statutory agencies/bodies, health practitioners and social workers. **(DJE, DH, DCYA, AGS, HSE, CFA)**

- 3.16 Provide an integrated and comprehensive service response to children under 18 presenting as out of home (as for all children in care) in keeping with the findings and recommendations of the *Review of the Implementation of the Youth Homelessness Strategy*.¹³⁹ (DCYA, DH, DECLG, DES, DSP, DJE, HSE, CFA, AGS)
- 3.17 Reform aspects of family law, including the law on guardianship, to create a legal structure to underpin diverse parenting situations and provide legal clarity on parental rights and duties in diverse family forms.¹⁴⁰ (DJE)
- 3.18 Develop a National Framework for Anti-Bullying, taking a community-wide approach to tackling bullying from childhood through to adulthood. (DCYA, All)
- 3.19 Continue to promote best practice by social media providers with respect to privacy controls and reporting mechanisms for abuse/bullying so as to better protect children online. (DCENR, DJE)
- 3.20 Tackle youth crime and divert children and young people from crime and anti-social behaviour through engaging with young people in the community and other proven effective interventions, with a view to changing short- and long-term behaviour patterns of youth offending.¹⁴¹ Use a coherent range of community and criminal sanctions to reduce offending.¹⁴² (DJE, DCYA, AGS, Probation Service)
- 3.21 Build and open a new National Children Detention Facility and end the practice of accommodating 17-year-old boys in adult prison facilities. Complete the reforms of the Children Detention Schools, monitor outcomes for children in and post-detention, and ensure a robust independent inspection, complaints and investigation system operates within the Children Detention Schools. (DCYA)
- 3.22 Ensure adequate access by children to an imprisoned parent, in a child-friendly setting. (DJE)
- 3.23 All national public awareness strategies on safety, and accident and injury prevention, including road, water and farm safety¹⁴³, will incorporate and target children and young people. (DCYA, All as relevant)
- 3.24 Take appropriate measures to protect young people from gambling-related risks. (DJE, DTTS, DJEI, DCENR, Local Government)

Commitments under Transformational Goals – Central to Outcome 3

Earlier intervention

- Provide universal evidence-informed parenting supports and ensure early identification of ‘at risk’ children, families and communities for specific supports as appropriate to strengthen families and reduce the incidences of children coming into, and remaining in, care. (DCYA, CFA)
- Support quality youth work, both as a protective factor contributing to the young person’s overall development and in reaching out to young people at risk of crime or anti-social behaviour. (DCYA)

Listen to and involve children and young people

- Facilitate children and young people in care to have meaningful participation in their care planning and decision-making, including through training and support of the professionals. (CFA, DCYA)
- Create mechanisms to provide children with the opportunity to be heard in judicial proceedings affecting them, including through independent representatives where appropriate. (DJE, DCYA)

Quality services

- Achieve effective child and family support services through the establishment of the Child and Family Agency and implementation of the National Service Delivery Framework for child welfare and protection services, with agreed thresholds and outcome measures. (DCYA, CFA)

Collaboration and coordination

- Adopt an effective interagency approach in relation to cases of child protection and welfare, establishing information and coordinating protocols (including 'Hidden Harm' protocols) between agencies serving children and young people and adult-focused addiction, domestic violence and mental health services. (DCYA, DH, DES, HSE, CFA and others as relevant)

Key supporting policies

- Action Plan on Bullying: Report of the Anti-Bullying Working Group to the Minister for Education and Skills (Department of Education and Skills, 2013)
- Tackling Youth Crime – A Youth Justice Action Plan, 2014-2018 (DCYA, 2014)
- An Garda Síochána Children and Youth Strategy, 2012-2014 (An Garda Síochána, 2012)
- National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland, 2009-2012 (Department of Justice and Equality, 2009)
- Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (DCYA, 2011)
- The Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook (OMC, 2007)
- National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016 (Department of Social Protection, 2007)
- The National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan (Department of Justice and Equality, 2013)
- HSE National Project Management Steering Group on Hidden Harm (2013) *Addressing Hidden Harm: Bridging the gulf between substance misuse and childcare systems*, Submission for the attention of Minister of State with responsibility for Drugs, Alex White, TD (unpublished).



Economic Security

Outcome 4

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Achievement of Outcome 4 will further Ireland's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Relevant Articles include:

- **Article 27:** Children have a right to a standard of living 'adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development'. Parents have the primary responsibility to provide this, and the State has a duty to assist parents, where necessary, in fulfilling this right.
- **Article 18:** The State has an obligation to recognise and promote the principle that both parents or legal guardians have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child; the State shall support parents or legal guardians in this task through the provision of appropriate assistance.
- **Article 26:** Children have a right to benefit from social security.
- **Article 32:** Children have a right to be protected from harmful labour exploitation.

Economic Security and opportunity

INTRODUCTION

The aims for all children and young people are that they:

- 4.1 Are protected from poverty and social exclusion.
- 4.2 Are living in child/youth-friendly, sustainable communities.
- 4.3 Have opportunities for ongoing education and training.
- 4.4 Have pathways to economic participation and independent living.

Young people want to work and progress in life. Their natural talents, entrepreneurship and creativity need to be harnessed and opportunities given to gain useful qualifications and valuable work experience. The economy, concern about lack of jobs and job opportunities, and the impact on their parents in terms of worry and stress were some of the strong themes emerging from the 2012 consultation with children and young people. 24% of children and 19% of young people identified the current recession as the worst thing about living in Ireland.

The Government recognises that poverty, sub-standard housing and social exclusion have a significant impact on a person's life outcomes and efforts must be made to reduce the arising inequalities. Certain families are at an increased risk of poverty, in particular one-parent and jobless households. Growing up in a marginalised and disadvantaged community, experiencing intergenerational cycles of poverty, educational disadvantage and unemployment, seriously hinders a child or young person's opportunities.

Identified Lead Government departments and agencies



Other key contributing Government and agency partners are noted in brackets after each commitment.

Key Facts

- In 2011, 9.3% of children lived in consistent poverty – up from 6.3% in 2008. 63% of all children in consistent poverty are in jobless households.¹⁴⁴
- 26% of children live in jobless households.¹⁴⁵
- 32.1% of children experienced basic deprivation in 2011.¹⁴⁶
- The at-risk-of-poverty rate for children was reduced from 49.8% to 18.8% after social transfers in 2011.¹⁴⁷
- 18% of children live in single-parent families.¹⁴⁸
- In the period 2008-2012, the number of people aged 15-24 in employment fell by nearly 60%, accounting for over 210,000 of the overall reduction of 340,000.¹⁴⁹
- Youth unemployment grew from 10% in 2007 to 30.4% in 2012, before falling slightly to average 26.5% in the first 9 months of 2013.¹⁵⁰
- The unemployment rate for those aged 20-24 with no more than lower secondary education has been over 50%, as compared with about 30% for those with higher secondary education and 20% for third-level graduates.¹⁵¹
- 40% of young people aged 16-24 are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.¹⁵²
- 18% of young people are not in education, employment or training.¹⁵³

Findings from *Growing Up in Ireland, National Longitudinal Study of Children*

- There was little variation in the extent to which mothers of 9-month-olds (57%) and mothers of 5-year-olds (55%) were employed outside the home or primarily looking after the home/family (36% in both cases) (2010, 2013).
- At 9 months, 3 years and 5 years, mothers with lower levels of education were the most likely to be 'looking after the home/family' and the least likely to be employed (2013).
- Family income was strongly related to the mother's education. Where the mother had left school with the Junior Certificate or less, 45% of the families were in the lowest income group and just 5% of these families were in the highest income group (2012).
- 25% of parents of 5-year-olds said they were making ends meet with 'great difficulty' or 'with difficulty'. This compares to their response of 12% in 2008/09 when their child was 9 months old (2013).
- 55% of one-parent families recorded difficulties in making ends meet at all three ages, compared to 29% of two-parent families (2013).
- Comparing data from when the child was 3 to when he or she was 5, the percentage of families who 'couldn't afford' or 'cut back on basics' increased from 32% to 43%. The percentage who were 'behind with utility bills' increased from 14% to 17% and the percentage 'behind with rent/mortgage' increased from 9% to 14% (2012, 2013).

POLICY PRIORITIES

This section outlines the key Government priorities in relation to each of the four aims under Outcome 4 (Economic security and opportunity). Ireland's economic progress forms the context within which economic security and opportunity for children and young people will be achieved. Economic security is defined as the condition of having stable income or other resources to support a standard of living now and in the foreseeable future. Family economic security is a very important determinant of positive child outcomes. The Government's Strategy for Growth aims to promote the economic security of families through increasing the number of parents in employment. Income supports, as well as opportunities for further education and employment, are also an essential part of delivering economic security. A priority of the Government is employment activation.

Youth unemployment grew to 30.4% in 2012, falling to 26.5%¹⁵⁴ in 2013, which is still higher than that of the general population. These figures have been lessened by the effects of emigration. Youth unemployment represents a huge loss to society and a significant, immediate and long-term cost in terms of health, lost taxes and social exclusion. Young people's experiences now, and their ability to get into stable employment, will have a generational effect on the life chances and expectation of their children not yet born.

Changes in the labour market in the past three decades have had significant impacts on the types of skills (in particular soft skills) and capabilities young people need to access employment. There is also greater pressure for young people to be job-ready and able to perform in a job from Day 1.

Young people must be encouraged to find or create their own jobs, to actively contribute and to shape Government and industry responses to youth unemployment.

Aim 4.1: Protection from poverty and social exclusion

Protecting children and young people from poverty and social exclusion¹⁵⁵ is about ensuring that they have adequate income and resources, are living in decent houses, have access to quality affordable food, good quality education and healthcare, and have the opportunities necessary to develop and participate as equals in society.

The Government recognises:

- Every child should grow up in a family with access to sufficient resources, supports and services to nurture and care for the child, and to foster the child's development and full and equal participation in society.
- The recession has impacted particularly on children and young people as evident in the increase in child poverty rates, greater difficulties for families in making ends meet,¹⁵⁶ reduced employment opportunities* and high emigration.

* OECD Education At a Glance, Country Note (2013) states: 'Between 2008 and 2011, unemployment among 25-34 year-olds who did not attain an upper secondary education increased by 21.5 percentage points, going up to 37%. Among tertiary-educated young adults, the increase was 5.2 percentage points, reaching 8.7%. Again, these unemployment rates are higher than the OECD averages of 18.1% and 6.8% respectively.'

- Poverty and social exclusion limits and undermines opportunities for children's emotional, social and intellectual development. The impact on health and cognitive development is greater the younger the child is, and has long-term effects on future wellbeing and employment prospects.
- Poverty is a greater risk for children and young people than for the overall population, with children more likely to experience persistent poverty.¹⁵⁷
- The effects of the social determinants of health and of health inequalities tend to cluster among individuals living in disadvantaged conditions and therefore pose an increased burden on those individuals.
- Children and young people living in Direct Provision face specific difficulties.¹⁵⁸
- Household joblessness is an important risk factor for child poverty. Ireland has twice the European average of jobless households (22%). A quarter of all children live in jobless households. This raises the prospect of the intergenerational transmission of unemployment and poverty.
- There is a strong link between parental participation in the labour market, maternal educational attainment and children's living conditions. Tackling disadvantage is most effectively achieved through active inclusion strategies that combine supports for parents to access education, training and employment with adequate income support and access to essential services, such as quality, affordable and accessible childcare, quality pre-school education, after-school services, health, housing and social services. This is particularly important in supporting the economic engagement of all women and in helping lone parents to make the transition from welfare dependency to economic independence.
- Ireland has one of the best poverty reduction effects from social transfers of all EU Member States¹⁵⁹ (87% reduction in poverty gap) and Ireland's child at-risk-of-poverty rate is lower than the EU average (17% compared with 21%), ranking 10th best of the 28 Member States.
- Despite the positive effect of social transfers on reducing the poverty gap of children (*see above*), Ireland's child poverty outcomes* are not as good relative to other European countries spending the same or less.¹⁶⁰
- The most effective strategies in addressing child poverty are those underpinned by policies that focus on prevention and improving the wellbeing of all children and young people, while giving targeted support to children and young people with additional needs.¹⁶¹

* Richardson (2013) found that countries with the best outcomes in terms of family poverty and wellbeing spent relatively more on services than cash transfers – Richardson, D. (2013) *Social spending across the child's life cycle: International variation and its consequences*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.

Aim 4.2: Live in child/youth-friendly, sustainable communities¹⁶²

Children and young people should enjoy an adequate standard of living, compatible with a life of dignity. They should be able to live and grow up in a safe, healthy, sustainable and child-friendly environment that supports their developmental and learning needs. Child-friendly communities cover issues about access to local services, amenities, schools and good quality public transport; streets and residential areas that are safe for walking and cycling; and the provision of outdoor green spaces for play, recreation and sport.

The Government recognises:

- The lifelong negative consequences for a child if his or her family is homeless or in substandard or unstable housing or accommodation, and the need for affordable, good quality housing for all children and young people.
- The negative impact of growing up in an area of disadvantage, including cycles of early school-leaving and intergenerational poverty, exposure to cultures of drug and alcohol misuse, criminal activity or anti-social behaviour.
- The role of Local Government in developing physically safe, sustainable communities, ensuring safe places to play, walk and cycle, the maintenance of roads and houses¹⁶³, and ensuring thought is put into planning road and transport routes.¹⁶⁴
- The strong link between the quality of a child's housing and their learning outcomes.

Aim 4.3: Opportunities for ongoing education and training

Opportunities for ongoing education and training are part of a commitment to lifelong learning. Access is critical for both parents of children and for young people themselves to facilitate their active participation in the economy and their ability to build economically secure lives for themselves and their children.

The Government recognises:

- There is a strong correlation between educational attainment, employment and future earnings.
- The evidence indicates that educational attainment of mothers is strongly correlated to employment prospects, as well as to a range of children's outcomes, including risk of poverty and deprivation. Thus, measures to improve maternal educational attainment and access to employment will have an effect on child poverty. This is particularly relevant for female-headed lone-parent households.
- The importance of providing flexible opportunities to continue formal education, particularly for early school-leavers, lone parents, teen mothers and young people in low skill jobs.

- The importance of non-formal educational and learning opportunities, as both complementary to formal education and in providing an alternative approach and learning environment for many early school-leavers.
- The importance of supporting young people on low incomes to access and remain in third-level education.

Aim 4.4: Have pathways to economic participation and independent living

Young people want to work and secure employment, to pursue a career and contribute to society. The best guarantee of economic security is a well-paid, secure job and failure to find employment greatly increases the risk of poverty and social exclusion. Training, volunteering, job placements, internships and support for entrepreneurship are all helpful in increasing employability.

The Government recognises:

- The importance of high expectations for our young people, striving to maximise their independence, focusing on ability, all with a view to enabling adolescents as far as possible to go on into adulthood holding a job, being economically independent, confident and capable.
- Unemployment, in particular long-term unemployment, has a negative impact on young people, not only in terms of economic independence but also on their self-confidence and mental health.
- The dynamics of the labour market have shifted significantly over the past decade, with rising unemployment (particularly in youth unemployment (30.4% in 2012) and in long-term unemployment), lower wages, less job security, greater labour market segmentation, rising underemployment and a significant growth in atypical work patterns, including differential pay and conditions for new entrants.
- Future job creation and employment opportunities are likely to be driven in large part by new technologies and other innovations, requiring significant reforms to education and training across the life cycle, in order to match these opportunities with appropriate skills and attributes.
- Independence and living independently require both the material means and the life skills to manage independently, to cook, to budget and to make good choices, recognising some people may require support to achieve this independence.
- The role of the youth work sector in supporting young people furthest from the labour market into further education, training and employment.
- Community education plays a significant role in supporting adults, including mothers, back into education, particularly for those most marginalised, hardest to reach and distanced from accredited training and the labour market.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

- 4.1 Adopt a multidimensional approach to tackling child poverty, building on the life cycle approach in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016 and informed by the European Commission's Recommendation on 'Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage', as part of the Social Investment Package. **(DSP, DF, DPER, DH, DES, DCYA, CFA, HSE)**
- 4.2 Set a national child-specific social target to lift over 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of at least two-thirds on the 2011 level. This target will include reducing the higher consistent poverty rate for households with children as compared to non-child households (8.8% compared with 4.2%) and for children as compared to adults (9.3% compared with 6%). **(DSP, DCYA, DH, DES, CFA, HSE)**
- 4.3 Determine the optimal design of child and family income supports to maximise their effectiveness and efficiency in reducing child poverty, while improving employment incentives.¹⁶⁵ **(DSP)**
- 4.4 Reform the One-Parent Family Payment Scheme so that lone parents have access to a range of supports and services designed to provide them with pathways to work while acknowledging their caring responsibilities. **(DSP)**
- 4.5 Reform labour market activation initiatives so that they actively promote progression into the labour market. **(DSP, DECLG, Local Government)**
- 4.6 Remove barriers to employment through increasing the affordability of quality and accessible childcare and after-school services, meeting EU childcare targets and encouraging flexible working arrangements.¹⁶⁶ **(DCYA, DSP, DJEI, DPER)**
- 4.7 Progress the Social Impact Investment pilot project for homeless families with children in the Dublin region and consider its application nationally as part of implementing a housing-led approach to end long-term homeless for all homeless families with children. **(DECLG)**
- 4.8 Promote the child protection and welfare of all children in the asylum system. **(DJE, DCYA, CFA)**
- 4.9 Implement and monitor the National Travellers/Roma Integration Strategy, with a particular focus on Traveller accommodation and the engagement of Roma in education. **(DJE, DH, DES, DCYA, Local Government)**
- 4.10 Develop child- and youth-friendly communities through Local Government adopting appropriate policies and objectives in County/City Development Plans and further supported by the preparation and issuing of National Guidelines on Planning for Child-friendly Communities. **(DECLG, DTTS, Local Government)**

- 4.11 Promote vocational education and training through the Educational Training Boards, encouraging the development of entrepreneurship skills among young people, promoting the development of in-school internship programmes and strengthening the links between local businesses, schools and youth organisations. (**DES**, DCYA, Local Government)
- 4.12 Develop and implement an action plan to support youth employment, including the EU Youth Guarantee, and having regard to the development of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities and how it applies to those young people under 25 years of age. (**DSP**, DCYA, DES, DECLG, DJEI)
- 4.13 Draw on the strengths and reach of youth work services and local development companies in working with public agencies and employers to promote the training, employment and entrepreneurship of young people. (**DCYA**, DSP, DES, DECLG, Local Government)
- 4.14 Support young people building businesses and livelihoods in the rural economy, such as in farming, fishing, forestry, food, hospitality and tourism. (**DAFM**, DECLG, DJEI, DTTS)

Commitments under Transformational Goals – Central to Outcome 4

Effective transitions

- Ensure all young people leaving care, detention or residential disability settings are adequately prepared and supported to negotiate the system and transition to stable independent living, further education, training or employment through the development and implementation of a quality aftercare plan and the development of protocols in relation to accessing housing, education and training. (**DCYA**, CFA, DH, HSE, DECLG)
- Increase opportunities for young people to enter employment through the promotion of work experience opportunities at second and third level. (**DES**, DSP)

Collaboration and coordination

- Improve the effectiveness of overall expenditure on children in achieving better child poverty outcomes. (**DPER**, DCYA, DH, DES, DSP)
- The establishment of new Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in each county/city, bringing a more strategic, joined-up approach to local and community development. (**DECLG**)

Key supporting policies

- A Strategy for Growth: A Medium-Term Economic Strategy, 2014-2020 (Department of Finance, 2014)
- Pathways to Work – The Implementation of the EU Council Recommendation for a Youth Guarantee (Government of Ireland, 2014)
- The Action Plan for Jobs (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2013)
- EU Commission: Social Investment Package – Commission Recommendation on investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage (European Commission, 2013)
- Area-based Childhood Programme (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2013)
- Pathways to Work – Government Policy Statement on Labour Market Activation (Government of Ireland, 2012)
- National Reform Programme for Ireland under the Europe 2020 Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2011)
- National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016 (Department of Social Protection, 2007)
- EU Youth Strategy, 2010-2018 (European Commission, 2010)



**Connected
Respected**

Outcome 5

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Achievement of Outcome 5 will further Ireland's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Relevant Articles include:

- **Article 2:** All the rights guaranteed by the UNCRC must be available to all children without discrimination of any kind and the State is obliged to protect children from discrimination.
- **Article 12:** The child's view must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting him or her, in accordance with their age and maturity.
- **Articles 7 and 8:** Children have a right to his or her identity, which the State is obliged to protect and, if necessary, re-establish.
- **Article 16:** Children have a right to protection from interference with privacy, family, home and correspondence, and from libel or slander.
- **Article 30:** Children of minority communities and indigenous peoples have the right to enjoy their own culture, to practise their own religion and to use their own language.
- **Article 13:** Children have a right to obtain information and to express their own views, unless this would violate the rights of others.
- **Article 15:** Children have a right to meet with others and to join or set up associations, unless this would violate the rights of others.
- **Article 42:** The State is obliged to make the rights contained in the UNCRC widely known to adults and children.

5

Connected Respected

& contributing to their world

INTRODUCTION

The aims for all children and young people are that they:

- 5.1 Have a sense of their own identity, free from discrimination.
- 5.2 Have positive networks of friends, family and community.
- 5.3 Are civically engaged, socially and environmentally conscious.
- 5.4 Are aware of their rights, responsible and respectful of the law.

Children and young people should be supported and encouraged to participate in decision-making and play a full role in society, recognising that they themselves, through their own choices and determination, can heavily influence their own lives and communities now and in the future.

The Government recognises that some children and young people face challenges and discrimination that may isolate them from their peers and communities, and impact greatly on their lives. Issues may be related to personal identity, gender, social class, family homelessness, parental addiction, mental health difficulties or imprisonment. Measures are needed to create a society in which all children and young people are valued and respected for *who* they are, so that they can freely express their identity and engage in society.

Identified Lead Government departments and agencies



Other key contributing Government and agency partners are noted in brackets after each commitment.

Key Facts

- *Growing Up in Ireland* (2009) study showed that 75% of 9-year-olds were involved in some form of organised sports club or organisation.
- 380,000 children and young people participate in youth work.¹⁶⁷
- Between 5% and 10% of the population are LGBT.¹⁶⁸
- 1.2% of 0-24 year-olds are Travellers and 42% of Travellers are under 15 years of age.¹⁶⁹
- 36% of births in 2012 were outside of marriage.¹⁷⁰

Findings from *Growing Up in Ireland, National Longitudinal Study of Children*

- Most 9-year-olds (over 90%) were described by their parents as having 'at least two or three close friends' (2009).
- 75% of 9-year-olds are involved in organised sports/fitness clubs (2009).
- At 13 years of age, boys had higher overall scores compared to girls on 'overall self-concept' and also on 'physical appearance', 'freedom from anxiety' and 'happiness' (2012).
- Girls, in contrast, were more likely than boys to have higher scores on 'general behaviour', indicating fewer 13-year-old girls displaying problematic behaviour (2012).
- The vast majority of the older children reported getting on 'very well' or 'well' with their mothers and fathers, and this was true at both 9 and 13 years of age (2009, 2012).

POLICY PRIORITIES

This section outlines the key Government priorities in relation to each of the 4 aims under Outcome 5 (Connected, respected and contributing to their world). This outcome speaks to friendships and belonging, having positive self-esteem and personal resilience, to growing independence and personal agency, to having a voice, engaging with friends, community, society and the democratic processes. This outcome area is very important in contributing to the development of individual resilience. Key Government activities in this area are to promote equality, challenge discrimination and ensure children and young people are aware of their rights and actively engaged in their communities.

Aim 5.1: Sense of own identity, free from discrimination

Children begin to develop a sense of their own identity in early childhood and this process continues throughout childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. A positive sense of identity and belonging are core human needs. Understanding their family, origins and cultural identity is of huge significance to children, particularly in their teenage years, and can have a profound impact on their psychological development and stability.

The Government recognises:

- The value to society of promoting equality and respecting diversity.
- The importance of children and young people being supported to know and develop their own identity, having opportunities to explore life and build diverse experiences.
- When children and young people have positive experiences, they develop an understanding of themselves as significant and respected, and feel a sense of belonging essential for their own wellbeing and their participation in society.
- The importance of the Irish language to national identity, culture and heritage.
- The importance of policies that integrate minority ethnic groups into the fabric of society.¹⁷¹
- The importance of children and young people being able to access all services without discrimination.

Aim 5.2: Positive networks of friends, family and community

The social networks in children and young people's lives can include family, friends, neighbours and the wider community. 'Community' is a wide construct and takes into account the multiple communities that children and young people may be part of, whether physical or digital. All of these networks have the potential to enrich their lives and provide multiple layers of support when there is a need to address a problem or difficulty in their lives.

The Government recognises:

- The importance of friendship to children and young people.¹⁷² Friendships contribute to improved health and wellbeing and a sense of belonging and purpose.
- Friendships are essential for the psychological, emotional and social development of children and young people, allowing them to learn how to relate to others and also about reciprocity, social standing and power.
- An ability to develop and maintain friendship can support positive mental health and educational outcomes for children and young people.
- Children and young people may experience difficulties maintaining friendships due to social exclusion, rural isolation and/or the need for them to take on caring responsibilities within their families.
- A child or young person withdrawing from their social networks can often be indicative of a deeper problem, as well as isolating them from support systems to address these problems.
- As children mature, they rely less on their parents for guidance and turn more to their peers.

- The prominent role of technology in children and young people’s lives. The Internet is now the 3rd most popular means of accessing information among young people¹⁷³ and plays a growing role in forming and maintaining friendships.

Aim 5.3: Civically engaged, socially and environmentally conscious

Children and young people live as part of families and communities. Many children and young people contribute significantly to their communities. They are often keenly interested in social, political and environmental issues, envisioning the kind of world they want to be part of and taking action to create such a world. The development of new technologies, in particular social media, has created new modes of engagement and activism, and has helped connect the local and the global.

An outcome of civic engagement is a society in which human rights are respected, the individual’s dignity and worth is acknowledged, the rule of law is observed, people willingly fulfil their responsibilities and the common good is the concern of all.

The Government recognises:

- All children and young people need and deserve the chance to make a difference – in their families, schools, communities, nation and world. This occurs through exposure to models of caring behaviour, awareness of the needs of others, a sense of personal responsibility to contribute to the larger society and opportunities for volunteering, leadership and service.
- The value of facilitating the active participation of children and young people in decisions that affect their individual and collective lives.¹⁷⁴ Involving children and young people in decision-making encourages them to become active participants in a democratic society and also contributes to a sense of achievement and attainment.
- The role that the education sector can play in promoting participation, citizenship, understanding of sustainable development, democracy and human rights.
- Young people need opportunities to engage in meaningful civic discourse that contributes to policy-making. This requires effective ways to draw on children’s views, locally, nationally and internationally. The success of policies needs to be tested in terms of what children and young people think and experience.
- The importance of encouraging greater participation, particularly of young women, in public life and in decision-making roles.¹⁷⁵
- Children and young people should be aware of their connection to the natural world and the interdependence between people, plants, animals and the land, motivating them to live more sustainably. Outdoor learning spaces should be a feature of the lives of children and young people to raise their environmental consciousness.

- Children and young people should display cultural competence and intercultural respect, to celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences.

Aim 5.4: Aware of rights, responsible and respectful of the law

Children and young people should be aware of and informed of their rights, as well as feeling confident and able to affirm those rights. All children and young people have rights as individuals as set out in the Constitution of Ireland and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Ireland in 1992. The UN Convention commits the Irish State to promoting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights of all children and young people. Children's rights take into account the vulnerable situation of children in that they are largely dependent on adults for their care and are often powerless to vindicate their own rights. Children's rights also recognise the evolving capacities of the child throughout their childhood.

As children grow up, they take on more responsibility for their own actions. As members of their community, they have a responsibility to respect the law, engage in democratic processes and be respectful of others, their property and the environment.

The Government recognises:

- The State has an obligation to protect and promote children's rights, and to ensure the fulfilment of those rights. A child or young person must be made aware of their rights and there must be mechanisms through which they can affirm those rights.
- Children and young people need to learn the skills necessary to look after themselves, to deal with bullies, to recognise when lies are being used to hurt other people and to stand up for what they believe in. Children must learn to develop strategies to make informed choices about their interpersonal behaviours and learn how to negotiate their rights in relation to the rights of others.

The Government recognises in respect of young people in conflict with the law:

- The evidence in Ireland shows a positive trend of falling rates of detected youth crime and the vast majority of young people who have been in trouble with the law grows out of crime.¹⁷⁶
- A specific cohort of young people every year requires targeted supports because their behaviour has led to their involvement in the youth justice system.
- The age when offending peaks is between 17 and 19 years,¹⁷⁷ just at the point where young people exit the youth justice system and are therefore more likely to secure a criminal record for a first offence, significantly impacting on their potential life trajectory.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Government commits to:

- 5.1 Support youth organisations to provide safe, supportive and developmental opportunities for young people and to provide quality-assured information and support responding to young people's needs, both online and within the community, on issues of mental health, substance misuse, relationships, sexual health, education and employment. **(DCYA)**
- 5.2 Promote and recognise young people's active citizenship and engagement in democratic processes, participation in social and environmental activism and innovation, volunteering and social entrepreneurship, including promoting voter registration in elections by all newly eligible voters. **(DCYA, DEJI, DECLG)**
- 5.3 Ensure the views presented by children and young people in participation forums and consultation are taken into account by the formal political process and policy-making, and that feedback to young people is always provided in return. **(DCYA)**
- 5.4 Hold a referendum before the end of 2015 on a proposal to amend the Constitution to reduce the voting age to 16.¹⁷⁸ **(DECLG)**
- 5.5 Develop and implement a National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development and deepen and strengthen the teaching of civics and human rights. **(DES)**
- 5.6 Reduce discrimination and intolerance of all types experienced by marginalised groups (i.e. Travellers, Roma, migrants and asylum-seekers; children and young people with disabilities; those in care and detention; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people; and those from ethnic or religious minorities). **(DJE, DES, DH, DSP, DCYA, HSE, CFA, Local Government and others as relevant)**
- 5.7 Ensure the ethos, policies and practices of Government institutions and State-funded services (including schools) promote equal treatment and interculturalism, and have measures to protect against and remedy all forms of discrimination. **(DJE, All)**
- 5.8 Ensure that Ireland's laws, policies and practice are compliant with the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols which Ireland has ratified.¹⁷⁹ **(DCYA, OCO, All)**
- 5.9 Provide children and young people with access to a remedy if there is a breach of their rights and promote knowledge of the Ombudsman for Children's Office and the Equality Tribunal. **(DCYA, DJE, DES, DH)**
- 5.10 Clarify the law in relation to a child and young person's right to know his or her identity (e.g. where adopted or where born) through the use of Assisted Reproductive Technologies and put in place mechanisms to collect and retain information necessary to enable a child to exercise their right to identity and to facilitate regular family access for children in care.¹⁸⁰ **(DJE, DCYA)**

- 5.11** Implement the principles underpinning the provisions of the Thirty-first Amendment to the Constitution on Children through legislative reform, support for judicial studies and the training and development of staff. (**DCYA**, DJE, CFA)
- 5.12** Drive reform in the youth justice area through the implementation of *Tackling Youth Crime – A Youth Justice Action Plan, 2014-2018*, focusing on diversion and rehabilitation, including greater use of community-based interventions, promoting initiatives to deal with young people who offend, providing a safe and secure environment for detained young people and supporting their early re-integration into the community.¹⁸¹ (**DCYA**, DJE)
- 5.13** Work with children and young people to help them contribute to their own community and safety, ensuring a positive relationship between An Garda Síochána, children and young people.¹⁸² (**AGS**)

Key supporting policies

- National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016 (Department of Social Protection, 2007)
- One World, One Future: Ireland's Policy for International Development (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2013)
- Intercultural Strategy for Education, 2010-2015 (Department of Education and Skills, 2010)
- The National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan (Department of Justice and Equality, 2013)

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Section 3: IMPLEMENTATION

Measuring progress

Government will assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the commitments in this National Policy Framework in realising better outcomes for children and young people through tracking progress over time. A small number of key indicators have been identified, most with international comparative data. Some indicators are measured annually, but many are only reported upon every 3-4 years. It is recognised that the indicators in Table 1 do not provide an holistic picture of the lives of all children and young people up to and including the age of 24. Rather, these key indicators will allow us to measure progress in some key areas across the outcomes over the 7 years of the Framework.

The indicators identified are drawn in large part from the National Set of Child Well-being Indicators, published biennially in the DCYA's *State of the Nation's Children* reports and the CSO's *Survey on Income and Living Conditions* (EU-SILC).

A more extensive set of indicators will be developed during 2014, coordinated by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, which will enable us to better track progress in terms of improving outcomes for children and young people across the aims of each of the five national outcome areas to give a richer and more extensive picture of children and young people's outcomes.

Table 1: Key indicators for National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020

National Outcome area	Key indicators	Ireland		International		Source
		Base	2020	Average	Rank	
1. Active and healthy	Breastfeeding initiation rates	55%	↑	86%	30/30	OECD ¹
	% of 11-year-olds categorised as overweight or obese	30%	↓	23%	35/39	HBSC ²
	Total suicide and intentional self-harm death rates per 100,000 for 15-29 year-olds	13.5	↓	7.4	23/28	Eurostat ³
	Reported incidents of STIs 15-24 year-olds	4,505	↓			CIDR ⁴
	Number of children under 18 on hospital waiting lists	3,065	↓			PTR ⁵
	Alcohol volume (cl 100%) consumed last drinking day among alcohol consumers aged 15-16	6.7cl	↓	5.1cl	29/34	ESPAD ⁶
	Cigarette use in past 30 days	21%	↓	28%	7/36	ESPAD
	% of 15-16 year-olds who have ever used cannabis	18%	↓	17%	16/36	ESPAD

National Outcome area	Key indicators	Ireland		International		Source
		Base	2020	Average	Rank	
2. Achieving full potential in learning and development	Participation in early childhood education aged 4 years and the starting age of compulsory education	96.1%	No change	93.2	12/36	Eurostat ⁷
	% of 2nd Class children performing at Level 3+ in Mathematics	35%	↑	n/a	n/a	DES ⁸
	PISA Maths	502	↑	494	13/34	OECD ⁹
	% of 2nd Class children performing at Level 3+ in English Reading	35%	↑		n/a	DES
	PISA Reading	523	↑	497	4/34	OECD
	% of students taking higher level Maths at Leaving Cert	24.7%	↑		n/a	DES ¹⁰
	PISA Science	522	↑	501	9/34	OECD
	11-year-olds reporting feeling low more than once a week	11%	↓	13%	13/39	HBSC
	Early school-leaving rate	8.6%	↓	12%	12/28	Eurostat ¹¹
3. Safe and protected from harm	15-year-olds who report being bullied at school	25%	↓	24%	22/39	HBSC
	15-year-olds involved in a physical fight at least once in the last 12 months	36%	↓	32%	30/37	HBSC
	15-year-olds who reported being drunk once in last 30 days	26.4%	↓	24.1%	26/37	HBSC
	Children in care aged 16 and 17 in full-time education	85%	↓	n/a	n/a	CFA
4. Economic security and opportunity	% of children under 18 in consistent poverty ¹²	9.3%	↓	n/a	n/a	SILC
	% of children under 18 at risk of poverty before social transfers	49.8% ¹³	↓	37.2%	28/28	EU-SILC
	% of children under 18 at risk of poverty	18.8% ¹⁴	↓	20.8%	10/28	EU-SILC
	% of children under 18 experiencing deprivation ¹⁵	32.1%	↓	n/a	n/a	SILC
	% of children under 17 in jobless households ¹⁵	26%	↓	9.2%	28/28	SILC ¹⁶
	% of 15-24 year-olds not in education, employment or training	18.7%	↓	13.2%	23/28	Eurostat LFS ¹⁷
5. Connected, respected and contributing to their world	No. of young people involved in youth clubs and projects	383,000	↑	n/a	n/a	DCYA
	Number of young people under 18 in prison/detention school	51	↓	n/a	n/a	IYJS ¹⁸
	% of students reporting being 'very interested' or 'quite interested' in political issues within their local community	42%	↑	40%	10/23	ICCS ¹⁹

NOTES to Table 1

n/a = not applicable

- ¹ OECD (2009) *Doing Better for Children*. Breastfeeding initiation rates exceed more than 90% for over half of the OECD. At the time of the report Ireland was 41%. Rates have improved to 55% (Perinatal Statistics Report Ireland, 2012). According to WHO World Health Statistics 2013, only 15% of children in Ireland are exclusively breastfed for the first 6 months compared with the global average of 38% and WHO European average of 25%.
- ² Health Behaviour of School-aged Children (HBSC) Survey 2010 (available at: <http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc/>), published in *State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2012* (DCYA, 2012). Available at: www.dcy.a.ie
- ³ Eurostat (2010). There were 3,724 hospital-treated episodes of self-harm (10-25 years) according to the National Registry of Deliberate Self-harm.
- ⁴ Number of notifications of sexually transmitted infections by gender and age group in 2013, from Department of Health's Computerised Disease Reporting System (CIDR), data extracted 12 February 2014.
- ⁵ September 2012 data from Patient Treatment Register (*State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2012*, DCYA, 2012). The number of children on a hospital waiting list awaiting treatment has decreased by 45.1% between 2009 and 2012.
- ⁶ European Schools Project on Alcohol and Drugs (ESPAD) Survey 2010. Available at: www.espad.org
- ⁷ Eurostat (2011). Available at: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00179&plugin=1>
- ⁸ Department of Education and Skills (2010) *2009 National Assessments of English, Reading and Mathematics*.
- ⁹ OECD (2013) *PISA 2012 Results in Focus. What 15-year-olds know and what they can do with what they know*. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf>
- ¹⁰ Data from Department of Education and Skills (2013). The target in *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011-2020* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) is to increase the percentage of students taking the higher level Mathematics examination in Leaving Certificate to 30% by 2020.
- ¹¹ Eurostat (2013). Available at: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.o?tab=table&init=1&plugin=0&language=en&pcode=t2020_40&tableSelection=1
- ¹² The consistent poverty measure looks at those persons who are defined as being at risk of poverty and experiencing enforced deprivation (experiencing two or more types of deprivation). An individual is defined as being in 'consistent poverty' if they are identified as being at risk of poverty and living in a household deprived of 2 or more of the 11 basic deprivation items. Central Statistics Office (2013) *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2011* and revised 2010 results. Available at: http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/silc/2011/silc_2011.pdf
- ¹³ At risk of poverty *before* social transfers. Eurostat EU-SILC figure for Ireland is 49.1% in terms of comparative with EU average. Discrepancy due to use of different definitions for disposable income and equivalised scales between Ireland and Eurostat.
- ¹⁴ Eurostat EU-SILC figure for Ireland is 17.1% in terms of comparative with EU average. Discrepancy due to use of different definitions for disposable income and equivalised scales between Ireland and Eurostat.
- ¹⁵ This rate is using the Irish measure of basic deprivation, which measures when people are denied – through lack of income – at least 2 items of 11 listed on the Irish index of basic deprivation. This differs from the EU measure of material deprivation, which measures the proportion of the population lacking 3 or more of a list of 9 items. Only 2 of these items are similar to those in the Irish list. For more information on Irish and EU measures of deprivation (and poverty), see Watson, D. and Maître, B. (2012) *Technical Paper on Poverty Indicators – Appendix C: Report of the Review of the National Poverty Target*, Social Inclusion Technical Paper No. 2. Dublin: Department of Social Protection.
- ¹⁶ Watson, D., Maître, B. and Whelan, C.T. (2012) *Work and Poverty in Ireland: An Analysis of the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2004-2010* Dublin: Department of Social Protection and the ESRI.
- ¹⁷ Eurostat Labour Force Survey (2012). Available at: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tipslm90&plugin=0>
- ¹⁸ Irish Youth Justice Service (2014). As at 26 February 2014, there were 16 17-year-olds in adult prisons (5 on remand and 11 serving a sentence). There were 33 boys and 2 girls in Oberstown (13 on remand and 22 serving a sentence).
- ¹⁹ ICCS (2009) *International Report: Civic knowledge, attitudes, and engagement among lower-secondary school students in 38 countries*. Ireland also scored significantly higher than the ICCS average on political issues in their country (56% vs. 49%), politics in other countries (30% vs. 26%), internal politics (37% vs. 33%). Ireland scored significantly lower than the ICCS average on interest in European politics (35% vs. 38%).

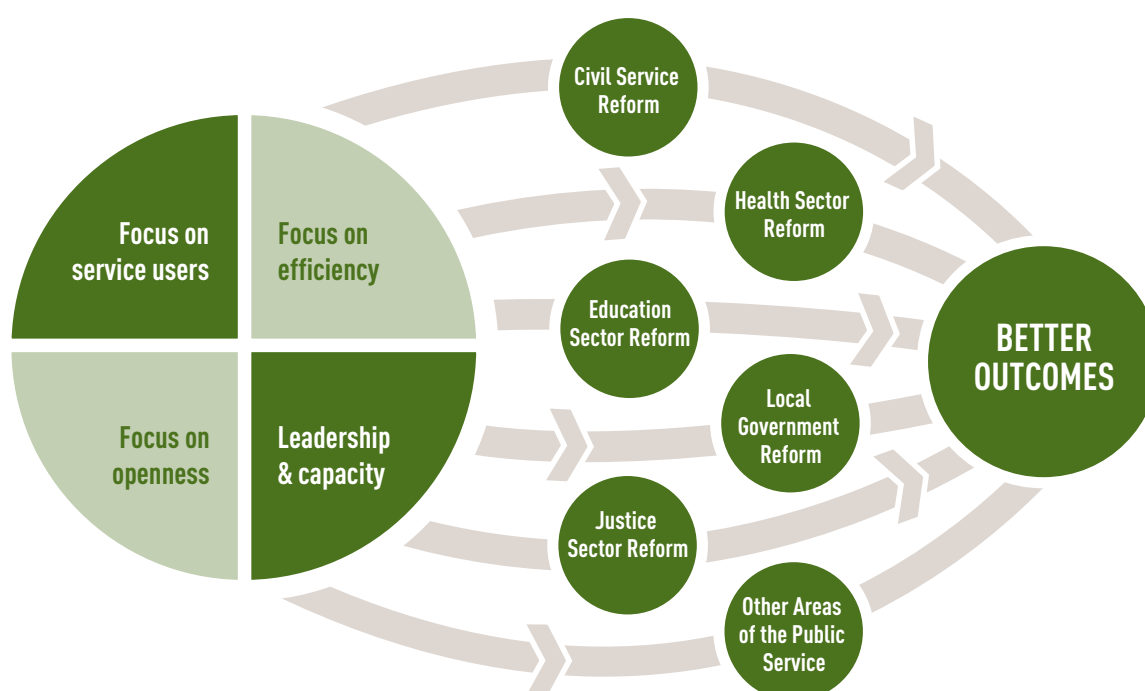
Driving implementation, Ensuring accountability

The most significant challenge over the next 7-year period (2014-2020) is in implementation, realising the ambition behind our vision for children and young people. There is considerable consensus on the systemic barriers, the problems facing children and families and an improved understanding of 'what works' (i.e. effective solutions) in terms of bringing about better outcomes. Bridging the implementation gap requires ensuring that policy, research and strategy are meaningfully implemented in practice. The challenge lies in re-orientating the system and implementing changes to the services and *how we work* to deliver improved outcomes and services for children and young people. This requires cross-Government and interagency collaboration and coordination at national and local level. It also requires:

- leadership;
- people working in different ways;
- changing the way resources are allocated and services are funded;
- reconfiguration of services, decommissioning some and commissioning more of others.

Over the past number of years, a process of reforming structures, implementing new systems and ways of working has commenced. The context for reform has become more challenging, with reducing budgets, increasing demand for services and rising public expectations. On the other hand, reform has been given strong impetus with the appointment of the first ever full Cabinet Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the establishment of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. It will take continued leadership across all sectors for the reforms to be delivered. The establishment of the Child and Family Agency in 2014 represents a further milestone in the reform of services for children and young people. At a wider level across Government, there is a significant reform programme underway that impacts on children, young people and their families (see *Figure 3*).

Figure 3: Public Service Reform Plan, 2014-2026



Succeeding in the implementation of this Framework is going to be challenging. The approach to implementation, in particular the whole of Government approach, has been drawn from experience and evidence in Ireland and internationally as to ‘what works’. The Framework contains a large number of commitments, both current and new, of varying levels of complexity, action and intent. The active implementation focus will be on progressing the complex, multi-lateral commitments with Government departments progressing their own commitments as normal, but reporting annually on progress or where issues need to be escalated. A rolling action plan will be used throughout to direct priority issues and report on progress. The first Action Plan to be developed will detail activities for the first 18 months of the Framework.

Driving implementation and ensuring monitoring and accountability are two separate, yet connected functions. There is also a third function – that of stakeholder engagement, which supports both implementation and accountability functions. In designing the supporting mechanisms and structures of the National Policy Framework, we have sought to ensure all three functions are met.

Of prime importance in driving implementation of the Policy Framework is leadership. Effective implementation will require significant collaboration and coordination across Government and between departments, agencies and other bodies. To provide that leadership and guidance, a high-level Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium* will be established, reporting directly to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy, comprising senior officials from Government departments and agencies and representatives from advisory and local operational fora. The Policy Consortium will be chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, with a Deputy Chair from the Department of The Taoiseach (*see Figure 4*).

The Government commits to:

1. Streamline accountability structures for children and youth, creating:
 - (a) Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium, with a sub-group (Sponsors Group) that will connect with other cross-Government accountability structures in a strategic and collaborative way (e.g. Healthy Ireland). (DCYA, All)
 - (b) Advisory Council, with two pillars – one for Early Years and one for Children and Youth. (DCYA)
2. Ensure children and young people have a voice in the accountability mechanisms through linking with Dáil na nÓg structures. (DCYA)
3. Ensure local county-level implementation and monitoring through the Children’s Services Committees (CSCs), which will be formally linked with the new Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) being established in each Local Authority area under an initiative of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. (DCYA, Local Government)

* A consortium is defined as an association of two or more individuals or entities with the objective of participating in a common activity or pooling their resources for achieving a common goal.

4. Establish an Implementation Team within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to support the development of a strong Policy Consortium and Sponsors Group. The Implementation Team will drive accountability and the delivery of cross-Government coordination and collaboration to achieve better outcomes for children and young people. Membership of the Implementation Team will include a mix of skills and draw on the contribution and creativity of young people. (DCYA)
5. Develop and implement a communications plan for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and its supporting strategies, using existing national and local structures as channels for communication. (DCYA, All as relevant)

Accountability

Timeframe: The timeframe of *Better Outcomes, Better Futures* will be from 2014 to 2020. The Framework will be followed in 2014 by several key strategic documents that will lay out in greater detail the programme of work in particular areas. These will include Ireland's first national *Early Years Strategy* and a national *Youth Strategy*. It will also include *Tackling Youth Crime – A Youth Justice Action Plan* and policies on *Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* and *Parenting and Family Support*.

Political accountability will be achieved through the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy.

Interdepartmental and non-Governmental accountability will be achieved through representation on the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium and participation in the Advisory Council.

Accountability to children and young people will be achieved through creating formal links between the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium and two existing participatory structures – the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive and the European Structured Dialogue process.

Financial accountability mechanisms will be explored in consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, including the development of a mechanism to track and analyse expenditure on children and young people across departments, agencies and NGOs.

Public accountability will be achieved through the online publication of annual progress reports. The *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Framework will be a live document, available online through the DCYA website (www.dcy.ie).

Implementation structures

The implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* involves the establishment of clear and efficient structures to ensure accountability, drive implementation and provide a forum for stakeholder engagement. These structures have been designed to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) will consolidate its existing consultative bodies and interdepartmental processes into the Consortium, the Sponsors' mechanisms and the Advisory Council. This new structure will replace many of the existing advisory and consultative fora relating to children and young people, with a view to enhancing the position of these groups within one coherent and coordinated infrastructure (see Figure 4).

The range of groupings outlined in this infrastructure will each have a clear function and specific Terms of Reference in relation to the Framework. Moreover, these groupings will interrelate in a structured and systematic manner to ensure that the broad range of constituents is working on a shared outcomes-focused agenda for children and young people. The structures for the implementation of the Framework will involve:

Cabinet Committee on Social Policy

- **Chair:** The Taoiseach
- **Members:** Relevant Ministers
- **Function:** This committee gives overall strategic direction to the development of policies to combat poverty and social exclusion, and ensures that their implementation is regularly monitored and promoted at the highest level. It is supported in its work in this area by the Senior Officials Group on Social Policy.
- The committee will undertake to oversee, monitor and address common Government policies, targets and action plans to improve outcomes for children and young people.

NEW STRUCTURES

The following new structures will deliver on the three functions of ensuring accountability, driving implementation and providing a forum for stakeholder engagement.

Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium

- **Chair:** Secretary General, DCYA
- **Deputy Chair:** Department of The Taoiseach
- **Members:** Assistant Secretaries from DT, DPER, DF, DH, DES, DSP, DECLG, DJE, DTTS, DJEI, DAHG and DCENR; senior representatives from the CFA, HSE, An Garda Síochána, County/City Manager nominated by CCMA; the Chair and three members of the Advisory Council; and the Chair of the Children’s Services Committees National Steering Group. It is envisaged that the Consortium will meet on a twice yearly basis to review progress.
- **Function:** To have oversight of and drive cross-Government implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and its supporting strategies, and report annually to Government on progress achieved.

Sponsors Group (sub-group of the Policy Consortium)

- **Sponsors:**
 - Department of Health (Outcome 1)
 - Department of Education and Skills (Outcome 2)
 - Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Outcome 3)
 - Department of Social Protection (Outcome 4)
 - Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Outcome 5)
 - Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Transformational Goals)

- **Function:** The Sponsors Group is a sub-group of the Policy Consortium, composed of members of five key departments. Each will have lead responsibility for a National Outcome area, supported by the Implementation Team (*see below*). The purpose of the Sponsors Group is to actively drive implementation and provide a forum for problem-solving.
- **Method:** Each sponsor will determine the mechanism(s) most appropriate to its Outcome area, which may include existing Committee(s), establishing new Committee(s) and/or working directly with key officials.

Advisory Council

- **Membership:** The Advisory Council will consist of approximately 16 members under an independent Chair. The members of the Council will be drawn from pillars representing the Early Years and Children and Youth sectors and also independent experts.
- **Function:** To advise the Policy Consortium and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on the implementation of the National Policy Framework and its supporting strategies.
- The Advisory Council will have a formal link with the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium.

Children's Services Committees National Steering Group

- **Members:** Current membership includes the Chairs of local Children's Services Committees (CSCs), representatives of Local Authorities, the DCYA and the Centre for Effective Services (CES).
- **Function:** CSCs are a structure for bringing together a diverse group of agencies in local county areas to engage in joint planning of services for children and young people. The National Steering Group is a representation of this at national level. Implementation of the Framework will be driven at local level by the CSCs. The National Steering Group will act as a vehicle to link implementation at local level with oversight by the Policy Consortium.
- The CSC National Steering Group will have a formal link with the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium.

Comhairle na nÓg National Executive

- **Membership:** The Comhairle na nÓg National Executive is the national participation structure for young people aged 12-18 years. Its membership consists of 34 representatives elected by each of the Comhairle na nÓg located in each Local Authority area.
- **Function:** The Comhairle na nÓg National Executive will have a direct and structured engagement with the Policy Consortium on progress in relation to the implementation of the Framework. This engagement and reporting arrangement will be developed based on international best practice in involving children and young people in the decision-making process.
- The Comhairle na nÓg National Executive will have a formal link with the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium.

Structured Dialogue Working Group

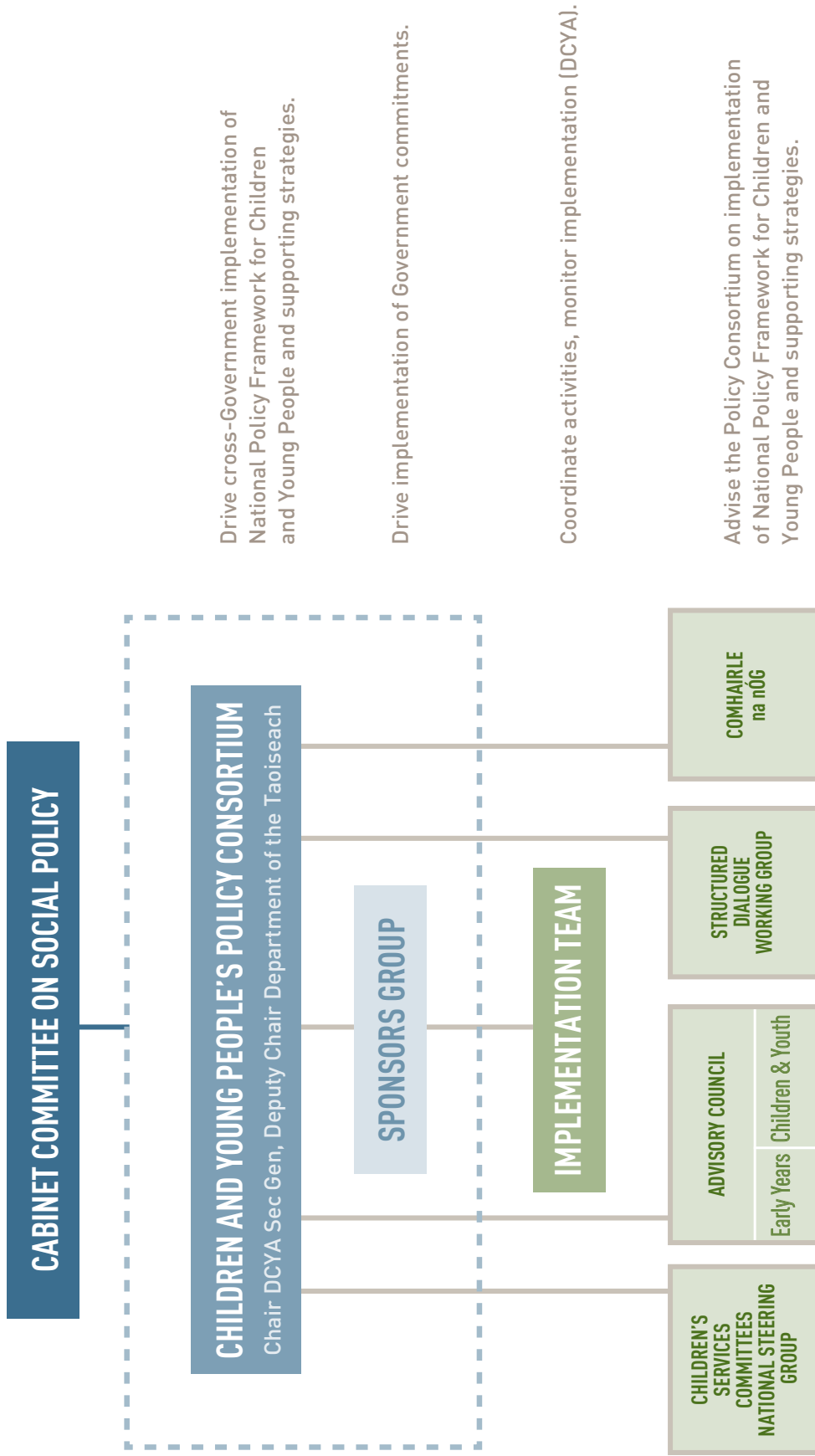
- **Membership:** Young people and youth organisations, experts on youth issues and public decision-makers.
- **Function:** The Structured Dialogue Working Group provides a national participation and consultation structure for young people aged 15-25 to feed into European youth policy on pertinent issues. The Structured Dialogue process is currently under review by the EU Commission. Once the review is completed, a mechanism for engagement of young people involved in Structured Dialogue with the Policy Consortium will be refined.
- The Structured Dialogue Working Group will have a formal link with the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium.

Implementation Team

While acknowledging that most of the commitments outlined within the Framework will be implemented by their respective Government departments, an Implementation Team will be established within the DCYA to:

- project-manage implementation, coordinate activities and work relating to the implementation of the Framework and its supporting strategies;
- provide an analytical, change management and communications capability to address the implementation of complex priority commitments and transformational goals;
- coordinate and support planning and reporting, and develop with sponsors and departments an action plan and progress reports;
- support quality stakeholder engagement and communications;
- ensure the effective operation of the implementation structures through central coordination and support, including drafting agendas, collating reports, providing analysis and managing meetings.

Figure 4: Implementation and Accountability structures of National Policy Framework for Children and Young People



Appendices

APPENDIX 1: THE NATIONAL OUTCOMES AND THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights sets out the human rights of all individuals – children, young people, adults and older people. Flowing from the Universal Declaration, 9 treaties have been developed to focus on specific themes – the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is one of these treaties; others focus on women, disability and racism. The UNCRC expresses the rights of the Universal Declaration in child-specific language; provides additional protections to children given their particular vulnerability; and takes into account that the fulfilment of their rights is often dependent on the actions of others, such as parents. The UNCRC defines ‘a child’ as anyone under the age of 18 years. There is no equivalent UN Convention on ‘Youth’. Hence, this Policy Framework has adopted the UNCRC as its guide, but where relevant draws from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

UNCRC Articles that apply to all five national outcomes

- **Article 1: Definition of a child: Children are defined as all persons under 18 years.**
- **Article 2: Non-discrimination: All Convention rights apply to all children without exception, and the State is obliged to protect children from discrimination.**
- **Article 3: Best interests of the child: All actions concerning the child should take full account of his or her best interests.**
- **Article 4: Implementation of rights: The State has an obligation to translate the rights of the Convention into reality.**
- **Article 5: Parental guidance and the child’s evolving capacities: The State has a duty to respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and the wider family to provide guidance appropriate to the child’s evolving capacities.**
- **Article 6: Life, survival and development: The child has an inherent right to life, and the State has an obligation to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.**
- **Article 12: The child’s opinion: Children have the right to express an opinion, and to have that opinion taken into account, in any matter affecting them, in accordance with their age and maturity.**



UNCRC Articles relevant for specific national outcomes

Active and healthy	Achieving full potential in learning and education	Safe and protected from harm	Economic security and opportunities	Connected, respected and contributing to their world
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children have an inherent right to life and the State has an obligation to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child (Article 6). Right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health possible and to have access to health services and the State is obliged to take steps to combat disease and develop preventative healthcare (Article 24). Right to rest, engage in leisure, play and recreational activities, and participate in cultural and artistic activities (Article 31). Right to protection from illicit drug use and involvement in drug production and trafficking (Article 33). Children with a physical disability or learning difficulties have the right to special care, education and training designed to help them to achieve the greatest possible self-reliance and to lead a full and active life (Article 23). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to education as a progressive and equal right; the State is obliged to make primary education compulsory and free to all; to develop different forms of secondary education and make it available and accessible to all; make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity; take measures to encourage regular school attendance and reduce drop-out rates, and to ensure school discipline is administered consistent with the child's dignity (Article 28). Education should be directed at developing the child's personality and talents; fostering respect for human rights; own cultural, national values; and the environment (Article 29). Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, subject to appropriate parental guidance and national law (Article 14). Children with a physical disability or learning difficulties have the right to special care, education and training designed to help them to achieve the greatest possible self-reliance and to lead a full and active life (Article 23). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to live and/or maintain contact with parents unless it is not in their best interests (Article 9). The State is obliged to foster and enable family re-unification (Article 10). Right to protection from all forms of abuse (Article 19), exploitation (Article 36), including sexual exploitation, sexual abuse (Article 34) and armed conflict (Article 38). The State has a duty to promote the recovery of child victims of abuse (Article 39) and to act to prevent child kidnapping (Article 11), abduction and the sale and/or trafficking of children (Article 35). The State is obliged to assist a child without a family (Article 20); children have a right to a periodic review of their care placement (Article 25); and adoptions should only be carried out in the best interests of the child (Article 21). The State is obliged to provide refugee children with appropriate protections (Article 22). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children have a right to a standard of living 'adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development'. Parents have the primary responsibility to provide this and the State has a duty to assist parents, where necessary, in fulfilling this right (Article 27). The State has an obligation to recognise and promote the principle that both parents or legal guardians have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child; the State shall support parents or legal guardians in this task through the provision of appropriate assistance (Article 18). Right to benefit from social security (Article 26). Right to be protected from harmful labour exploitation (Article 32). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the rights guaranteed by the UNCRC must be available to all children without discrimination of any kind and the State is obliged to protect children from discrimination (Article 2). The child's view must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting him or her, in accordance with their age and maturity (Article 12). Right to his or her identity, which the State is obliged to protect and, if necessary, re-establish (Articles 7 and 8). Right to protection from interference with privacy, family, home and correspondence, and from libel or slander (Article 16). Children of minority communities and indigenous peoples have the right to enjoy their own culture, to practise their own religion and to use their own language (Article 30). Right to obtain information and to express their own views, unless this would violate the rights of others (Article 13). Right to meet with others and to join or set up associations, unless this would violate the rights of others (Article 15). The State is obliged to make the rights contained in the UNCRC widely known to adults and children (Article 42).

APPENDIX 2: FINDINGS OF THE CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The views of 66,705 children and young people were collected in 2011 to inform the development of this Policy Framework and its related age-cohort strategies. Children and young people in every school and Youthreach centre in the country were invited to complete short questionnaires.

The questions for children of primary school age were:

1. What's the best thing about being a child in Ireland?
2. What's the worst thing about being a child in Ireland?
3. What one thing would you change in Ireland for children to be happy?

The questions for young people of secondary school age were:

1. What do you think is good about being a young person living in Ireland?
2. What do you dislike about being a young person living in Ireland?
3. If you were leader of the country, what one thing would you change for young people?

In total 66,705 children and young people (38%) responded to the questionnaire. 81% were from primary level and 19% from post-primary, 52% female and 48% male. Respondents ranged in age from 4 to 23 years, the majority (50%) being between the ages of 10 and 12.

Key messages from children and young people

Children and young people said that **education was the best thing** about living in Ireland. Children noted that there were good schools, schooling is free and everybody can go to school. Young people noted that education is a right, it is free and the standard is really good.

Children and young people said that the **worst thing was the recession and current financial situation** in Ireland. Children noted that there is no money in the country, people are not happy, children will have to pay back banks when they grow up, parents are worried about losing jobs and having less money, everything is more expensive, and they may not be able to get a job and earn money when they leave school. Similarly, young people noted that the country is in a recession, economy is going downwards, there are no jobs, and the high cost of living. Many were worried about the effect of the recession on their families' financial situation and their future job prospects.

Children and young people said that the **top thing they would change is aspects of the education system**. Children suggested changes such as: have less homework; make days at school shorter and holidays longer; have fewer pupils in the classroom; have more equipment for sports and art; put more money into teaching science and have science labs; and have more computers in school. Young people suggested changes such as: have better school facilities and resources; have bigger classrooms; change the points and exam system; use more continuous assessment; reduce high costs of books and uniforms; and spend less time in school.

APPENDIX 3: FINDINGS OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

A public consultation process, involving parents and people working with children and young people, was undertaken in 2012. In total, 1,081 online and written submissions were analysed and reported on by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at the National University of Ireland, Galway. Respondents were asked to:

- make suggestions for actions by family, community and Government towards achieving each of the national outcomes;
- identify the three best and three worst things about life for children and young people in Ireland;
- how positive behaviour and citizenship can be supported;
- what actions are needed from family, community and Government to support young people to move confidently into adulthood.

Summary – Recurrent themes

1. Positive parenting.
2. Encouraging more positive attitudes to children and young people, listening to them.
3. Importance of youth clubs, extracurricular activities, non-academic education.
4. That community was about providing opportunities to participate.
5. Social inclusion.
6. Family support for those who need it to help fulfil their role as a parent.

What **Family can do** predominantly revolves around good parenting practice as well as providing economic security.

What **Community can do** largely revolves around social and community activities and facilities, emphasizing the need to recognise, involve, encourage and respect children and young people.

What **Government can do** largely revolves around supporting and enabling the two above (i.e. family and community), strengthening systems (health, education and child protection), developing supportive policy and legislation, as well as improving the economy and job creation. The feedback was that Government can:

1. Lead by example.
2. Job creation, improve the economy.
3. Increase provision of quality, affordable childcare.
4. Modernise education.
5. Strengthen the child protection system.
6. Improve health system.
7. Legislation and policy on:
 - regulating food and recreation sectors to incentivise healthy choices;
 - food labelling;
 - advertising to children;
 - sale of tobacco and alcohol;
 - childhood obesity;
 - alcohol misuse;
 - children's rights.

APPENDIX 4: A NATIONAL CHILD AND YOUTH POLICY FRAMEWORK INDICATOR SET

A comprehensive indicator set to support the measurement of the five national outcomes will be developed in 2014, building on the National Set of Child Well-being Indicators.

Section 3, 'Measuring Progress', of this Framework includes a table of indicators (see Table 1, pp. 108-110). These are drawn in large part from the CSO's *Survey on Income and Living Conditions* (EU-SILC) and the DCYA's *National Set of Child Well-being Indicators*, originally developed by the National Children's Office in 2005¹⁸³ and being added to every 2 years for the *State of the Nation's Children* report. The indicators do not attempt to provide a holistic picture of the lives of all children and young people up to 24 years. They were selected to give an 'indication' of where we are at present, focusing on priority areas for policy over the next

7 years in order to monitor progress.

The key criteria used to inform the selection of the Framework's indicators are:

- established indicators;
- currently monitored by Government departments/agencies;
- regularly collected;
- capable of being influenced within 7 years;
- can be benchmarked internationally (by the EU, OECD and UNICEF).

As a first step in selecting indicators to support the Framework, the National Set of Child Well-being Indicators was matched to the five national outcomes in the Framework. This matching process helped identify gaps or areas where the particular outcome areas were not well represented in existing indicators. As part of the Framework's consultation process, the matched indicator set and identified gaps were circulated to all Government departments for their review. Following this consultation process, a draft set of indicators appropriate to the outcomes of the Framework were identified.

It is important to note that indicators serve as an indication. Good indicators merely provide a sense of whether expected results are being achieved. They do not answer questions about why results are or are not achieved, unintended results, the linkages existing between interventions and outcomes, or actions that should be taken to improve results. As such, data on indicators must be interpreted with caution. They are best used to point to results that need further exploration, rather than as definitive assessments of success or failure.

APPENDIX 5: GROWING UP IN IRELAND: NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF CHILDREN

The *Growing Up in Ireland: National Longitudinal Study of Children* has been tracking the development of two nationally representative cohorts of children: a Child Cohort (recruited when the children were 9 years of age) and an Infant Cohort (recruited when the children were 9 months of age). The study is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, in association with the Department of Social Protection and the Central Statistics Office.

This study is carried out under the Statistics Act 1993 and is subject at all phases to rigorous ethical review by an independent Research Ethics Committee, as well as ongoing monitoring by national and international experts in several oversight and steering committees.

Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) is being carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College, Dublin (TCD).

Coverage and fieldwork

Child Cohort: A total of 8,568 9-year-old children and their families, teachers and other caregivers were initially interviewed between September 2007 and March 2008. A second round of interviews took place with this cohort of young people (and their families) when they were 13 years of age. This second round of interviews took place between August 2011 and February 2012.

Infant Cohort: A total of 11,134 9-month-old infants and their families and other caregivers were recruited into the study and interviewed for the first time between September 2008 and March 2009. A second wave of interviews took place between January and August 2011, when the children were 3 years of age. A third wave of interviews was completed between March and September 2013, when the children were 5 years of age.

GUI reports and related references

Infant Cohort

Key Findings No 1: Infant Cohort at five years (2013) *Transition to School Among Five-Year-Olds*. Available at: http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/5year_KFs/GUI_KF_1_School.pdf

Key Findings No 2: Infant Cohort at five years (2013) *Socio-Emotional Wellbeing of Five-Year-Olds*. Available at: http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/5-year_KFs/GUI_KF_2_Socio.pdf

Key Findings No 3: Infant Cohort at five years (2013) *Wellbeing, Play and Diet among Five-Year-Olds*. Available at: http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/5year_KFs/GUI_KF_3_Wellbeing.pdf

Key Findings No 4: Infant Cohort at five years (2013) *The Family Circumstances of Five-Year-Olds*. Available at: http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/5year_KFs/GUI_KF_4_Financial.pdf

Child Cohort

Key Findings No 1: Child Cohort at nine years (2009) *Being Nine Years Old*. Available at: http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Update_Key_Findings/Key_Findings_1.pdf

Key Findings No 1: Child Cohort at thirteen years (2012), *School Experiences among 13-Year-Olds*. Available at: http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/Conference_2012/GUI_KF_A4_1_School__2_.pdf

Key Findings No 2: Child Cohort at nine years (2009) *The Families of Nine-Year-Olds*. Available at: http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Update_Key_Findings/Key_Findings_2.pdf

Key Findings No 2: Child Cohort at thirteen years (2012) *Physical Activity and Obesity among 13-Year-Olds*. Available at: http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/Conference_2012/GUI_KF_A4_2_obesity.pdf

Key Findings No 3: Child Cohort at thirteen years (2012) *The Family and Financial Circumstances of 13-year-olds*. Available at: http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/Conference_2012/GUI_KF_A4_3_Family.pdf

Key Findings No 4: Child Cohort at thirteen years (2012) *The Lives of 13-Year-Olds: Their Relationships, Feelings and Behaviours*. Available at: http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/Conference_2012/GUI_KF_A4_4_Relationships.pdf

Growing Up in Ireland Special Report (2013) 9-year and 9-month cohorts. Dublin: Government Publications.

Williams, J., Greene, S., Doyle, E., Harris, E., Layte, R., McCoy, S. and Thornton, M. (2011) *Growing Up in Ireland: National Longitudinal Study of Children. The lives of Nine-Year-Olds*. Dublin: Government Publications. Available at: http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/1st_Report/Barcode_Growing_Up_in_Ireland_-_The_Lives_of_9-Year-Olds_Main_Report.pdf

Williams, J., Greene, S., McNally, S., Murray, A. and Quail, A. (2010) *Growing Up in Ireland: National Longitudinal Study of Children. The Infants and Their Families*. Dublin: Government Publications.

Williams, J., Murray, A., McCrory, C. and McNally, S. (2013) *Growing Up in Ireland: National Longitudinal Study of Children. Development from Birth to Three Years*. Dublin: Government Publications.

APPENDIX 6: GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS – SUMMARY TABLE

Commitments (bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
Goal 1: Support Parents																			
G1 Develop a high-level policy statement on Parenting and Family Support to guide the provision of universal evidence-informed parenting supports. This should address parental and familial factors impacting on parenting capacity and family functioning (e.g. mental health and substance abuse) and identify responses required for 'at risk' children, families and communities.	✓																		
G2 Ensure planning and coordination of parenting supports at local level through Children's Services Committees.	✓			✓										✓	✓	✓			
G3 Continue to support parents financially with the costs of rearing children through the provision of Child Benefit.					✓														
G4 Evaluate current policy in relation to maternity and parental leave with a view to giving consideration to the introduction of paid paternity leave.	✓			✓			✓	✓											
Goal 2: Earlier Intervention and Prevention																			
G5 Work towards a rebalancing of resources to place a greater emphasis on prevention and earlier intervention.	✓	✓	✓	✓										✓	✓				
G6 The HSE and the Child and Family Agency will explore the provision of an enhanced maternal ante-natal and early childhood development service, building on the review of the Community Nursing Services and related developments in family support provision (including home visiting), incorporating the learning from the <i>Growing Up In Ireland</i> study and the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme.	✓		✓											✓	✓				
G7 Provide and commission both universal and targeted evidence-informed parenting supports and ensure early identification of 'at risk' children and families to strengthen families and reduce the incidences of children coming into, and remaining in, care.															✓				
G8 Continue to increase investment in high-quality Early Years care and education for all children, prioritising families on low incomes. introduce a second free pre-school year within the lifetime of this Framework, once the required quality standards are achieved and subject to resources becoming available.	✓	✓			✓										✓				
G9 Introduce universal GP services and continue to roll out Primary Healthcare Teams, to promote early diagnosis and treatment of ill-health.			✓											✓					
G10 Support quality youth work, both as a protective factor contributing to the young person's overall development and in reaching out to young people at risk of crime or anti-social behaviour.	✓																		

 Relevant to all ages
 Specific to under-6s (Early Years)
 Specific to over-12s (Youth)

Commitments (bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
G11 Training and up-skilling of professionals across formal and non-formal educational settings to be in a position to identify potential child welfare and mental health issues, and to provide preventative and early intervention support.	✓	✓	✓											✓	✓				
G12 Profile key risk factors for poor outcomes for children and young people and develop practice tools to assist professionals in identifying and – working with families – mitigating these risks.	✓	✓	✓											✓	✓				
G13 Implement the Area-Based Childhood Programme to address the impact of child poverty and improve child outcomes in 10 or more areas of disadvantage and mainstream the learning from the programme to services throughout the country.	✓	✓	✓															✓	
Goal 3: Listen to and involve children and young people																			
G14 Consult with children and young people on policies and issues that affect their lives.	✓																		✓
G15 Develop and implement a National Policy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making to strengthen efforts to ensure children and young people are supported to express their views in all matters affecting them and to have those views given due weight, including those of ‘seldom-heard’ children.	✓																		✓
G16 Strengthen participation in decision-making for health and well-being at community level.														✓	✓	✓		✓	
G17 Create mechanisms to provide children and young people with the opportunity to be heard in primary and post-primary schools and centres for education through Student Councils or other age-appropriate mechanisms.	✓	✓																	
G18 Create mechanisms to provide children with the opportunity to be heard in judicial proceedings affecting them, including through independent representatives where appropriate.	✓			✓															
G19 Facilitate children and young people in care to have meaningful participation in their care planning and decision-making, including through training and support of the professionals.	✓														✓				
G20 Ensure the views presented by children and young people in participatory forums and consultations are taken into account by the formal political and policy-making process, and that feedback to the young people is always provided in return.	✓																		
G21 Establish a Children and Young People’s Participation Hub to support Government departments and agencies in the implementation of the National Policy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making.	✓																		
Goal 4: Ensure Quality Services																			
G22 Achieve effective child and family support services through the establishment of the Child and Family Agency and implementation of the National Service Delivery Framework for child welfare and protection services, with agreed thresholds and outcome measures.	✓														✓				



Commitments <small>(bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)</small>	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
G23 Review the scope of functions of the Child and Family Agency, having regard to the recommendations of the <i>Report of the Taskforce on the Child and Family Support Agency</i> and experience from the Agency’s initial operations.	✓		✓											✓	✓				
G24 Work towards a common assessment approach within all agencies working with children and young people, and ensure that, where necessary, assessment and decision-making regarding children coming into care are undertaken in a timely and comprehensive manner.	✓	✓	✓											✓	✓				
G25 Continue to improve the quality and timeliness of services for children and young people, ensuring that State-funded programmes and services are outcomes-focused and can clearly demonstrate that they improve outcomes.	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓								✓	✓				
G26 Ensure that health and social planners, commissioners and funding programmes prioritise community-based programmes for those most at risk, experiencing the greatest disparities and with the greatest opportunity for impact and mainstreaming.	✓		✓																✓
G27 Support the monitoring and full implementation of National Standards in relation to children (child and family services, health and disabilities services, early years, education and youth work).	✓	✓	✓	✓															
G28 Support independent inspection and public reporting by bodies such as HIQA and the CFA, ensuring compliance with National Standards in children’s services, such as child protection, foster care, residential care, disability, detention schools and pre-schools.	✓		✓											✓	✓				✓
G29 Develop quality standards and training for all professionals working directly with children and young people, ensuring a highly trained, supported and professionally aligned workforce.	✓	✓	✓											✓	✓				
G30 Support early childhood practitioners, teachers and educationalists through the provision of continuous professional development, the establishment of peer-learning networks and the development of teaching, learning and assessment activities that utilise new technology effectively.	✓	✓	✓											✓		✓			
G31 Reconfigure services for children with disabilities under 18 years in line with the HSE’s national programme on ‘Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0-18)’.			✓											✓					
G32 Deliver better and more cost-effective public services through greater use of alternative or innovative service delivery models.							✓												✓
Goal 5: Support Effective Transitions																			
G33 Bring a stronger focus on effective transitions, particularly within education, health, child welfare and youth justice services.	✓	✓	✓	✓															

Commitments <small>(bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)</small>	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
G34 Research and adopt strategies to strengthen transitions through the educational system (into primary, from primary to second-level, from second-level into higher or further education, employment or, in the case of early school-leavers, to Youthreach), including ensuring coherency of curriculum approach, school connections and promoting in-school practices such as the adoption of peer-to-peer support programmes.		✓																	
G35 Increase opportunities for young people to enter employment through the promotion of work experience opportunities at second and third level.		✓			✓														
G36 Strengthen the transitions between child and adolescent and adult services in the areas of physical and mental health services.			✓											✓					
G37 Ensure all young people leaving care, detention or residential disability settings are adequately prepared and supported to negotiate the system and transition to stable independent living, further education, training or employment through the development and implementation of a quality aftercare plan and the development of protocols in relation to accessing housing, education and training.	✓		✓			✓								✓	✓				
Goal 6: Cross-Government and interagency collaboration and coordination																			
6.1 People																			
G38 Support the development of interdisciplinary and interprofessional training programmes which encourage leadership and collaboration for professionals working with children and young people across the range of service delivery.	✓	✓	✓	✓											✓	✓			
G39 Develop and implement a multidisciplinary workforce development plan on a phased basis for all professionals working with children and families, including staff within the Child and Family Agency and other key professionals.	✓	✓		✓											✓	✓			
G40 Collaborate with universities to ensure social work graduates are well equipped to enter practice, having had the experience of good quality undergraduate student placements.															✓				
G41 Build the required project and change management capabilities to implement this Framework.	✓																		
G42 Implement the Senior Public Service Leadership Development Strategy, 2013-2015 within the civil service and extend these initiatives to senior levels of the wider public service, paying particular attention to the opportunities and challenges associated with cross-Government working.							✓												✓
G43 Strengthen the performance culture within the public service through continuous improvement of performance management systems and the management of under-performance.							✓												✓
G44 Promote the provision of customer service training for key front-line staff in all public bodies.							✓												✓
6.2 Infrastructure																			
G45 Resource the Child and Family Agency to implement the change agenda effectively and to deliver better outcomes for children and young people.	✓		✓				✓												

Commitments <small>(bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)</small>	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
	G46 Adopt an effective interagency approach in relation to cases of child welfare and protection, establishing information and coordinating protocols (including Hidden Harm protocols) between agencies serving children and young people and adult-focused addiction, domestic violence and mental health services.	✓	✓	✓											✓	✓			✓
G47 The roll-out nationally of Children's Services Committees (CSCs) in a coordinated fashion, connecting them with Local Government and the Child and Family Agency.	✓														✓	✓		✓	
G48 Put in place an agreed resourcing framework for Children's Services Committees, drawing on existing financial support from the CFA, Local Government and DCYA.	✓														✓	✓			
G49 Establish integrated services or 'hubs' for children and young people at community level (examples include Primary Care Clinics, Family Support/Resource Centres and Jigsaw Youth Mental Health Centres) and, where appropriate, bring health and therapeutic services into schools.	✓		✓											✓	✓	✓			
G50 Build on existing good practice around clustering of schools to enable better access to educational supports, particularly for children with special educational needs, and explore the potential for further development of cluster arrangements, to encourage greater connections between schools and community and State services, including sharing infrastructure.		✓	✓											✓	✓	✓			
G51 The establishment of new Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in each county/city, bringing a more strategic, joined-up approach to local and community development.						✓													
G52 Streamline planning and decision-making structures at local level, including Children's Services Committees, to be consistent with the Government's public sector reforms, and specifically the alignment of local Government and Local Community Development Committees.	✓					✓									✓	✓			
G53 Review structures for delivery of non-acute health and social care services, having regard to Local Authority administrative boundaries where appropriate.			✓											✓					
6.3 Evidence and Data Analysis																			
G54 Address information-sharing issues across sectors and strengthen the integration of data systems, including, where appropriate, through utilisation of the Public Sector Identifier for children to support greater use of data to inform policy, planning and service development.	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓							✓	✓				
G55 Develop information protocols to assist the sharing of information, where appropriate, in respect of particular children who are vulnerable and at risk.	✓	✓	✓	✓											✓		✓	✓	
G56 Develop a comprehensive set of indicators to support the Framework and to track progress across the aims of each of the 5 national outcome areas.	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓													

Commitments <small>(bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)</small>	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
G57 Disaggregate data and indicators by important demographic characteristics to allow for improved evidence-based policy-making, implementation and monitoring, and in the delivery of services.	✓						✓												✓
G58 Implement the <i>National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives, 2011-2016</i> .	✓																		✓
G59 Extend <i>Ireland Stat</i> , the citizen-focused public service performance information website, to all Government departments.							✓												✓
G60 Improve legislation, policy and technological support for data use and sharing, including open data for citizens.							✓												✓
G61 Develop shared systems for coordinating and facilitating statistical analysis from across Government.	✓	✓	✓																✓
G62 Deliver the County-level Data Analysis Initiative to support the Children's Services Committees.	✓																		
G63 Develop integrated Social Impact Assessments as a feature of policy development and policy impact analysis, ensuring a focus on the impact of policy on children.	✓		✓		✓		✓			✓									
G64 Strengthen data capture to enhance our knowledge and understanding of abuse and children's experience of the Court system, through development of the National Child Care Information System and informed by the Child Care Law Reporting Project.	✓																		
6.4 Funding and Finance																			
G65 Explore the development of cross-Government estimates for expenditure on children and young people, and update these annually thereafter.	✓						✓			✓									
G66 Ensure resource allocation is based on current evidence of need and directed towards services and programmes that have evidence of effectiveness in improving outcomes.	✓														✓				
G67 Improve the effectiveness of overall expenditure on children in achieving better child poverty outcomes.	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓												
G68 Use the intelligence from Children's Services Committees in relation to local need and priorities to inform the allocation of national and local funding streams.	✓		✓				✓							✓	✓	✓	✓		
G69 Introduce the commissioning of services by the Child and Family Agency, moving away from a grants system to outcome-based contracts, and offer support to build capacity within the children and youth sector to respond to the new approach effectively.	✓														✓				
Outcome 1: Active and healthy																			
1.1 Tackle the issues of childhood obesity and obesogenic environments through a mix of legislative, policy and public awareness activities and will give active consideration to the introduction of fiscal measures to support healthy lifestyles in the context of the annual budgetary process.	✓	✓	✓							✓				✓	✓				✓

Commitments (bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
1.2 Support children, young people and their parents to make healthier choices through education, addressing food poverty and ensuring that all educational and State institutions providing food and drink to children, whether directly or through franchised commercial services on-site, have a Healthy Foods policy and provide food that meets basic nutritional standards.	✓	✓			✓														
1.3 Continue to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the School Meals Programme and consider inclusion of DEIS schools not currently benefiting under the programme, subject to resources becoming available.					✓														
1.4 Tackle inequalities in health outcomes for identified vulnerable groups, including Travellers, Roma, refugee and asylum-seeking children, migrants, young people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), those experiencing poverty, and children and young people who are the responsibility of the State, whether in care or detention.	✓	✓	✓	✓										✓				✓	
1.5 Implement a new National Model of Paediatric Care and complete the building of the new National Children's Hospital.			✓											✓					
1.6 Continue to support accessible and affordable youth and sport activities, which encourage young people's overall personal and social development including healthy behaviours and engage young people who might be at risk of early school-leaving or engaging in criminal activity and anti-social behaviour.	✓		✓								✓			✓	✓		✓		
1.7 Address the high rate of premature and risky alcohol consumption, use of illicit drugs and the incidence of smoking among young people through a combination of legislative, regulatory and policy mechanisms.	✓	✓	✓	✓													✓		
1.8 Implement a <i>Vision for Change</i> as it relates to children and young people, in particular to improve access to early intervention youth mental health services and coordination of service supports, with a focus on improving mental health literacy and reducing incidents of self-harm and suicide.	✓	✓	✓											✓		✓		✓	
1.9 Ensure there is equity of access to child and adolescent mental health services for all children, in particular those aged 16 and 17 years.		✓	✓											✓					
1.10 Combine mental health promotion programmes with interventions that address broader determinants and social problems as part of a multi-agency approach, particularly in areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation and fragmentation.	✓	✓	✓											✓	✓			✓	
1.11 Complete and implement a National Sexual Health Strategy as a strategic framework for the sexual health and well-being of the population, ensuring access for young people to age-appropriate information and services about relationships and sexual health.	✓	✓	✓																

Commitments <small>(bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)</small>	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
1.12 Complete and implement the National Physical Activity Plan; support the full implementation of the schools' Physical Education Programme and encourage the Active Schools Flag Initiative.		✓	✓																✓
1.13 Enable hard-to-reach groups to access services by making health services (including mental health services) available in youth-friendly, accessible and inclusive environments.	✓	✓	✓											✓		✓			
1.14 Enable greater access to sports, arts and culture for all children and young people, including through facilitating collaboration between sports, youth, arts and cultural organisations and schools and preschools to enrich the educational experience of all.	✓	✓									✓		✓						✓
1.15 Continue to develop play and recreation spaces for both children and young people, from playgrounds (for multiple age ranges) to youth cafés, sports and leisure centres, and where possible look to weatherproof these spaces.	✓		✓			✓													
Outcome 2: Achieving full potential in learning and development																			
2.1 Develop and implement a National Early Years Strategy for all children aged 0-6 years, covering all aspects of children's experiences in their early years and their inclusion in Early Years care and education services.	✓	✓																	
2.2 Strengthen the connections between pre-school and infant classes at primary level, including through the roll-out of Aistear and Síolta.	✓	✓													✓				
2.3 Build children's emotional literacy in pre-school and primary school as a core foundation for educational attainment.	✓	✓																	
2.4 Implement strategies to improve school engagement and reduce incidences of suspensions and expulsions and early school-leaving through engaging parents in schooling, strengthening transitions, promoting different styles of learning to better engage boys, and fostering inclusive school environments where all pupils flourish, irrespective of social and ethnic background or disability.	✓	✓													✓				
2.5 Implement the Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life Strategy.	✓	✓																	
2.6 Continue to implement the new framework for Junior Cycle, which is structured around a set of key principles and statements of learning and which will allow students to develop key skills, such as effective communication, collaborative working, independent thinking, problem-solving and analytical skills.		✓																	
2.7 Continue to develop, evolve and implement curricula in the education system and to support initiatives in out-of school settings, to teach children knowledge and skills relating to information management, new technologies, coding and digital literacy.	✓	✓							✓										

Commitments <small>(bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)</small>	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
2.8 Combat gender stereotyping in subject choices and promote the increased uptake of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects by young women, both in school and in higher education.		✓																	
2.9 Implement a whole-school approach to health and well-being to bring about a cultural focus on well-being as a basis for effective learning, strengthening the collaboration between the education, health, youth and social sectors to provide multidisciplinary supports when problems arise.	✓	✓	✓											✓	✓				
2.10 Ensure that equal treatment and equality are embedded into the Whole School Planning Development Process, for example, in mission and ethos, the curriculum, care and management of students and staff organisation, and staff development.		✓																	
2.11 Support and link existing partnerships, strategies and initiatives that aim to improve the decision-making capacity of children and young people through strengthening self-esteem, resilience, responses to social and interpersonal pressure, health and media literacy (including social media literacy).	✓	✓	✓						✓					✓				✓	
2.12 Support Early Years practitioners, teachers and educators through the provision of continuous professional development, the establishment of peer learning networks and the development of teaching, learning and assessment activities that utilise new technology effectively.	✓	✓	✓											✓		✓			
2.13 Continue to expand the provision of multi-denominational schools where parental demand exists.		✓																	
2.14 Build on existing data collection systems and, using the public service identifier, strengthen the collection of data and information on primary and post-primary pupils in order to inform future policy-making.		✓																	
2.15 Ensure quality learning environments for all through the Schools Building Programme and improved access to information and communications technology		✓																	
2.16 Consider the recommendations of the review of the DEIS Programme and use it as a platform for the new initiatives to deliver better outcomes for students in disadvantaged areas.		✓																	
2.17 Provide opportunities for early school-leavers to engage with further education and training within the framework of youth and educational welfare services, Education and Training Boards and SOLAS.	✓	✓																	
2.18 Build on the cross-cutting arrangements in place between the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Skills, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to enhance collaboration across the three sectors on children's disability issues.	✓	✓	✓											✓				✓	

Commitments <small>(bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)</small>	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
2.19 In the context of the Early Years Strategy, develop a plan for the inclusion of children with a disability in mainstream pre-school and Early Years settings.	✓	✓	✓											✓					
2.20 Continue to provide timely access to educational and therapeutic supports for children who are identified as having special needs.	✓	✓	✓											✓	✓				
2.21 Prepare and implement a plan, guided by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) policy advice, on how aspects of EPSEN (Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs) can be implemented, including prioritising access to an individual education plan and implementing the recommendations of the NCSE Working Group on a new resource allocation model for schools.		✓	✓															✓	
2.22 Strengthen social inclusion measures and re-invigorate efforts to improve educational outcomes among, and integration of, Travellers, Roma and migrant children and young people, and all those with special needs, including gifted students, recognising an enhanced role for Early Years education in targeting these groups.	✓	✓		✓		✓										✓			
2.23 Ensure quality education is available to all children and young people in detention and in hospital and respite settings, and that additional supports are available to help them overcome gaps in their schooling.	✓	✓	✓																
Outcome 3: Safe and protected from harm																			
3.1 Learn from investigations and reviews on child protection, implement relevant recommendations and continuously adapt policies and laws to ensure they meet required standards of child protection.	✓																		
3.2 Review and reform, as necessary, the Child Care Act 1991.	✓																		
3.3 Strengthen data capture to enhance our knowledge and understanding of abuse and children's experience of the Court system through development of the National Child Care Information System and the Child Care Law Reporting Project.	✓																		
3.4 Improve the nature of Court proceedings, reducing the potentially negative impact on children through reform of the Courts and reducing the adversarial nature through the introduction of child-friendly Court practice and encouraging greater use of mediation.				✓															
3.5 Prioritise access to health, education and therapeutic services for children in care.	✓	✓	✓											✓	✓				
3.6 Implement the <i>Children First</i> national guidance in full, including placing elements on a statutory footing, implementing sectoral plans, associated training and ensuring vetting requirements are met.	✓																		✓

Commitments (bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEL	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
3.7 Introduce and enact the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, which will address in a comprehensive way the interaction of migrant children with the immigration system and should provide for a speedier and more efficient protection determination system that will shorten the time families and in particular children spend in the Direct Provision system.				✓															
3.8 Support efforts to limit exposure by children to age-inappropriate material (including material of a sexual or violent nature, online gambling, etc) on the Internet, including via smartphones.				✓					✓										
3.9 Continue to promote best practice among retailers, the media and the entertainment industry with a view to interrupting the sexualisation and commercialisation of childhood; and where appropriate to introduce legislation and/or regulation to control or restrict inappropriate practices.	✓			✓				✓	✓										
3.10 Provide effective and timely protection and support services, including therapeutic services for victims of abuse and crime.	✓		✓	✓										✓	✓				
3.11 Ensure perpetrators of abuse, including those under 18, receive effective therapeutic support with the aim of reducing recidivism.	✓		✓	✓										✓	✓			✓	
3.12 Introduce consolidated and reformed domestic violence legislation to address all aspects of domestic violence, threatened violence and intimidation in a manner that provides protection to victims.				✓															
3.13 Support all efforts, including EU and international efforts, to combat child sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking in all contexts, including through support for an online filtering system in relation to blocking online child abuse material and measures targeted at reducing the abuse and exploitation of children and young people through prostitution and labour exploitation.	✓			✓				✓	✓									✓	
3.14 Ensure that an appropriate legal and policy framework is in place relating to child victims of trafficking, setting out the rights and entitlements of trafficked children, including provisions on care, accommodation and safeguarding.				✓															
3.15 Have in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure the identification of all child victims of trafficking. Such mechanisms involve competent statutory and non-statutory agencies/bodies, health practitioners and social workers.	✓		✓	✓										✓	✓			✓	
3.16 Provide an integrated and comprehensive service response to children under 18 presenting as out of home (as for all children in care) in keeping with the findings and recommendations of the <i>Review of the Implementation of the Youth Homelessness Strategy</i> .	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								✓	✓			✓	
3.17 Reform aspects of family law, including the law on guardianship, to create a legal structure to underpin diverse parenting situations and provide legal clarity on parental rights and duties in diverse family forms.				✓															

Commitments <small>(bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)</small>	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
3.18 Develop a National Framework for Anti-Bullying, taking a community-wide approach to tackling bullying from childhood through to adulthood.	✓																		✓
3.19 Continue to promote best practice by social media providers with respect to privacy controls and reporting mechanisms for abuse/bullying so as to better protect children online.				✓					✓										
3.20 Tackle youth crime and divert children and young people from crime and anti-social behaviour through engaging with young people in the community and other proven effective interventions, with a view to changing short- and long-term behaviour patterns of youth offending. Use a coherent range of community and criminal sanctions to reduce offending.	✓			✓													✓	✓	
3.21 Build and open a new National Children Detention Facility and end the practice of accommodating 17-year-old boys in adult prison facilities. Complete the reforms of the Children Detention Schools, monitor outcomes for children in and post-detention, and ensure a robust independent inspection, complaints and investigation system operates within the Children Detention Schools.	✓																		
3.22 Ensure adequate access by children to an imprisoned parent, in a child-friendly setting.				✓															
3.23 All national public awareness strategies on safety, and accident and injury prevention, including road, water and farm safety, will incorporate and target children and young people.	✓																		✓
3.24 Take appropriate measures to protect young people from gambling-related risks.				✓				✓	✓		✓					✓			
Outcome 4: Economic security and opportunity																			
4.1 Adopt a multidimensional approach to tackling child poverty, building on the life cycle approach in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016 and informed by the European Commission's Recommendation on 'Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage', as part of the Social Investment Package.	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓			✓					✓	✓			
4.2 Set a national child-specific social target to lift over 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of at least two-thirds on the 2011 level. This target will include reducing the higher consistent poverty rate for households with children as compared to non-child households (8.8% compared with 4.2%) and for children as compared to adults (9.3% compared with 6%).	✓	✓	✓		✓										✓	✓			
4.3 Determine the optimal design of child and family income supports to maximise their effectiveness and efficiency in reducing child poverty, while improving employment incentives.					✓														

Commitments (bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
4.4 Reform the One-Parent Family Payment Scheme so that lone parents have access to a range of supports and services designed to provide them with pathways to work while acknowledging their caring responsibilities.					✓														
4.5 Reform labour market activation initiatives so that they actively promote progression into the labour market.					✓	✓										✓			
4.6 Remove barriers to employment through increasing the affordability of quality and accessible childcare and after-school services, meeting EU childcare targets and encouraging flexible working arrangements.	✓				✓		✓	✓											
4.7 Progress the Social Impact Investment pilot project for homeless families with children in the Dublin region and consider its application nationally as part of implementing a housing-led approach to end long-term homeless for all homeless families with children.						✓													
4.8 Promote the child protection and welfare of all children in the asylum system.	✓			✓											✓				
4.9 Implement and monitor the National Travellers/Roma Integration Strategy, with a particular focus on Traveller accommodation and the engagement of Roma in education.	✓	✓	✓	✓												✓			
4.10 Develop child- and youth-friendly communities through Local Government adopting appropriate policies and objectives in County/City Development Plans and further supported by the preparation and issuing of National Guidelines on Planning for Child-friendly Communities.						✓					✓					✓			
4.11 Promote vocational education and training through the Educational Training Boards, encouraging the development of entrepreneurship skills among young people, promoting the development of in-school internship programmes and strengthening the links between local businesses, schools and youth organisations.	✓	✓														✓			
4.12 Develop and implement an action plan to support youth employment, including the EU Youth Guarantee, and having regard to the development of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities and how it applies to those young people under 25 years of age.	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓											
4.13 Draw on the strengths and reach of youth work services and local development companies in working with public agencies and employers to promote the training, employment and entrepreneurship of young people.	✓	✓			✓	✓										✓			
4.14 Support young people building businesses and livelihoods in the rural economy, such as in farming, fishing, forestry, food, hospitality and tourism.						✓		✓			✓	✓							

Commitments <small>(bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)</small>	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
	Outcome 5: Connected, respected and contributing to their world																		
5.1 Support youth organisations to provide safe, supportive and developmental opportunities for young people and to provide quality-assured information and support responding to young people's needs, both online and within the community, on issues of mental health, substance misuse, relationships, sexual health, education and employment.	✓																		
5.2 Promote and recognise young people's active citizenship and engagement in democratic processes, participation in social and environmental activism and innovation, volunteering and social entrepreneurship, including promoting voter registration in elections by all newly eligible voters.	✓					✓		✓											
5.3 Ensure the views presented by children and young people in participation forums and consultation are taken into account by the formal political process and policy-making, and that feedback to young people is always provided in return.	✓																		
5.4 Hold a referendum before the end of 2015 on a proposal to amend the Constitution to reduce the voting age to 16.						✓													
5.5 Develop and implement a National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development and deepen and strengthen the teaching of civics and human rights.		✓																	
5.6 Reduce discrimination and intolerance of all types experienced by marginalised groups (i.e. Travellers, Roma, migrants and asylum-seekers; children and young people with disabilities; those in care and detention; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people; and those from ethnic or religious minorities).	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓	✓	✓		✓	
5.7 Ensure the ethos, policies and practices of Government institutions and State-funded services (including schools) promote equal treatment and interculturalism, and have measures to protect against and remedy all forms of discrimination.				✓															✓
5.8 Ensure that Ireland's laws, policies and practice are compliant with the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols that Ireland has ratified.	✓																	✓	✓
5.9 Provide children and young people with access to a remedy if there is a breach of their rights and promote knowledge of the Ombudsman for Children's Office and the Equality Tribunal.	✓	✓	✓	✓															
5.10 Clarify the law in relation to a child and young person's right to know his or her identity (e.g. where adopted or where born) through the use of Assisted Reproductive Technologies and put in place mechanisms to collect and retain information necessary to enable a child to exercise their right to identity and to facilitate regular family access for children in care.	✓			✓															

Commitments <small>(bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)</small>	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	CFA	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
5.11 Implement the principles underpinning the provisions of the Thirty-first Amendment to the Constitution on Children through legislative reform, support for judicial studies and the training and development of staff.	✓			✓											✓				
5.12 Drive reform in the youth justice area through the implementation of <i>Tackling Youth Crime – A Youth Justice Action Plan, 2014-2018</i> , focusing on diversion and rehabilitation, including greater use of community-based interventions, promoting initiatives to deal with young people who offend, providing a safe and secure environment for detained young people and supporting their early re-integration into the community.	✓			✓															
5.13 Work with children and young people to help them contribute to their own community and safety, ensuring a positive relationship between An Garda Síochána, children and young people.																	✓		
Implementation of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i>																			
1. Streamline accountability structures for children and youth, creating: (a) Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium, with a sub-group (Sponsors Group) that will connect with other cross-Government accountability structures in a strategic and collaborative way (e.g. Healthy Ireland). (b) Advisory Council, with two pillars – one for Early Years and one for Children and Youth.	✓																		✓
2. Ensure children and young people have a voice in the accountability mechanisms through linking with Dáil na nÓg structures.	✓																		
3. Ensure local county-level implementation and monitoring through the Children’s Services Committees (CSCs), which will be formally linked with the new Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) being established in each Local Authority area under an initiative of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.	✓															✓			
4. Establish an Implementation Team within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to support the development of a strong Policy Consortium and Sponsors Group. The Implementation Team will drive accountability and the delivery of cross-Government coordination and collaboration to achieve better outcomes for children and young people. Membership of the Implementation Team will include a mix of skills and draw on the contribution and creativity of young people.	✓																		
5. Develop and implement a communications plan for <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> and its supporting strategies, using existing national and local structures as channels for communication.	✓																		✓

APPENDIX 7: ENDNOTES

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THE OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

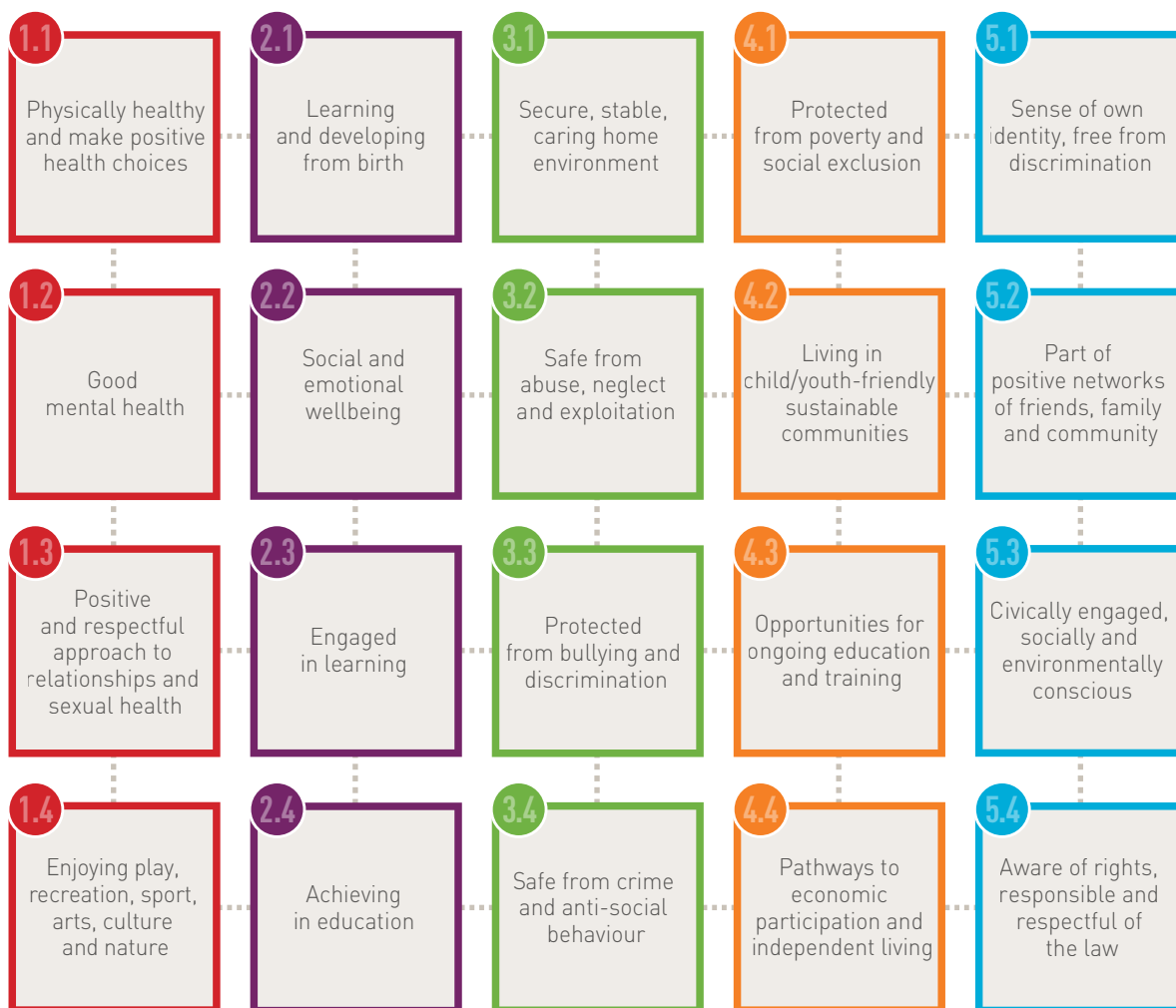
VISION

Our vision is to make Ireland the best small country in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future.

NATIONAL OUTCOMES



AIMS: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE, AND OR HAVE...



Children and Young People have a voice and influence in all decisions affecting them

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