



The National Children's Strategy

Our Children - Their Lives



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Taoiseach's Foreword

Ireland, just like most parts of the world, has only begun to try to fully listen to, understand and act in the best interests of all of its children. The challenge to us all is to work to build a society where all children can hope to experience happy and fulfilled childhoods and develop to their potential.

This is not something which can happen overnight - it requires an ongoing commitment and clarity of purpose. It also requires all those who are involved in discussing, developing and implementing policies which affect children, both in governmental and non-governmental bodies, to work together.

This is why the Government has, following one of the most extensive consultation processes yet undertaken, prepared the first ever National Children's Strategy.

The Strategy sets out an ambitious series of objectives to guide children's policy over the next ten years. It sets out a common vision to work towards. It identifies six principles to guide all actions to be taken and it proposes a more holistic way of thinking about children which reflects contemporary understanding of childhood. To realise the vision the Strategy then sets three National Goals: to listen, think and act more effectively for children. New structures are proposed to deliver better co-ordination between government departments and the agencies providing services to children so that the Goals can be achieved. Rooted in the positive vision of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it represents a different way of doing business, which will, if we all work together, help us become a society which fully values and respects its children.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bertie Ahern'.

Bertie Ahern, T.D.
Taoiseach



Minister for Health and Children's Foreword

I am very pleased to be associated with this important initiative which has been carried out under the direction of my colleague, Mary Hanafin, Minister of State with responsibility for Children. As Minister for Health and Children, I am very aware of the central role our health and personal social services play in the lives of our children. The breadth of this Strategy demonstrates how many other services and organisations, both statutory and voluntary, are involved in working with children.

The Strategy rightly recognises the role of the family primarily and of local communities in caring for children. Its publication is a statement of support for parents. It is also an invitation to all those who work with children to work together more effectively. Finally, it is an encouragement to our children to continue to be actively involved in shaping their present and their future.

The Strategy is a good beginning. I look forward to working with my colleagues in Government and with the organisations involved in realising the goals and objectives set out in the Strategy.

Micheál Martin, T.D.
Minister for Health and Children



Minister of State's Foreword

Is mór an táthas atá orm an stratéis seo a fhoilsiú. This National Children's Strategy is an exciting plan which aims to improve the quality of children's lives in Ireland.

All of us who work with children now realise that children's views should be heard, their contribution to society valued and their role as citizens recognised. We aim to ensure that all our children are given the support and services that they need.

The consultation process undertaken in the preparation of this Strategy was both enjoyable and enlightening. The response of children to the invitation to give their views was so positive that formal structures for listening to children now form a part of the Strategy. The experience and views of organisations and individuals providing care and support for children is reflected in our commitment to improve services for children. The obvious need for better co-ordination of activities is evident in the new proposed structures.

This Strategy leads the way in encouraging families and communities to value our children, listen to their voices, support their needs and to ensure they enjoy their childhood and prepare them for adulthood.

Foghlaimimid uathu, cabhróimid leo, fásfaimid le chéile.

Mary Hanafin, T.D.
Minister of State with responsibility for Children

Acknowledgements

The development of the National Children's Strategy is the culmination of twelve months of work and co-operation by many individuals, groups and organisations. The recently published set of reports on the results of the public consultation is testament to the complexity of the issues considered and the breadth of the consultations undertaken in preparing the Strategy. Our thanks to the consultant who prepared these reports. Sincere thanks are expressed to each individual and organisation that took the opportunity to forward a submission. These contributions were extremely valuable in the development of the Strategy. The direct involvement of more than 2,500 children and young people has ensured that their views and concerns are considered and addressed. A particular word of thanks is extended to each child and young person who contributed to this process.

In preparing the Strategy, we benefited greatly from the advice we received from the three expert panels. The wide professional expertise and practical experience they brought, provided a ready source of informed and constructive guidance for which we are deeply grateful. Our thanks are also due to the seven international experts with whom we consulted at various stages of our work. Their invaluable advice and encouragement served to underline the innovative nature of the approach being taken in the development of the Strategy and provided a comparative international context and quality check for the work being done.

It was the task of the Inter-Departmental Group to shape the overall Strategy, while respecting the points of view on particular aspects expressed by the many individuals and organisations who contributed. The enthusiastic participation by each member of the Group, reflecting each Departments' commitment to the success of this project, made the task of chairing the Group an easy one.

The main credit however, for the final product must go to the Cross-Departmental Team we established to prepare the Strategy. On behalf of the Inter-Departmental Group, I would like to express our warm gratitude for their sustained energy, commitment, thoroughness and collective imagination in bringing to a successful conclusion what appeared as a daunting challenge one year ago.

I believe that the work we have done in preparing the Strategy provides a useful and widely supported framework for future policy development and service delivery which, if followed through, will impact positively on the lives of children over the next decade. The success of our joint working may also provide a useful template for other complex cross-cutting policy issues.



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Contents

THE VISION	4		
CHAPTER 1 WORKING TOGETHER - A CHILDREN'S STRATEGY	5		
1.1 WHY A NATIONAL CHILDREN'S STRATEGY ?	6		
1.2 WORKING TOGETHER	7		
1.3 HOW THE STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED	8		
1.4 THE STRATEGY IN OUTLINE	9		
1.5 TAKING THE STRATEGY FORWARD	12		
CHAPTER 2 FOCUSING ON CHILDREN	15		
2.1 RECOGNISING THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF CHILDREN'S LIVES	16		
2.2 DEVELOPING A 'WHOLE CHILD' PERSPECTIVE	24		
2.3 SETTING GOALS FOR A MORE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH	28		
CHAPTER 3 NATIONAL GOAL: CHILDREN WILL HAVE A VOICE	29		
3.1 GIVING DUE REGARD TO CHILDREN	30		
3.2 THE OBJECTIVES	32		
3.3 THE MEASURES	32		
3.4 BUILDING CAPACITY TO SUPPORT PARTICIPATION	36		
CHAPTER 4 NATIONAL GOAL: CHILDREN'S LIVES WILL BE BETTER UNDERSTOOD	37		
4.1 USING RESEARCH AND INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN'S BENEFIT	38		
4.2 THE OBJECTIVES	39		
4.3 THE MEASURES	39		
4.4 MAINTAINING THE FOCUS	41		
CHAPTER 5 NATIONAL GOAL: CHILDREN WILL RECEIVE QUALITY SUPPORTS AND SERVICES	43		
5.1 ADDRESSING ALL ASPECTS OF CHILDREN'S LIVES	44		
5.2 THE OBJECTIVES	46		
GROUP 1: ALL CHILDREN HAVE A BASIC RANGE OF NEEDS	46		
GROUP 2: SOME CHILDREN HAVE ADDITIONAL NEEDS	47		
GROUP 3: ALL CHILDREN NEED THE SUPPORT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY	47		
5.3 DETAILING THE OBJECTIVES	48		
SCHEDULE OF OBJECTIVES	49		
GROUP 1: ALL CHILDREN HAVE A BASIC RANGE OF NEEDS	50		
A. CHILDREN'S EARLY EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS WILL BE MET THROUGH QUALITY CHILDCARE SERVICES AND FAMILY-FRIENDLY EMPLOYMENT MEASURES	50		
B. CHILDREN WILL BENEFIT FROM A RANGE OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND EXPERIENCES WHICH REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF NEED	53		
C. CHILDREN WILL BE SUPPORTED TO ENJOY THE OPTIMUM PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	55		
D. CHILDREN WILL HAVE ACCESS TO PLAY, SPORT, RECREATION AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES TO ENRICH THEIR EXPERIENCE OF CHILDHOOD	57		
		E. CHILDREN WILL HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPLORE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN WAYS WHICH ARE SAFE AND DEVELOPMENTALLY SUPPORTIVE	59
		F. CHILDREN WILL BE SAFEGUARDED TO ENJOY THEIR CHILDHOOD FREE FROM ALL FORMS OF ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION	61
		GROUP 2: SOME CHILDREN HAVE ADDITIONAL NEEDS	63
		G. CHILDREN WILL BE PROVIDED WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORTS NECESSARY TO ELIMINATE CHILD POVERTY	63
		H. CHILDREN WILL HAVE ACCESS TO ACCOMMODATION APPROPRIATE TO THEIR NEEDS	65
		I. CHILDREN WITH BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS COMING BEFORE THE COURTS OR IN TROUBLE WITH THE LAW WILL BE SUPPORTED IN THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT WHILE HAVING THEIR NEEDS ADDRESSED	66
		J. CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY WILL BE ENTITLED TO THE SERVICES THEY NEED TO ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL	68
		K. CHILDREN WILL BE EDUCATED AND SUPPORTED TO VALUE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY SO THAT ALL CHILDREN INCLUDING TRAVELLERS AND OTHER MARGINALISED GROUPS ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL	70
		GROUP 3: ALL CHILDREN NEED THE SUPPORT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY	72
		L. CHILDREN WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE THE QUALITIES OF FAMILY LIFE	72
		M. CHILDREN WILL BENEFIT FROM AND CONTRIBUTE TO VIBRANT LOCAL COMMUNITIES	76
		N. CHILDREN WILL BENEFIT FROM A BUILT AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT WHICH SUPPORTS THEIR PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING.	78
		CHAPTER 6 THE ENGINE FOR CHANGE	81
		6.1 ENSURING IMPLEMENTATION	82
		6.2 MANAGING CHANGE AT NATIONAL LEVEL	83
		6.3 DELIVERING AT LOCAL LEVEL	87
		6.4 PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES	89
		CHAPTER 7 MAKING A STRONG START	91
		7.1 THE STRATEGY APPROACH	92
		7.2 TAKING ACTION	93
		7.3 MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION	95
		APPENDICES:	
		A: DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY	97
		B: GLOSSARY OF TERMS	101
		C: BIBLIOGRAPHY	105
		D: UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD	111

The Vision

An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential.

“I want that every child is loved like I am loved”

Quote from the public consultation

Chapter 1

Working Together - A Children’s Strategy

“We are a first year CPSE class and we are studying children’s rights. We have discovered through our research that Ireland has no national policy on children. We as 13 years old young adults are quite concerned and disappointed about this issue.”

“Is Ireland a good place to grow up? Yes, if you are from a loving family, with a decent income, supportive network and nice community.... However, if you are less well off, have medical, learning or emotional needs and the family situation is unstable or plagued by drink, drugs or depression, things are quite different.”

“Despite comprising almost a third of the population of the State and Ireland’s commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are remarkably invisible in many areas of policy which nevertheless impinge hugely on the quality of their lives.”

Quotes from the public consultation

1.1

WHY A NATIONAL CHILDREN'S STRATEGY?

Children matter. Their status and wellbeing speak volumes about the values and quality of life within any society. The National Children's Strategy is an opportunity to enhance the status and further improve the quality of life of Ireland's children. It is a statement of support to parents. It is an invitation to everyone who works with children, in whatever capacity, to work together more effectively. It is also an encouragement to children to become more formally involved in shaping their own lives. The Strategy provides a vision for the future, three National Goals to aim at and an engine to drive change at both national and local levels. The Strategy offers the means to listen to, to think about, and to act more effectively for children.

Children deserve to be highly valued for the unique contribution they make through just being children. Respect for children as a global ideal has been affirmed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Ireland ratified in 1992. The publication of this Strategy is a major initiative to progress the implementation of the Convention in Ireland. The guiding principles of the Convention are:

- all children should be entitled to basic rights without discrimination;
- the best interests of the child should be the primary concern of decision-making;
- children have the right to life, survival and development;
- the views of children must be taken into account in matters affecting them.

Especially at a time of major social and economic change every effort should be made to enhance children's status and improve their quality of life. As a society we must ensure that all of our children benefit from the opportunities and are helped to tackle the challenges that face them.

Children actively shape their own lives and the lives of those around them while at the same time needing the support of many people if they are to make the most of their childhood, to enjoy it to the full and to prepare themselves to take their place as responsible adults. Primarily, this support comes from their families, but it also comes from friends and neighbours in their communities, and staff and volunteers who work with children. Finding a way for all these people to work together for and with children is the key to ensuring that children thrive in today's world and go on to contribute positively to the Ireland of tomorrow.

There is currently a growing public debate about children; about their care, their behaviour and aspirations and about what the future holds for them. There is increasing recognition of the richness and complexity of their lives and how that can impact both positively and negatively on the lives of others. There is also an acknowledgement of past failures in meeting children's needs and the continued existence of barriers which inhibit some children from realising their full potential. There is a recognition that present challenges and past mistakes must be faced openly so that further progress can be made.

All kinds of opportunities are opening up for children. The range of experiences and choices they have are much greater than ever before in all areas of their lives, for example, in relation to what they eat, what they wear, how they spend their time. At the same time children find themselves under a whole range of social, psychological and emotional pressures. There are increasing pressures to compete and succeed - not just academically and in sport but also in accumulating fashionable consumer goods. In addition, child poverty is still high compared with many of our European neighbours and the problem of youth homelessness is growing. One tragic reflection of the psychological and emotional pressures is an increased suicide rate. Harmful behaviours such as smoking, alcohol consumption and illicit drug-taking are persistent concerns, not least because of their association with criminal activity and generally disruptive anti-social behaviour. Change in the cultural make-up of our

society has raised issues of racism and discrimination. The steady rise in teenage pregnancies outside marriage has meant there are increasing numbers of young people being faced with the heavy responsibilities of parenthood.

The opportunities and challenges faced by children are part of an Irish economy and society that has changed and grown in a way that could hardly have been envisaged ten years ago. Living standards are now reaching the levels of our European partners. Social investment is vital to continuing success and nowhere is that investment more important than in the lives of children. It is now realistic to aspire to provide all our children with a quality of life equal to the best of our European partners. The question is how best to rise to this challenge.

1.2

WORKING TOGETHER

For the first time, through this Strategy, a determined lead is being given. The strategy provides a coherent policy statement which reflects the aspirations and concerns of children themselves and those who care about them. It is focused on all children and how to make changes in their lives for the better over the next ten years. The Strategy takes account of the very broad scope of children's issues. Children's needs are varied and range across the emotional, the intellectual, the social, the cultural, and the material. This is particularly the case when the term 'children' is being used, as it is here and in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to cover everyone under the age of eighteen. Most government departments and their agencies have children among their client groups. Some departments have children as a main area of responsibility to which significant resources are being committed. Children's services include both the universal and the tightly targeted, the supportive and the custodial.

The Government is committed to co-ordinating all these services through the development of the National Children's Strategy. The importance of doing this has been recognised by the voluntary sector



The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as 'every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier'.

Article One

(Small Voices: Vital Rights) and by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. It also reflects the new approaches to effective government and good governance being implemented under the Strategic Management Initiative and the Government's commitment to working with the community and voluntary sector. The National Children's Strategy is the means to work together to ensure that every child is afforded the respect and the quality of life needed to develop and sustain within them a spirit of optimism, pride and confidence.

Fortunately we have moved on from emigration and unemployment to a modern and admired country. I appreciate what my predecessors have achieved, the fact that I am nearly guaranteed a job on finishing my education, a beautiful language and a culture and a wonderful educational system that is fair to all. However some things have not been inherited from past generations such as the new attitude to enterprise and achievement. I am glad that our old, frightened impression of risk taking and creativeness has diminished, especially within the new youth culture.

Helen – Submission to the National Children's Strategy Consultation

1.3

HOW THE STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED

The commitment of Government to children is reflected in the high priority that the Minister of State with Responsibility for Children has given to preparing this Strategy and to ensuring the direct involvement of children themselves. The Government established an Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) of senior officials from eight key government departments and a legal adviser from the Attorney General's Office to oversee the development of the Strategy. The number of departments involved reflects the wide range of children's needs which cross traditional departmental boundaries. This group was supported by a cross-departmental team. Two advisory panels were established, to provide

expert advice: a non-governmental service providers' panel and a research and information panel. Additional expertise, including that of international advisors, was brought to the work as required.

A key role was played in the development of the Strategy by an extensive consultation programme. Invitations for submissions through the national press sought contributions from parents and others who care for and work with children. A targeted consultation was also carried out with children and young people, which was a major new development in the formulation of government policy. The main themes to emerge from the consultation were:

- the need to develop a more rounded view of children's needs as a basis for more effective policy development and service delivery;
- a recognition that children are citizens and their rights need to be strengthened in legislation, policies and practices and that they have a right to express their views;
- an emphasis on the empowerment and support of families and communities as the most effective way of supporting children;
- that the main areas of children's concerns and needs which must be addressed are
 - health and wellbeing
 - learning and education
 - play, leisure and cultural opportunities
 - children in crisis
 - child poverty and youth homelessness
 - discrimination in children's lives
 - supporting children with disabilities
 - responding to and harnessing children's concern for the environment;

- that a critical success factor for the Strategy will be better co-ordination between government departments at national level and locally between statutory and voluntary agencies;
- that the system must be re-orientated towards better evaluation of the effectiveness of services, with investment directed to programmes which research identifies as likely to benefit children;
- the need for ongoing consultation and communication during the implementation of the Strategy to ensure the continued engagement of both children and adults.

The Inter-Departmental Group also undertook a review of current government measures for children. Significant progress has been made on children's issues in recent years and this is reflected in the range of legislation and administrative initiatives currently being implemented by government departments. The Strategy brings these together in a more coherent framework, allowing connections to be made between initiatives and encouraging co-ordinated action where appropriate to build on existing strengths and tackle identified weaknesses.

A key strength is the level of commitment among people working with children. The partnership approach developed through the National Pay Agreements has worked to create a national consensus around social issues and provides a mechanism for managing change. Core services are of a high quality and funding for children's services has increased in recent years.

There are also important weaknesses which must be acknowledged and addressed. There have been failures in the management and co-ordination of services, with the result that the system has failed some children in need. It is also important to recognise the pressures on children today and to acknowledge past failures to fully address issues which affect them, such as poverty, homelessness and, increasingly, racism.

There is also a need to build capacity in the voluntary sector which has been in the forefront in raising

concern about these issues. This sector brings an invaluable contribution through its innovative and flexible approach which complements the statutory sector. The Strategy will build on these strengths and seek to address the weaknesses.

In addition, there are a number of important major national initiatives to which the Strategy can be linked. These include the Strategic Management Initiative, Local Government Reform, the Social Inclusion Initiative, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the National Development Plan, the Framework for the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector, the National Youth Work Development Plan, and the 'Families First' approach in government policy. (See Box 1.1.) These initiatives are an important part of the policy environment in which the Strategy will be implemented and they will directly enable the delivery of some of the Strategy's objectives.

Fuller details of the process of developing the Strategy are provided in Appendix A.

1.4

THE STRATEGY IN OUTLINE

The Strategy seeks to provide a clear direction to all those concerned with advancing the status and quality of life of children. It achieves this by expressing a unifying vision for children which relates to existing recognisable values. To help turn this vision into a reality it is necessary to have a more complete understanding of children's lives, which anchors the Strategy to a coherent and inclusive view of childhood. From that position it is possible to set three National Goals as the means of focusing on what needs to be done. The Strategy also provides a set of operational principles to guide action in pursuit of the National Goals. The structures through which action will be taken at national and local level are then identified. These involve partnerships within and between the State, the voluntary and community sector and families and children themselves.



Vision and Values

The National Children's Strategy offers a clear and unifying vision.

An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential.

This vision expresses a value base, which holds that children

- have an innate dignity as human beings which deserves respect;
- enrich the quality of all our lives;
- are especially vulnerable and need adult protection;
- thrive through the love and support of a family life;
- should be supported to explore, enjoy and develop their varied talents;
- need help to learn responsibility as they grow towards adulthood and full citizenship.

Operational Principles

The Strategy is grounded in six operational principles which emerged from the consultation, which reflect the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and derive from a more complete understanding of children. All actions to be taken will be:

- **Child Centred:** the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration and children's wishes and feelings should be given due regard;
- **Family Oriented:** the family generally affords the best environment for raising children and external intervention should be to support and empower families within the community;

- **Equitable:** all children should have equality of opportunity in relation to access, participation in and derive benefit from the services delivered and have the necessary levels of quality support to achieve this. A key priority in promoting a more equitable society for children is to target investment at those most at risk;
- **Inclusive:** the diversity of children's experiences, cultures and lifestyles must be recognised and given expression;
- **Action Orientated:** service delivery needs to be clearly focused on achieving specified results to agreed standards in a targeted and cost-effective manner;
- **Integrated:** measures should be taken in partnership, within and between relevant players be it the State, the voluntary/community sector and families; services for children should be delivered in a co-ordinated, coherent and effective manner through integrated needs analysis, policy planning and service delivery.

The 'Whole Child' Perspective

A coherent and inclusive view of childhood is crucial to the success of the Strategy. It not only provides a means for identifying the range of children's needs but it will help to identify how best to meet those needs by empowering families and communities. The Strategy seeks to establish this 'whole child' perspective at the centre of policy development and service delivery.

The 'whole child' perspective recognises the capacity of children to interact with and shape the world around them as they grow up. It identifies nine key dimensions of children's development, all of which must be addressed if a child is to enjoy a satisfying childhood and make a successful transition into adulthood. At the same time it stresses the importance to children of the support they get from a wide range of sources. This includes formal services, but support comes primarily from children's relationships with those around them – their parents, brothers and sisters, wider family circle, friends and

neighbours. Children not only benefit from but actively contribute to the mix of relationships, mutual support networks, local knowledge and know-how that make for vibrant communities. The 'whole child' perspective is described in detail in Chapter Two.

Three National Goals for Children

Drawing on the consultation and advisory process, the 'whole child' perspective has been used to shape three National Goals for Children. Achieving the National Goals will address key aspects of all children's lives. While it is important to address each of these Goals in its own right, they should be considered as an integrated set which reinforce each other.

National Goal: Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. (Chapter Three)

Children have important things to say. Their involvement will help ensure that the services and supports they receive are focused on their expressed needs. This type of participation is in itself a contribution to children's rounded development. Recognition of children's capacity to take up opportunities to participate is central to the vision, values and principles of the Strategy and reflects one of the basic aspects of the 'whole child' perspective in which the Strategy is grounded.

National Goal: Children's lives will be better understood; their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services. (Chapter Four)

The 'whole child' perspective provides a broad framework for understanding children's lives. This framework needs to be further developed through research so that it can be used effectively to inform the implementation of the Strategy. Long-term research into children's lives will be undertaken and there will be a new emphasis on measuring the effectiveness of services in delivering optimum

outcomes for children. As part of this process, key indicators of children's wellbeing will be developed to provide a way of measuring effectiveness and the impact of the Strategy. Research and evaluation will also be used for the identification and dissemination of best practice.

National Goal: Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development. (Chapter Five)

Supports and services provided to children will focus on children's needs and will not be service driven. They will be provided in appropriate settings and in ways which are accessible to children. The full range of needs, as identified in the 'whole child' perspective, will be addressed. The needs of marginalised children will be addressed so that all children have an equality of opportunity and will derive benefit from those supports and services.

Each of the three Goals is expanded in the coming chapters. A brief policy discussion is provided to highlight major issues and then objectives are identified and the measures which will be taken to achieve them are set out.

The Engine for Change

The success of the Strategy will depend on stimulating new thinking and encouraging closer working relationships. An ambitious and cross-cutting plan of action has been set down which will only be achieved with the fullest collaboration and co-operation between government departments, the statutory and voluntary agencies and the research community in the support of families and children. In Chapter Six a new framework is set out which will bring the key players and their particular knowledge and expertise together in ways which will encourage co-operative working and add to a shared understanding of children's issues. The need to improve co-ordination at national and local level is also addressed.



1.5 TAKING THE STRATEGY FORWARD

The National Children's Strategy is a major innovation for Irish social policy. It is not a report on the lives of children in Ireland but a means to intervene in their lives in a way that will enhance their status and improve their quality of life. This is the first time an attempt has been made to draw together policies and measures from so many departments into a coherent strategy for future action. The National Goals, objectives and measures proposed are wide-ranging because children's needs are wide-ranging. The Strategy also aims to bring together the efforts of all those working with children.

This Strategy document is to be used:

- to engage, through its Vision and National Goals, all those who have a contribution to make in undertaking and shaping its implementation;
- to provide, through the objectives set out under each National Goal, a co-ordinated plan for action and the means of monitoring progress;
- to promote debate on important unresolved issues so that a direction for future progress can

be identified, such as children's capacity to give medical consent or how best to change public attitudes to physical punishment in the home.

Specific targets will be set and progress will be built on year by year, in a consistent and measurable way, so that the cumulative effect will clearly have made an impact by the end of the ten years. The approach is, therefore, to build steadily on progress made to date in a strategic and systematic fashion. This process will begin with the implementation of the extensive programme of measures which is currently underway. These include legislation which has recently been passed or is before the Oireachtas and, in particular, such major legislation as the Children Bill, 1999, and the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000.

In addition to existing initiatives, a number of other measures are being prioritised for action in the first year of implementing the Strategy. Children in poverty, homeless youth and children in crisis will be a priority. There is also to be investment in developing more opportunities for all children to participate in play, sport, recreation and cultural activities, which has been identified as a major gap. These measures will be part of a package of early measures aimed at providing children with a more supportive environment in which to address the urgent problems facing them today.

The publication of this Strategy document is only the beginning of what is intended to be a flexible and evolving process. As policy and practice experience is gained through implementing the Strategy, and its research and information proposals bear fruit, it will be necessary to review the document and to make changes in the proposed measures as required. This Strategy document is not an end in itself. It is a tool to be used in developing the partnerships necessary to deliver action to enhance the status and improve the quality of life of Ireland's children.

BOX 1.1

Strategic Management Initiative

The Strategic Management Initiative is a major government programme aimed at ensuring the delivery of the highest quality of state services to the customer. The current focus is on improving inter-departmental co-ordination and introducing a new framework for performance management.

Local Government Reform

Local development strategies to co-ordinate local agencies' activities, which are being produced by the new City and County Development Boards, provide an effective platform on which to launch the National Children's Strategy at local level, as all the relevant statutory and voluntary agencies are being actively involved by the Boards.

Social Inclusion Initiative

A Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion was established in 1997 to provide a focus for tackling social exclusion, alienation and disadvantage, which are Important issues addressed in the Strategy. The initiative allows for a more co-ordinated approach to the development and assessment of initiatives and reviewing the extent to which various initiatives impact on poverty and social exclusion.

National Anti-Poverty Strategy

The NAPS is a major government policy initiative designed to place the needs of the poor and the socially excluded among the issues at the top of the national agenda in terms of government policy development and action. Tackling child poverty is a priority for the NAPS review.

National Development Plan

The National Development Plan (2000-2006) sets out plans supported by quantified multi-annual investment committed in key areas of infrastructure development, including housing, education and training, the productive sector and the promotion of social inclusion. It will involve the investment of £40.588 (€50.536) billion. This investment will have a significant impact on children's lives, in particular those suffering social exclusion. It is crucial that the needs of children are identified and represented in the implementation of the Plan.

Family First Approach

The Family Affairs Unit at the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs has been given the responsibility of pursuing the findings of the Report of the Commission on the Family. The Family First Approach is built on the view that the family generally affords the best environment for raising children.

Framework for the Relationship between the State and the Voluntary and Community Sector

A White Paper, *Supporting Voluntary Activity*, has been published which provides a more cohesive framework of support and encouragement for the voluntary and community sector. It gives formal recognition to the partnership ethos that informs much of the working relationship between the two sectors, while recognising the differences between them.

National Youth Work Development Plan (2002-2006)

A National Youth Work Development Plan is being prepared to promote the development and enhancement of youth work over a five-year period. The Plan will seek to identify the role and scope of youth work provision and the structures, funding and human resources necessary for the further development of effective youth work.



I like visiting my
Nana in Biff It
is nice in the County

Chapter 2

Focusing on Children

“I think that children should be more accounted for in decisions that the Government make.”

“The needs of the child must be catered for in an holistic sense. The emotional, physical, educational, societal and cultural needs should be looked at in the context of the family and community. The creation of building up of a sense of belonging, of being a valued member of the community, should be incorporated into all services.”

“Policies must prioritise and be assessed by commitment to quality of each child’s daily living experience growing up in the home, school, neighbourhood and beyond. This consideration of quality of life must embrace diverse aspects of childhood. It must be concerned not only with quality of service and provision, but also with the quality of experience.”

Quotes from the public consultation

2.1

RECOGNISING THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF CHILDREN'S LIVES

It is important to understand the context from which the Strategy has emerged and in which it will be implemented. Although there are major weaknesses and gaps in what is known about the lives of children in Ireland today, one thing is clear: children are active participants in a world which continues to experience increasing change. For children, as much as for adults, the social, economic and political environment provides both opportunities for success and challenges to be overcome. Management of change to capitalise on the benefits and minimise the costs to children is a core concern of the Strategy.

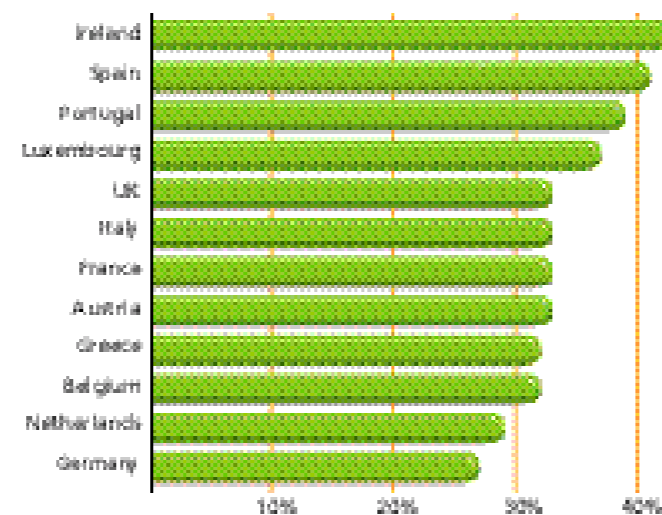
It is difficult to be definitive about the characteristics and the direction of the change being experienced by children, given the need for greater knowledge and understanding of their lives. Even within the statistics of state services, children tend to be poorly profiled. However, there are four areas which together represent the major features of this change:

- Demographic trends and diversity in family life
- Economic progress and labour market restructuring
- Changing lifestyles
- Poverty and social inclusion

Demographic Trends and Diversity in Family Life

There are 1,071,972 children under eighteen years of age in Ireland according to the 1996 census. Ireland has the highest proportion of children within the EU, representing approximately 29% of our population compared to the EU average of 21%. The Central Statistics Office forecasts a small change by 2011, with the child population aged 0-17 lying somewhere in the range 960,000 to 1,094,000, representing 24-26% of the population. Ireland also has the highest percentage of households with children in the EU with 43% of households including at least one child (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Percentages of EU Households with children aged 0-18

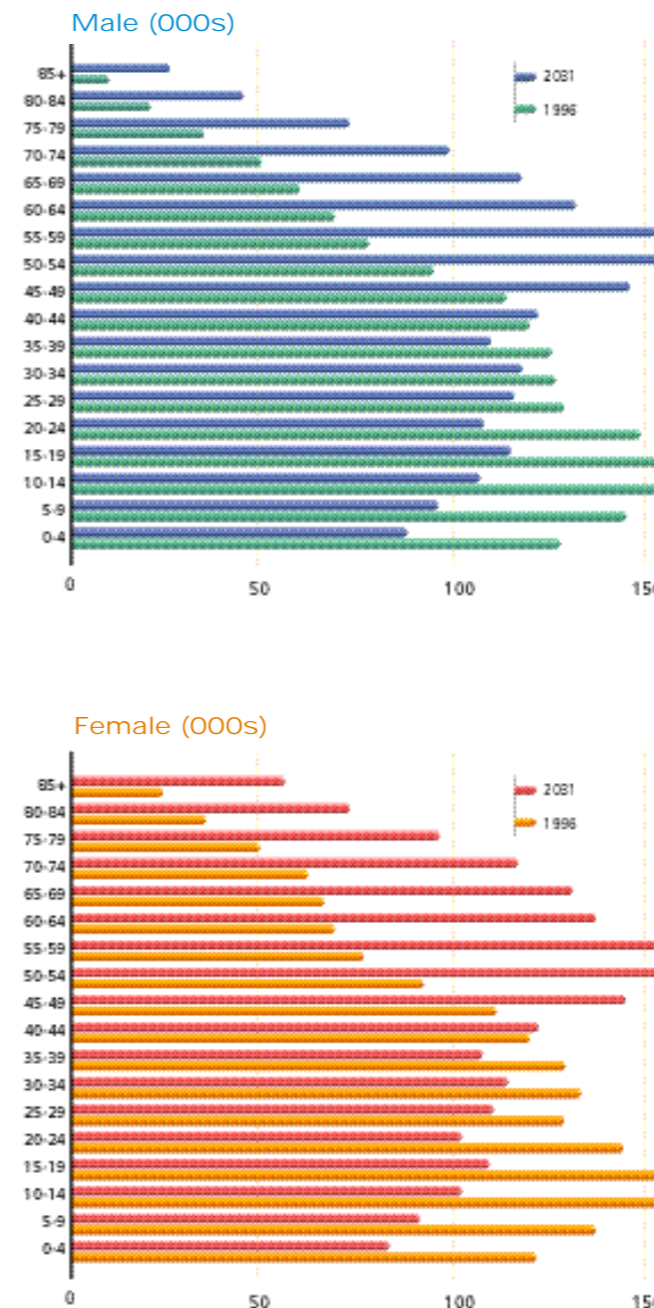


Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Results 1997, Table 117

Following a period of decline between 1986 and 1996, the total fertility rate increased to 1.93 in 1998, with 53,000 births recorded. The child dependency ratio is changing also; there was only one paid worker per child in the mid-1980s compared to a projected two workers per child by the middle of this decade. According to the CSO this ratio is likely to fall further by 2011. This will bring about improved opportunities for children over the lifetime of the Strategy as the economic support base for the child population will be strengthened and will allow for a higher level of

provision for children than in the past. The challenge will be to ensure that the supports and services for children and their families are planned and delivered in a co-ordinated and integrated way.

Figure 2.2: Population pyramid for 1996 and 2031



Source: CSO, 1996

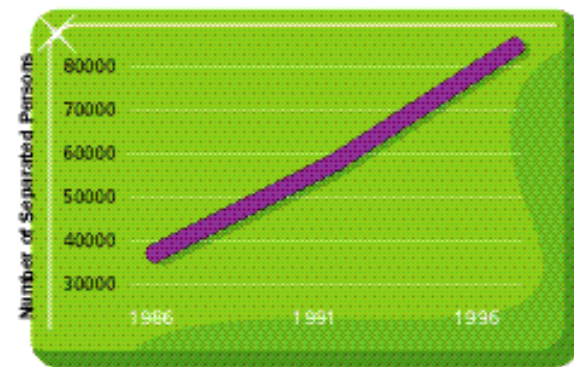
These demographic trends signal the strong position Ireland is in to support children over the next ten years and beyond. The population pyramid (Figure 2.2) indicates that, while the number of older people in Ireland will increase and there will be falling numbers of children. The support base for the child population, i.e. the working-age population, is reasonably stable in comparison to that of many other western countries.

Most people in Ireland experience parenthood during their life. In 1996 almost half of the adult population were identified as parents. In the same year, there were 465,134 families with children under eighteen years of age. The number of large families has fallen sharply. In the 1960s, 45% of births were to mothers of three or more children. The comparative 1998 figure dropped to 13%. In 1998, only 7% of children were living in households with five or more children and 50% were living in households with one or two children. This trend has important consequences for the family and household circumstances of children. Concerns related to larger families are higher levels of poverty and overcrowding in households. The increased number of smaller families has eased these concerns but new challenges emerge for housing and other services in the light of the extent of lone parenthood through marital breakdown or the absence of a partner.

The 1998 marriage rate was 4.5 per 1,000, representing 16,783 marriages. While marriage still remains the most popular choice for couples, the number of family units not based on the traditional marriage situation has increased. The Labour Force Survey in 1997 revealed that 13.5% of families with children aged under fifteen years were headed by lone parents and that such families accounted for 12% of children under fifteen. The proportion of births to young women under twenty years of age was 6%, or 3,301, in 1999: 96% of these births were outside marriage.

In addition, the number of separated persons continues to grow rapidly, with 87,800 people recorded as separated or divorced in the 1996 census. This represents a 60% increase on the 1991 figure of 55,143 and a significant further increase over the 1986 figure of 37,245 (Figure 2.3).

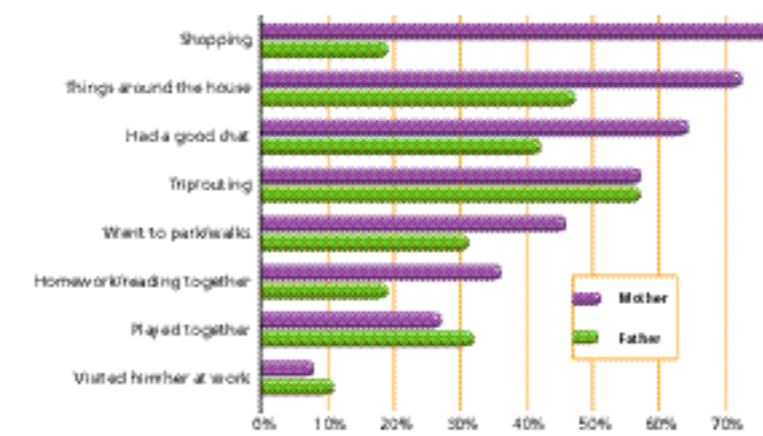
Figure 2.3:
Trends in number of separated persons



Source: CSO, 1996

Increasing non-marital partnerships, marital breakdown and lone parenthood have implications for the stability of family life and the welfare of children. Children of adults parenting alone face a higher risk of poverty. Relationship breakdown between a child's parents presents a significant challenge to the stability of his or her family life. The challenge will be to provide a range of supports to families with children so that children have positive experiences of their family environments. Shared activities are an important facet of family life which supports children's wellbeing by offering the opportunity for positive interaction and shared interests with their parents and between siblings (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4:
Activities with father/mother in past week



Source: "Children on Childhood" ISPCC, 1996

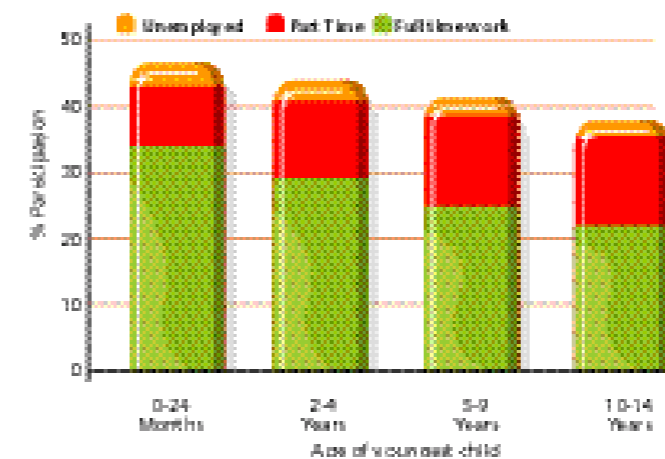
The division of domestic and childcare duties between parents is broadly unchanged over the past number of years, mirroring the experience of other EU families. When both parents are working, mothers still tend to be the primary carers of children. Fathers in Ireland work longer hours than their European counterparts. They tend to work more unsocial hours, reducing the opportunity to interact with their children and, where there has been a relationship breakdown, access for fathers to their children is reduced. These factors have implications for the wellbeing of children. The considerable changes in family formation and changing family dynamics and lifestyles have been well documented by the Commission on the Family.

Economic Progress and Labour Market Restructuring

One of the primary indicators of general population wellbeing is a country's Gross National Product. Ireland's GNP per capita in 1999 was estimated to be 97% of the EU average. There has been strong economic growth over the 1990s. A major characteristic associated with this progress has been the increase in women's participation in the workforce. Women's participation rates have grown rapidly since the mid 1980s representing 45% of the working-age population this year. This growth is particularly evident among married women, especially those with pre-school

children, whose participation rate is now higher than that of mothers of older children (Figure 2.5). The participation rate for married women is expected to increase slightly from around 46% at present to 47% by 2011.

Figure 2.5:
Labour force participation by mothers, by age of youngest child



Source: ESRI, 2000

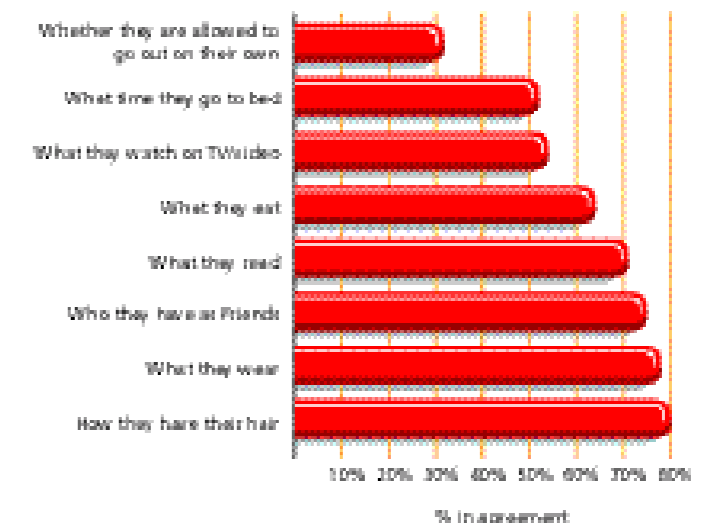
In this restructuring of the labour force, issues such as the cost and quality of childcare and the availability of flexible working arrangements are important for families and their children. They have implications for family formation and decisions on job opportunities for parents and the quality of life experience for children. The more recent development of a constricted labour supply has implications for the economic wellbeing of the country. Recent initiatives have sought to address these issues through the development of the childcare sector and the increased availability of options for time off work to care for children.

The workforce includes 32,000 or 16% of children in the 15-17 years age bracket. Almost 31% of these work on a full-time basis. While these children enjoy a number of additional protections under employment legislation, this level of work poses concerns for their educational attainment. Nevertheless, the participation rate of 15-19 year olds in education in 1998 was 80.7%, comparing favourably to the OECD country mean of 76.3%.

Changing Lifestyles

Change and diversity are now both major characteristics of modern day life. This has impacted significantly on children. They seek more independence and increasingly want to negotiate in family decisions that affect them. Some decisions they want to make for themselves (Figure 2.6). Yet, despite their willingness to assert themselves within their own families, our children, as young adults, have the lowest rate of voter participation in the EU at 40% compared, for example, to Great Britain at 75%. This lack of participation, or voter apathy, by young people in our democracy is a concern.

Figure 2.6:
Independence - things children believe they should be allowed to decide for themselves



Source: "Children on Childhood" ISPCC, 1996

Negotiating new freedoms with parents, brings its own concerns. Parents worry about allowing their children greater independence and increased opportunities for unsupervised activity. Concerns for children's safety, be they due to increased traffic, fear of strangers or that they would indulge in harmful behaviour, such as taking drugs or alcohol, have curtailed children's opportunities, for example, to cycle on the roads, walk to school, or play in parks. This has an impact on children's opportunity to develop their knowledge and experience of the natural world, develop and exercise their motor skills.

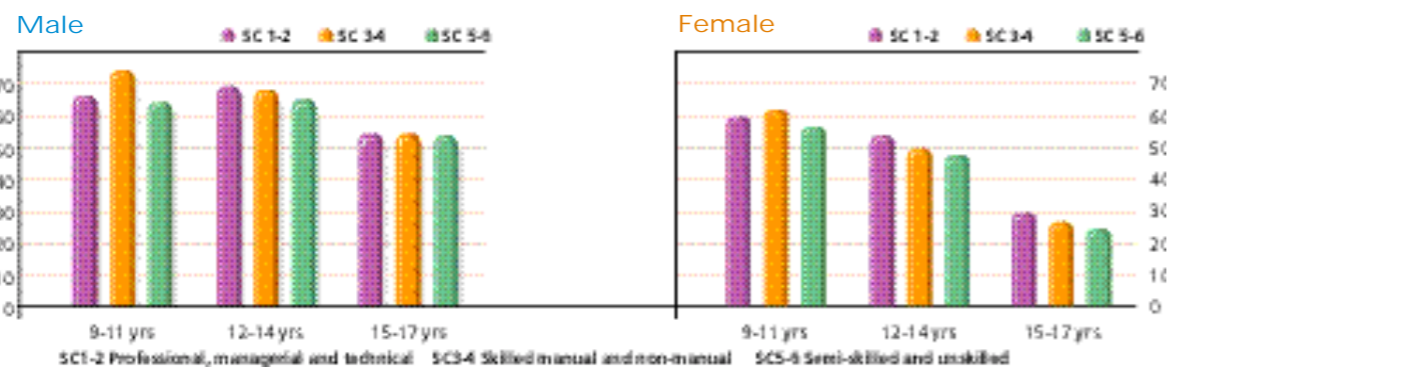
With building development there are fewer places for children to play and they are increasingly playing or passing their time indoors. Bedrooms have become play areas for many children, limiting the space needed to enjoy the vigorous exercise so important to physical and mental health (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7:
15-year-olds who reported feeling low at least once a week over a six month period (%)



Participation in physical activity has positive effects on the future health and wellbeing of Irish children. The majority of children are involved in some form of exercise outside of their schools, but the frequency of exercising decreases as they get older, particularly in the case of girls. Children in disadvantaged areas have been shown to exercise less than children who are

Figure 2.8:
Percentages of boys and girls participating in vigorous exercise four or more times per week, by social class



financially better off (Figure 2.8). Increasing the participation rates for children in sport and active leisure pursuits is important, particularly in disadvantaged areas, to improve health and wellbeing of children and reduce the incidence of anti-social behaviour through lack of opportunities for affordable activities and entertainment.

Many of the changes in lifestyle of the population in general, and children in particular, have been fuelled by the new leisure opportunities associated with information and communication technologies (ICTs). Children in Ireland have been receptive to these new technologies (Figure 2.9). Ireland now has the greatest penetration of Sony PlayStation around the world after Japan, with more than 500,000 units sold here.

Figure 2.9:
15-year-olds who report playing computer games for four hours or more a week (%)

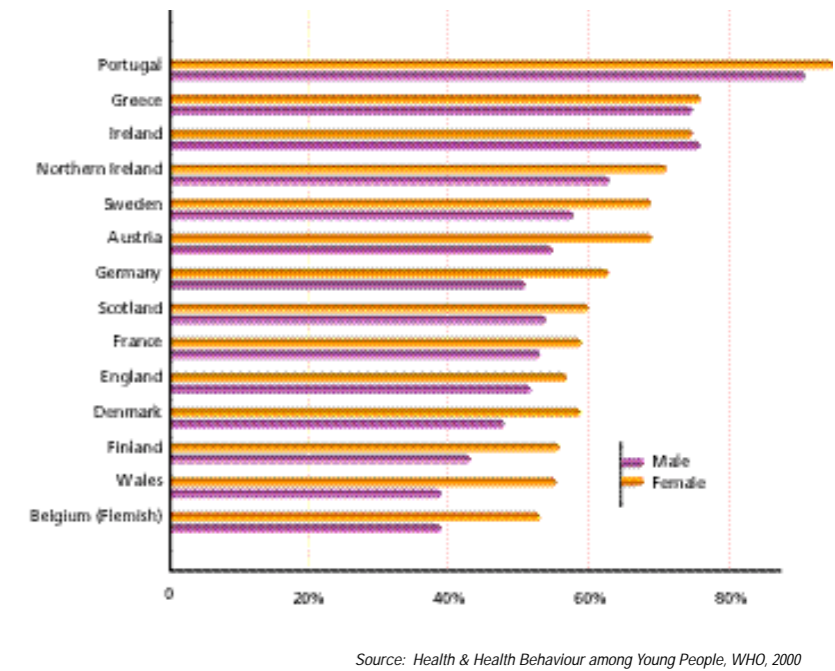


Greater use of ICTs and the Internet to entertain children has a number of implications. The reduction of active leisure recreations has physical and mental health implications. Family dynamics can change with both the emergence of what has been referred to as Internet addiction in the US and Europe and the withdrawal from family and social activities. There is an increased awareness of the threat of exposure to inappropriate material, i.e. racist, sexually or violently explicit material. The use made by paedophiles of the Internet is a real threat to children's safety. The challenge is to ensure children benefit from the use of ICTs while protecting them from negative effects. Providing children with hands-on computer experience and skills is essential to prepare them for the work environment and research is being undertaken to clarify how ICTs can relate to educational innovation. However, there is need for a much wider view of the social and health costs and benefits of the new technologies.

These changing leisure activities are only part of the picture of the wellbeing of our children. Other indicators include their regular diet and whether or not they indulge in harmful behaviour such as smoking or drinking.

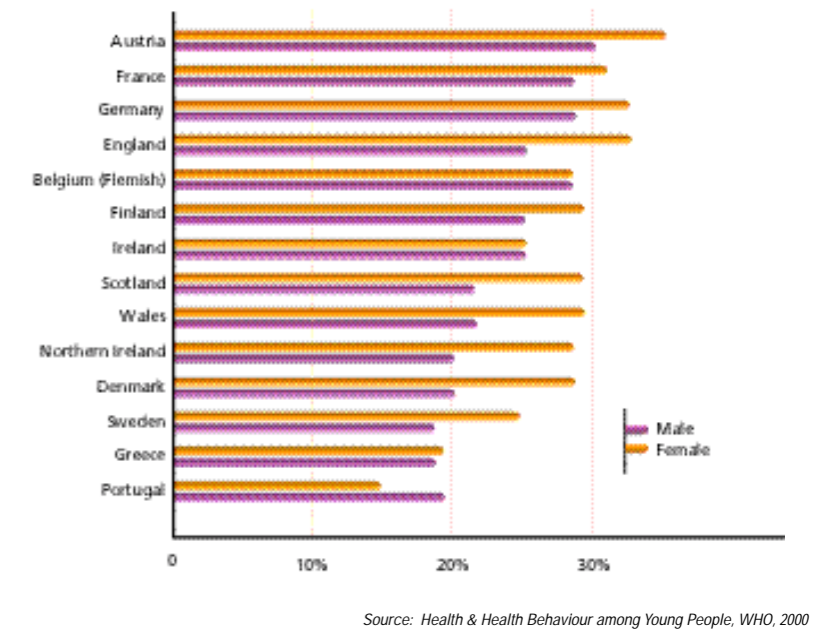
Healthy eating is very important for growing children. Promoting healthier eating habits is a key activity for parents within the home and is a government policy objective. Despite this, some Irish children have developed bad eating habits, eating less fruit and more fats. In general, girls eat more fruit and vegetables than boys. Almost three-quarters of fifteen-year-olds in Ireland eat fruit each day (Figure 2.10). This compares to a high in Portugal of over 90% and a low in Belgium of 39-53%. There is a high incidence among children in Ireland of eating crisps every day, at 53%. It has been found that the diet of our children is linked to the socio-economic class of the parents - the less the family experiences poverty and social exclusion, the better the implications for healthy eating habits. The long-term implication for health, is an additional reason for tackling poverty and social exclusion when the child is young.

Figure 2.10:
15-year-olds who report eating fruit every day



The level of smoking and alcohol consumption by children has increasingly been the focus of attention. The number of 15-year-olds smoking at least weekly is 25% (Figure 2.11) while those smoking daily is 16-19%. The fact that a quarter of 15-year-olds, across both genders, smoke weekly indicates the level of risk of progressing to more regular smoking with all the attendant physical long-term damage.

Figure 2.11:
15-year-olds who report smoking at least weekly



In relation to alcohol consumption, the gender difference between 15-year-olds drinking at least weekly is significant with boys being 2.25 times more likely to drink at that age (Figure 2.12). While the position for children living in Ireland is not a problem of the same scale as that of our near neighbours in Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, or Wales, the level of alcohol consumption among these children indicates the need to restrict their access to alcohol and enforce the protective legislation already in place.

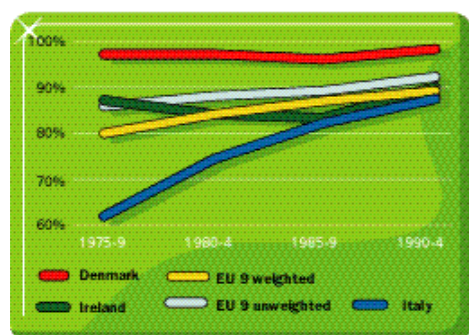
Figure 2.12:
15-year-olds who report drinking beer, wine or spirits at least weekly



Source: WHO, Health and Health Behaviour Among Young People, 2000

Children's wellbeing is also understood through how they describe themselves. Notwithstanding the fact that children have said they can feel low during the week (Figure 2.7), overall, Irish children are satisfied with their lives (Figure 2.13), with the share of satisfied teenagers jumping by seven points over a five-year period to 90%. This proportion of children expressing satisfaction with their lives compares well with their European counterparts.

Figure 2.13:
Percentage of 15-19-year-olds 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with their lives



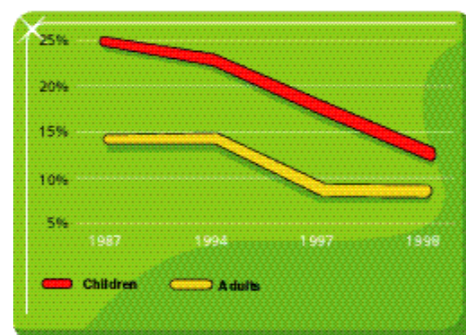
Source: 'Is Child Welfare Converging in the European Union?' Innocenti Occasional Papers, no. ESP 69, UNICEF, 1999.

Poverty and Social Inclusion

Sustained economic growth has provided improved budgetary conditions in Ireland. Increases in government expenditure, particularly in the areas of education, health and family and community development have contributed to improving services for children and their families. Targeting the services to disadvantaged areas, where children tend to form the larger proportion of the local population, is an important way of channelling resources from economic progress to the most socially deprived sections in our society. However, there continues to be a significant proportion of children for whom the benefits of economic success have not been a reality.

Early results of the *Living in Ireland Survey, 1998* show a drop to 12% in the number of children living in 'consistent poverty' from 17% in 1997¹. The children classified as 'consistently poor' are those living in households below the 60% relative income poverty line and experiencing basic deprivation.

Figure 2.14:
Percentage of children and adults experiencing consistent poverty



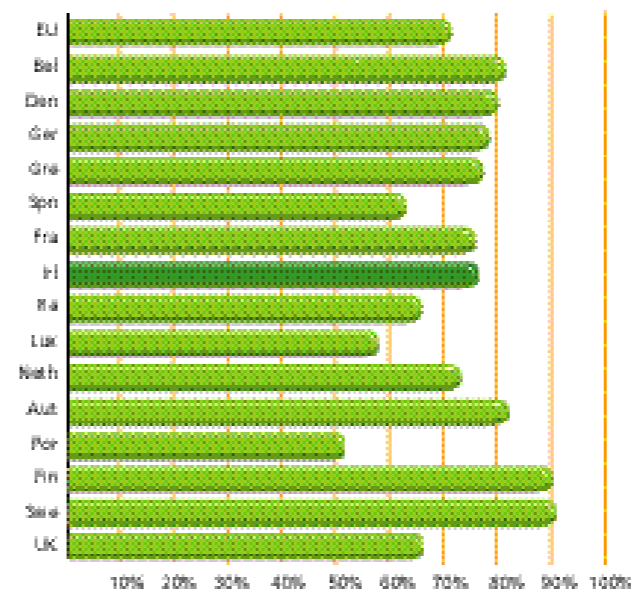
Source: Living in Ireland Surveys (ESRI) 1987-1998

More than half the children 'consistently poor' in 1997 were in households affected by unemployment. Increased employment levels have impacted positively, as reflected in a decrease in the rate of adult and child poverty since 1987. However, children are still more likely to experience poverty than adults (Figure 2.14). Despite the dramatic drop of five points over one year and a halving of the figure over four years, much work remains to be done to tackle the multi-dimensional causes and effects of poverty.

1. A fuller analysis of the *Living in Ireland Survey, 1998* will be published by the ESRI

Some children suffer from educational disadvantage. The '1998 Annual School Leavers Survey of 1996/97 Leavers' by the ESRI shows that 81% of pupils left school with a leaving certificate qualification, 15.5% of pupils left school with a junior certificate qualification and 3.5% left school with no qualification. In recent years resources have been targeted at the problem of early school leaving, but to date there has been no significant improvement in the numbers leaving school with a leaving certificate qualification. Despite this, Ireland is above the EU average for those who have successfully completed at least upper secondary education. (Figure 2.15)

Figure 2.15:
Percentage of those aged 22 who have successfully completed at least upper secondary education



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force survey 1997

Figure 2.16:
Numbers of homeless children by health board area

Health Board Area	Total	Males	Females
EASTERN	262	152	110
MIDLAND	17	6	11
MID-WESTERN	54	26	28
NORTH-EASTERN	22	11	11
NORTH-WESTERN	7	0	7
SOUTH-WESTERN	62	27	35
SOUTHERN	85	32	53
WESTERN	51	27	24
NATIONAL	560	281	279

Source: Preliminary Analysis of Child Care Interim Minimum Dataset, Dept. of Health & Children, 1998

Some of those experiencing the greatest social exclusion in our society are the homeless (Figure 2.16). In this context, homelessness is not defined as children sleeping rough, but includes all children without suitable accommodation. The causes, nature and extent of child homelessness are under explored. What is known is that young people who have spent time in care and Traveller children are disproportionately represented and that drug abuse and prostitution are activities related to homelessness. Tackling the issue means ensuring not only that no child sleeps on the streets, but also that all children have accommodation which is suitable to their needs. There is a need for an integrated response to the many issues which affect homeless children.

Addressing particular needs and promoting equality to build social inclusion in Irish society are issues to be addressed in the Strategy. Children with disabilities, Traveller children and children from ethnic minority communities, such as refugees and other immigrants, have special needs which have to be considered and addressed collectively and individually, as required.

Table 2.17:

Statistics on the Travelling community

No. of families	4,790
No. of families living in halting sites, caravans	2,307
Population under 15 years	50%
Infant mortality	
- Travellers	18.1 per 1,000
- Settled community	7.4 per 1,000
Mortality (% over 65 years)	
- Travellers	1.3%
- Settled community	11.4%

Travellers have more than double the national rate of stillbirths

In 1987, Travellers reached the life expectancy that settled people reached in the 1940s

In 1999/2000 there were 5,600 Traveller children attending primary school, 962 attending mainstream post-primary, 120 in junior education centres and 661 attending senior traveller training workshops.

Sources: CSO, 1996 and Pavee Point Traveller's Centre, Department of Education and Science

Historically, Ireland has often been perceived as a mono-cultural society and as a country of emigration rather than inward migration. But cultural diversity is not new to Ireland. The Traveller Community is the minority group of longest standing here (Figure 2.17). There has also been a long-established Jewish community and growing Islamic, Indian and Chinese communities in Ireland. Increasing cultural diversity arises from the greater numbers of EU and non-EU citizens living in Ireland. Increasing inward migration as a result of recent prosperity and employment and the rise in the number of asylum seekers has meant that Ireland is now experiencing accelerated change towards becoming a multi-cultural society. Children are among those coming to Ireland seeking refugee status, representing 17%, or 3,210 of the total number of persons seeking refugee status between 1992 and 1999.

This transformation brings challenges but also opportunities. The major challenge is to develop a society whose citizens are receptive to and value cultural diversity. Inclusion will bring with it a society enriched by the participation of people with a diversity of experiences, cultures and backgrounds.

The issues raised above identify some of the influences on children's lives today. It is a broad snapshot of children in our society, their families and their social lives. It describes a number of barriers affecting positive outcomes for some of our children, which need to be tackled. It is by no means a full analysis of children's needs but an initial step towards a shared understanding of the context in which children are growing up in Ireland.

2.2

DEVELOPING A 'WHOLE CHILD' PERSPECTIVE

Taking these trends as its context the Strategy has adopted a 'whole child' perspective, which provides a more complete understanding of children's lives. It draws on the most recent research and knowledge about children's development and the relationship between children and family, community and the wider society. This understanding will guide the management of change in children's lives over the period of the strategy. This perspective anchors the Strategy to a coherent and inclusive view of childhood and can be recognised as implicit in how most parents think about their children. The perspective is endorsed as good practice underpinning legislation and policy and service developments internationally. It is also compatible with the spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The 'whole child' perspective allows those working with or supporting children to focus on their particular interest and responsibility while, at the same time, recognising the multi-dimensional aspect of children's lives. It identifies the capacity of children to shape their own lives as they grow, while also being shaped and supported by the world around them.

Figure 2.18 provides a visual representation of the 'whole child' perspective. It represents the dynamic

interaction between the three aspects of the perspective which are:

- **the extent of children's own capacities;**
- **the multiple interlinked dimensions of children's development;**
- **the complex mix of informal and formal supports that children rely on.**

While it is helpful to unpack the elements of the perspective for illustrative purposes, it is only through considering all three together that the 'whole child' is recognised.

Children's Own Capacities

Children affect and in turn are affected by the relationships around them. Recognising the child as an active participant, the 'whole child' perspective takes as its starting point children's innate capacities for learning and growth which are present at birth and which parents quickly recognise. These capacities are expressed in different ways as children grow, develop and express themselves as individuals. This evolving capacity is acknowledged by the increasing freedoms and responsibilities that parents allow their children as they judge them to have sufficient understanding and confidence to make decisions for themselves. This type of approach informs the working practices of many health, education and welfare professionals.

Interlinked Dimensions of Children's Development

Childhood is a series of developmental stages, each of which is to be valued. Through these various stages of growing up, the foundations are laid for wellbeing in adult life. By building on early opportunities to develop social responsibility, childhood years also provide a preparation for taking on the responsibilities of active citizenship in later life. Children achieve outcomes at each of these stages of development. It is helpful to consider these outcomes as expressions of a set of relatively discrete but interrelated dimensions along which children make gains over time and which eventually together provide the capacity for coping with adulthood (Ward, 1995). Nine such dimensions can be usefully

identified: physical and mental health; emotional and behavioural wellbeing; intellectual capacity; spiritual and moral wellbeing; identity; self-care; family relationships; social and peer relationships; and social presentation (Box 2.1). There is no hierarchy of importance intended in this list and, while it is possible to describe how children tend to move along each dimension, there are multiple pathways through childhood. The attainments of individual children will reflect both their own capacity and the resources, supports and services available to them.

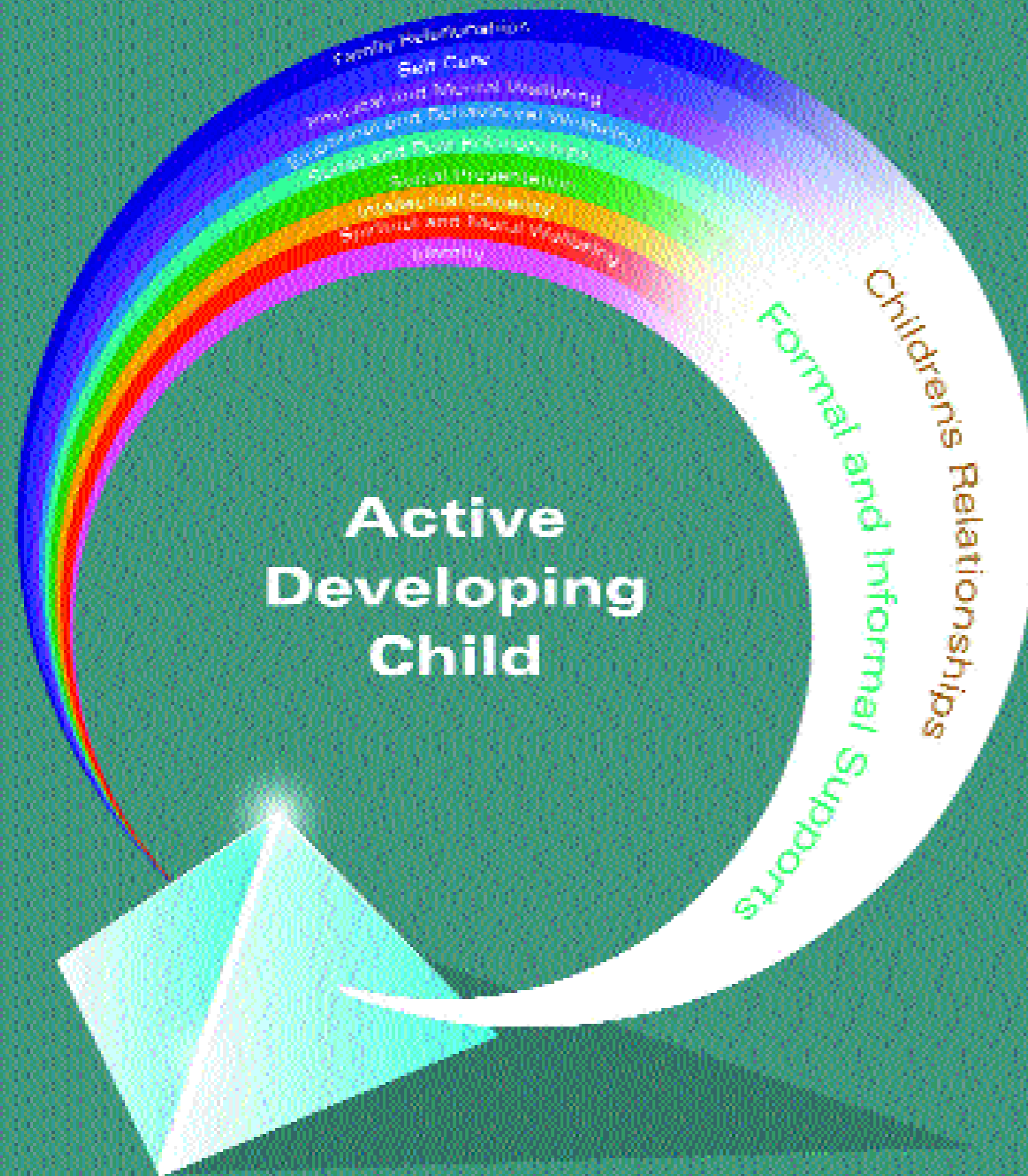
Informal and Formal Supports in Children's Lives

The perspective sees childhood as a complex set of dynamic relationships which interact in ways which are, as yet, not fully understood, but are recognised as essential to a satisfying and successful childhood. These relationships range from the family, the primary source of care and protection for children, to the State, which acts as the ultimate guarantor of their rights. Essential supports and services are provided for children through the primary, social networks of family, extended family and community, known as the informal supports, and through the formal support services provided by the voluntary sector, commercial sector, the State and its agencies. These provide the conduit through which children draw the supports and services they need and benefit from (Jack and Jordan, 1999). Supporting this 'social capital' is a central theme of the Strategy.

From these varied and interacting sources children gain the support they need to progress along all nine dimensions of their development. All children require basic supports and services, such as a good education and access to quality health services. For some children there is a need for additional supports and services because of being disadvantaged by poverty, disability, membership of minority ethnic and cultural communities, need for care and protection, or delinquent and self-harming behaviour. Again, these special needs are met by a mix of informal and formal supports. The State has a special responsibility to ensure that these needs are met and in the main this means supporting families and communities to provide for their children. In some cases it can mean providing alternative care.

Figure 2.18:

The Whole Child Perspective



Box 2.1

Dimensions of Childhood Development

Physical and Mental Wellbeing:

includes growth and development as well as physical and mental health. Development along this dimension requires that children are given an adequate, nutritious diet and appropriate accommodation, that at the appropriate age they receive immunisations and developmental checks, that older children and teenagers are given appropriate advice about issues such as smoking, alcohol consumption, substance abuse and sexual behaviour that they have access to appropriate health services.

Emotional and Behavioural Wellbeing:

concerns children's feelings and actions. It includes their growing ability to adapt to change, to cope with stress and to demonstrate self-control. It also covers children's ability to empathise with others and behave in a socially responsible manner. These emotions and behaviours will be affected by the nature and quality of children's early attachments and also by the temperament of the individual child. Children's needs on this dimension are more likely to be met if they are given the security of consistent boundaries within a context of emotional warmth and approval.

Intellectual Capacity:

covers all areas of cognitive development, educational attainment and active learning from their surrounding environment. Children's development and realisation of their varied capacities along this dimension are more likely to be met if they have frequent opportunities to play and interact with both adults and other children, if formal schooling is tailored to their particular strengths and needs, if they have access to books and other forms of intellectual stimulation, if they are given opportunities to acquire a range of skills and interests and if those with special educational needs receive appropriate support at school.

Spiritual and Moral Wellbeing:

covers feelings, experiences and beliefs that stimulate self-awareness, wonder, reverence, moral and aesthetic sensibility and questions about the meaning and nature of life and death. For many children this will be supported by traditions of belief, observance of religious duties and attendance at designated places of worship. For all children acknowledgement, validation and promotion of the spiritual dimension to their lives is needed from their peers, their parents and other significant adults.

Identity:

concerns children's growing confidence about themselves and their abilities as individuals in their own right, to feel respected and accepted by their family and by the wider society. Children's needs on this dimension are more likely to be met if their achievements are praised and encouraged, if they receive positive messages about their own gender and their culture as part of a rich and valuable mix of social diversity.

Self-Care:

includes the competencies that all children require in order to look after and respect themselves. Children's needs on this dimension are more likely to be met if they are encouraged to acquire appropriate self-care skills from a very early age and go on adding to them as they get older. For instance, parents can help toddlers learn how to dress and feed themselves, older children need opportunities to learn how to cross roads safely and to use public transport; young people approaching independence need help in learning how to plan and undertake the tasks of managing their domestic and working lives.

Family Relationships:

Children's capacity for development along this dimension is more likely to be met if they experience a stable family life to which they have a sense of belonging and where changes of carer are kept to the minimum, if parent and parent figures show appropriate physical affection, if there is openness about types of relationships within the family, if they are given opportunities to explore and develop their capacity for independence; and if there is frequent positive contact with extended family.

Social and Peer Relationships:

involves the child's ability to make friends and feel part of a peer group; it relates to their capacity to get on with adult figures outside their family circle. From an early age, but with increasing significance as they grow older, children require formal and informal opportunities to play and socialise with their peers of both sexes. They can also gain from the additional experiences and skills of adults living in their neighbourhood or involved with them through sporting and cultural activities.

Social Presentation:

concerns children's growing understanding of their capacity to engage with others and realise the impact of their actions, appearance and behaviour on others. Development along this dimension relates to children's ability to learn to pick up messages about the impressions they are creating, while not necessarily feeling that they need to conform. Through parents and other adults taking an interest in their appearance, children learn that behaviour and appearance can be adjusted to different situations and are able to make decisions about how they want to present themselves socially and culturally.

2.3

SETTING GOALS FOR A MORE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

The Strategy sets three National Goals. These reflect the context of children's lives today, as discussed earlier and the 'whole child' perspective. The results of both the consultation and the review of existing departmental activity have contributed to their development. The acknowledged importance of children as active contributors to their own lives, and to the lives of those around them, makes it clear that the National Children's Strategy must be centrally concerned with putting in place more formal and systematic mechanisms for obtaining and ensuring respect for children's views. Accordingly, one of the three National Goals is to ensure that children will have a voice in all matters which affect them and that their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. This Goal is expanded on in Chapter Three.

As the Strategy must take account of the complexity and changing context of children's lives, there is an urgent need for more information and a deeper understanding about how children, in all their diversity, are experiencing and making their way through childhood. How are children in general, and children with particular characteristics or in certain circumstances, progressing along the nine developmental dimensions? What supports and services do they have and what works best for them? Attention is to be given to developing the existing research and information infrastructure to improve service evaluation and to identify and resource effective services. Accordingly, the second National Goal is to ensure that children's lives will be better understood: their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services. This Goal is addressed in Chapter Four.

The 'whole child' perspective leads the Strategy to address all the various aspects of children's lives in a way that recognises their interdependence. Services must respond to children as rounded, active participants in their own lives and the lives of those around them. This requires providing a wide range of

co-ordinated services and considering the opportunities for synergies to be created between them. It also means focusing on the barriers which inhibit some children from realising their potential. Developing a holistic, inclusive approach to service development is to be achieved through the National Goal of ensuring that children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development. This Goal is developed further in Chapter Five.

Delivering these three Goals and establishing the 'whole child' perspective centrally in policy development and service delivery will require a special effort by all those involved in its implementation at national and local level. To drive this change and support its delivery, new structures are proposed. The new arrangements are set out in Chapter Six.



Chapter 3

National Goal

Children Will Have a Voice

"The only thing I would change would be that we would listen to our nation's children and young people much more as we are the next generation that will have to run the country. The voice of innocence can sometimes be wiser than a hundred years of wisdom."

"I am 12 1/2 years old and I go to a special school and my mammy says I need a lot of care and attention. And I hope to see children listened to more and believed... and for social workers to listen to us and our families..."

"People should think more about children's opinions... I'm glad our Government is taking time out to listen to our opinions."

Quotes from the public consultation

National Goal

Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

3.1

GIVING DUE REGARD TO CHILDREN

The aim of this National Goal is to give children a voice in matters which affect them and to ensure that their views are given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. It recognises that children have an active contribution to make in shaping their own lives and the lives of those around them. Parents recognise that children need to be listened to and that as they grow older they can be given greater freedom and responsibility in relation to decisions about their daily lives. Children appreciate and rise to challenges which stretch their capabilities and enable them to feel valued and appreciated.

Opportunities also need to be found to develop children's understanding of civic values in society so that they can act as responsible citizens and contribute fully to their families, schools and local communities. To develop this understanding children need to learn the social and negotiating skills which are essential to effective participation in civic life. This means providing them with practical opportunities to participate and become involved in the operation of local community activities which are provided for them. School, sports and youth clubs, local health services, are just some of the important activities and services provided for children which will help change their lives. But children frequently have little or no voice in how these are provided. In addition to helping to develop social awareness, giving children a voice is also a way for society to demonstrate its esteem and the value it places on its children.

Decision-making can be improved by the introduction of new or different perspectives. The involvement of consumers should make services more responsive and more accessible. Because childhood is a developmental stage, children are major users or recipients of public services, such as health, education and welfare supports. The Government is committed to delivering better public services under the Strategic Management Initiative. One of the aims of this Initiative is to give increased recognition to service users as clients and customers. This focus is driving improvements in the performance of those public services. Children's services will benefit from this approach.

Experience has shown that giving children a voice helps to protect them from abuse. This is recognised in the National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, *Children First*, which has as one of its principles for best practice in child protection the following: 'Children have a right to be heard, listened to and to be taken seriously. Taking account of their age and understanding, they should be consulted and involved in all matters which affect their lives'. The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the scope and purpose of such participation.

It is important that giving children a voice is not interpreted as passing responsibility for decisions and their consequences on to children. The intention is to ensure that in achieving a decision which is in the best interest of the child, the child should have an active part and know that his or her views are respected.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

'State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.' *Article 12*

Giving Children a Voice Means:

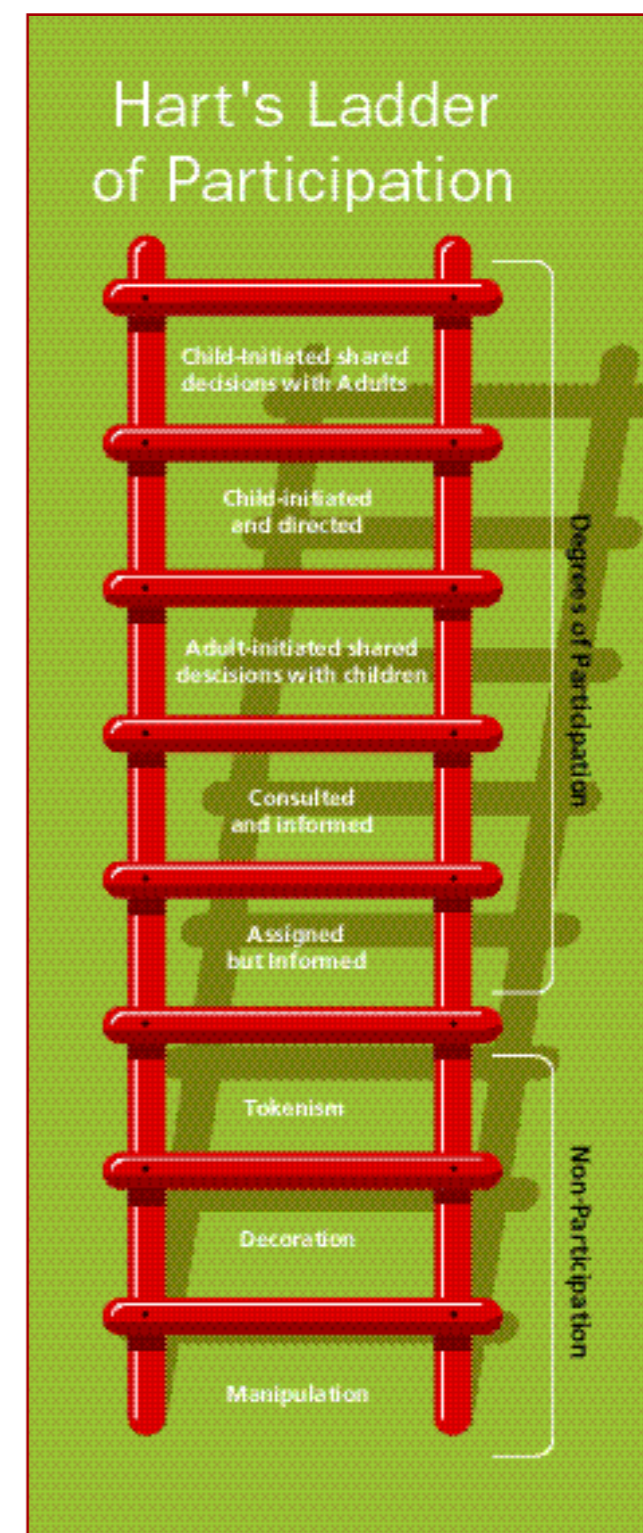
- ★ encouraging children to express their views and demonstrating a willingness to take those views seriously;
- ★ setting out clearly for the child the scope of such participation by them to avoid misunderstanding;
- ★ providing children with sufficient information and support to enable them to express informed views;
- ★ explaining the decisions taken, especially when the views of the child cannot be fully taken into account.

Opportunities for effective participation in decision-making can be either direct or mediated. It is important to take account of the age and capacity of children in designing specific measures and prioritising the need for direct participation. Building children's input to decision-making will require enhancing their analytical and communication skills and shifting the public perception of its value. Developing the skills to effect change cannot be learnt by adults and then applied to children. Participation skills will be best learnt by providing children with opportunities to engage and participate, i.e. active learning. The level of children's participation can range from tokenism to child initiated shared decision-making with adults (see Hart's Ladder of Participation), indicating the need to think about the level and quality of children's involvement.

The education system has a special role in developing our children's sense of civic responsibility. School councils are being established to give children at post-primary level a direct involvement in the running of their schools. Building involvement at the primary level will be the next step and discussions will be held with the partners in education to develop proposals. In judicial proceedings such involvement needs to be mediated. The Guardian-Ad-Litem Service provides for the appointment of a legal guardian to represent the interests of the child in court and to act as an independent voice in care proceedings.

There are mechanisms in place, or currently being put in place, in the statutory sector to give children a voice. A number of voluntary agencies, for example the ISPC, also provide similar opportunities. The aim must be to expand these opportunities across all sectors and services, as far as practicable, and to ensure that this is done in a consistent manner. Every organisation which works with children can contribute to achieving this National Goal.

It is recognised that as part of this process it will be necessary to provide training and support both to children and to organisations engaged in this process. There is limited but valuable experience of this type of participation in this country. Consultation with children was an important and innovative part of the process of developing the National Children's Strategy. This expertise will have to be built on and expanded and concrete measures put in place to support local initiatives.



Adapted by Hart from Sherry Arnstein

Giving Children A Voice Will:

- ★ Recognise that children must have a say in matters which affect them, in line with the UN Convention
- ★ Promote learning. Involvement promotes practical civic education
- ★ Improve decision-making. Involving diverse groups within the policy-making process can provide governments with new perspectives, opportunities for new solutions and greater citizen acceptance at the policy implementation stage
- ★ Help strengthen civil society. Increasing the capacity of citizens and government to interact and develop policy in collaboration can serve to strengthen democracy and provide means for civil society organisations to become more involved
- ★ Improve existing services. Consultation can lead to improvement in services to meet identified needs. Generally this involves making services more responsive and accessible
- ★ Develop new types of service. Identification of user needs can lead to the development of new services to meet previously unmet needs
- ★ Provide a fresh perspective. Through greater involvement, issues and problems can be seen in a new light, and new approaches to tackling what were previously seen as intractable issues identified
- ★ Support personal development. Users themselves have gained from involvement, giving them a growing sense of being able to influence change.

(The National Children's Strategy Enhancing Policy Co-ordination: Key Structure and Process Issues, Dr Richard Boyle, IPA)

3.2

THE OBJECTIVES

The objectives to be achieved under this Goal are:

- ★ **to put in place new mechanisms in the public sector which achieve participation by children in matters which affect them;**

- ★ **to promote and support the development of a similar approach in the voluntary and private sectors;**
- ★ **to ensure that children are made aware of their rights and responsibilities;**
- ★ **to support children and organisations to make the most of the new opportunities to be provided;**
- ★ **to target additional resources and supports to enable marginalised children to participate equally;**
- ★ **to support research into and evaluation of new mechanisms to give children a voice.**

3.3

THE MEASURES

Dáil na nÓg

Making citizenship a real-life experience for children requires a commitment from all sectors. It is important that children receive a clear signal that we value and want to encourage their participation and that we are prepared to invest in new and imaginative ways to achieve it. A clear commitment at national level is an important starting point. The response of children to being consulted about the Strategy was positive and this was reflected in the number of children, almost two thousand five hundred, who took the time to express their views. These are recorded in the Report of the Public Consultation which has been published separately and which includes a special report to children, the first such report from government directly to children. Consulting with children will be continued as part of the implementation of the Strategy.

A Dáil na nÓg, or National Children's Parliament, will now be established to provide a national forum where children can raise and debate issues of concern to them on a periodic basis. The Dáil na nÓg will meet under the auspices of the Minister for Children, who will have a report of the outcome published. The establishment of the Dáil na nÓg will take careful

preparation. It must have clear objectives and, most especially, arrangements must be put in place to support its operation. These must ensure that representation is genuinely inclusive.

Good local networks will need to be established as a basis for developing and supporting national representation in the Dáil na nÓg. Schools are potentially very important in this regard and a possible role will be discussed with the partners in education. Resources, especially time, will be needed to build up a meaningful process and structures. This work will be carried out under the direction of the Minister for Children and appropriate funding will be provided. The benefits of multi-media will be harnessed to facilitate participation. It will be important to draw on the experience of international initiatives such as the Kinder Parliaments in Germany and Austria and the Municipaux des Enfants in France.

Office of Ombudsman for Children

A Children's Ombudsman will be established by legislation as an independent office. Unlike the traditional Ombudsman role of investigating individual complaints, Offices of Ombudsman for Children have adopted a broader role of promoting the welfare and rights of children. This involves raising public awareness and promoting children's issues at government level. This is the approach taken in Norway where the first Office of Ombudsman for Children was established by statute in 1981. By 1996, there were eighteen such offices worldwide, concentrated primarily in Northern and Central Europe.

The office of Ombudsman for Children will have the following broad functions:

- ★ **to promote the welfare and rights of children generally;**
- ★ **to investigate complaints from children on issues which affect them;**
- ★ **to consult with children on issues of importance to them;**

- ★ **to advise government on issues of importance to children.**

The Ombudsman for Children will promote awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. An annual report will be published. This measure will provide children with a significant new voice at national level.

National and Local Fora

Children's views should be represented wherever services important for their wellbeing are being planned or delivered. This is particularly important at local level where the impact of decisions on children is most direct. A number of good examples are available from Europe. France has established the Conseils Municipaux des Enfants and in the United Kingdom Youth Parish Councils have brought about real change in local communities.

Children's views will be represented on existing national and local fora in relation to relevant services such as education and health. Discussions will be held with the relevant bodies and partnership interests on how best to represent children's views in these fora. As new mechanisms emerge in the future children's representation should be included.

Where commitments to establish special fora already exist, for example the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* provides for the establishment of a Housing, a Public Transport Partnership and a National Rural Development Fora, discussions will be held on how best to ensure that the views of children are addressed in these fora. This approach will build on the consultation guidelines set out in the White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity*.

The County and City Development Boards are central to how local communities and services will be planned and co-ordinated in future. These Boards and their associated sub-structures provide an ideal opportunity for children's views to be captured. A review of existing arrangements at local level will be undertaken by the Boards and measures will be agreed to ensure that children's views are obtained in formulating and implementing their economic, social

and cultural strategies. Community and voluntary organisations fora to be established as part of those supporting structures may provide the opportunity for articulation of the views of children on how their local communities should be developed. In addition, other appropriate local level bodies, including the health boards, will review their current consultation and participation procedures and agree measures to provide appropriate representation for children.

Family Group Conferencing

Family Group Conferences are specially convened meetings designed to empower both children and their families through placing them at the centre of planning and decision-making about their individual care at times of crisis in children's lives. Originating in New Zealand, they have been established successfully in a number of countries through adapting the original model to fit local contexts and cultures. These conferences maximise the use of the child's social and family support networks by bringing them together so that they can identify what options best meet the needs of the child. This approach is an important feature of the Children Bill, 1999.

Guardian-Ad-Litem Service Review

The Guardian-Ad-Litem Service was established under Section 26 of the Child Care Act, 1991. The Guardian-Ad-Litem is appointed to represent the child's interests in care proceedings. Many vulnerable children have benefited from this important service and it is now an appropriate time to undertake a major review of its operation. The review will examine:

- ★ the role of the Guardian-Ad-Litem Service in family law proceedings and the general issue of representation for children in legal proceedings;
- ★ the need for more detailed guidelines on the appointment, role and function of a Guardian-Ad-Litem;
- ★ the adequacy of the present service, including its funding and management.

Ratification of the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights

In order to facilitate ratification of the *European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights*, which is intended to promote the rights of children in family law proceedings, action will be taken to implement those provisions of the Children Act, 1997, which provide for the protection of children in the court system who are the subject of custody or access disputes between parents. This action will include:

- ★ the extension to the District Court of the power to order social reports in guardianship, custody and access proceedings;
- ★ the provision of a Guardian-Ad-Litem Service in such proceedings to represent the interests of children.

Representation and Complaints Procedure for Children in Care

Children in care and children who are involved with the State's welfare services have a special need and right to be heard. It is important that this special group of children are given an additional voice in decisions about their care. To ensure this, a formal system of representation and complaints will be developed and put in place. In addition, the Irish Association of Young People in Care (IAYPIC) will continue to be funded to develop an effective self-advocacy group for young people while in care and on leaving care. This is being done in partnership with Barnardos.

Medical Consent

One of the ways in which the Strategy will work is by encouraging debate as a prelude to developing new proposals on emerging issues. One such issue is that of medical consent in relation to children. A discussion paper will be produced in which the issues will be explored. These will include guidance in relation to: the capacity of children to consent to medical treatment; access to services without parental consent; consent to medical treatment for children in care; the need for effective communication between professionals and children and their families.

Children's Constitutional Rights

Children's rights in the Irish Constitution are found under Article 40 (personal rights), Article 41 (family), Article 42 (education), Article 43 (private property) and Article 44 (religion). A number of the rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are already provided for in the Constitution, either expressly or impliedly. Others are provided for in legislation.

Article 3.1 of the UN Convention provides 'In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.' This is a variant of what is known as the welfare principle. Although this principle appears in a number of Irish statutes relating to children, it is absent, at least in express form, from the Constitution.

The Constitution Review Group, in its report published in 1996, recommended that the Constitution be amended (a) to include the welfare principle and (b) to provide an express guarantee of certain other children's rights deriving from the UN Convention. These recommendations relating to children are linked to other recommendations made by the Constitution Review Group in respect of the family. This is a complex issue, given the status afforded to the marital family in the Constitution.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended the acceleration of the implementation of the Constitution Review Group recommendations relating to the UN Convention. The All Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution is currently considering the Report of the Constitution Review Group and this Committee has been requested on behalf of the Government to prioritise its consideration of the issue of the constitutional underpinning of individual children's rights.



Every organisation which works with children can contribute to achieving this National Goal.

3.4

BUILDING CAPACITY TO SUPPORT PARTICIPATION

It will be necessary to take measures to support the implementation of the measures set out above. This will require both training and resources. Providing the more systematic and comprehensive approach required by the Strategy is new and challenging. Approaches appropriate to the Irish context will need to be developed. The first step will be to work out the detail of how such arrangements are to be operated. Agencies involved will need advice and guidance. There is research available to support the development of best practice in this area. This research and existing expertise will be used to develop resource materials and protocols which can be adapted to individual needs. Professional training courses will be developed for key staff to equip them to operate and support children's participation. In addition, children will need to be supported if they are to make the most of the opportunities which will now be available to them. Some children, particularly children with a disability or from marginalised communities, will require additional supports to assist their involvement. These will be identified and provided. This work will be carried out under the new structures being put in place as part of the Strategy (see Chapter Six).



Chapter 4



National Goal

Children's Lives will be Better Understood

"Delivery of services needs to be flexible, focused and regularly evaluated in order to ensure that needs and targets of specific groups are constantly being recognised and met."

Quote from the public consultation



The aim of this goal is to achieve a better understanding of how children grow up in Ireland, including both their individual and shared needs

4.1

USING RESEARCH AND INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN'S BENEFIT

The aim of this Goal is to achieve a better understanding of how children grow up in Ireland, including both their individual and shared needs. There is a growing debate about the wellbeing of the general population of children and the effect on them of the modern world. This is reflected in public concern about specific issues such as childcare provision and the need to protect and care for vulnerable children who are homeless or who appear in the courts. A more complete understanding of children's lives is required so that the emerging issues which will need to be addressed can be identified. This will facilitate well-informed debate on these issues, identification of the priorities for intervention and the development of policies and services which are more likely to have impact. An important element of this evaluative approach will necessarily include asking children themselves about their experience of services.

Despite this interest and the considerable resources being committed by the Government to children, there continues to be limited empirical data and research-based understanding of their lives. The absence of a fuller knowledge and understanding is reflected in children's relative invisibility within public policy debate. It remains a barrier to providing a more coherent approach. Better research and information on children is, therefore, urgently required to improve the quality and effectiveness of the services and supports being provided to them and their families.

There has been a significant increase in the level of additional funding for children's services in recent years. Implementation of the measures set out in the Strategy will require significant investment over the next ten years. It is essential that the basis for decisions on expenditure is transparent and that the benefit to children of such decisions can be clearly

demonstrated. Of course, choices will continue to be made about where and how to invest the available resources. These decisions, taken daily in a multitude of different areas, all collectively impact on the quality of life of our children. These decisions should be taken on the basis of a good understanding of children's needs.

Good financial management systems are part of this informed decision-making process. A new model of financial management, providing indicators and costings against which to measure and evaluate supports and services, is being put in place through the Strategic Management Initiative. The White Paper, *Supporting Voluntary Activity*, puts forward measures to support these aims in the voluntary and community sector. Further measures, however, are required to build on these initiatives and to address specifically the effectiveness of services to children.

This evidence-based approach is in line with the recommendations of the National Economic and Social Council to place more emphasis on evaluating public programmes, and groups of programmes aimed at the same purpose, to assess their cumulative impact, (*Opportunities, Challenges and Capacities for Choice*, NESC, 1999).

This National Goal complements the Government's Families Research Programme launched last year and will increase the availability of Irish relevant research on children and their families.

4.2

THE OBJECTIVES

Better research and information will support policy makers, operational managers, professionals and others directly providing services at all levels. This approach will help inform the development of quality standards and support good management practices in all organisations. Gaps in services will be more easily identified and resources targeted at those with the greatest need. It will support more effective evaluation of services and allow for monitoring the impact of the measures to be taken at national and local level to improve the quality of children's lives

under the Strategy. A better understanding at all levels will not only improve the quality of services, it should also provide an impetus for action. The measures set out below will also create new opportunities for cross-border collaboration.

The objectives to be achieved under this Goal are:

- ★ **to build up a more coherent understanding of children's development and needs among those working with children;**
- ★ **to develop an evidence-based approach to decision-making at all levels down to the point of service delivery;**
- ★ **to improve the commissioning, production and dissemination of research and information;**
- ★ **to improve evaluation and monitoring of children's services.**

4.3

THE MEASURES

National Longitudinal Study

A national longitudinal study of children is to be established. This study will examine the progress and wellbeing of children at critical periods from birth to adulthood. Such a study would identify the persistent adverse effects which lead to social disadvantage and exclusion, educational difficulties, ill health and deprivation. By studying a representative sample of children over a period of time it is possible to identify the key factors which, independently of other influences, most help or hinder children's development.

The study will create a bank of information on the 'whole child'. As a first step, a feasibility study is to be carried out which will recommend the approach to be taken and how the study should be managed. There are a number of models currently in operation internationally.

The feasibility study is being undertaken jointly by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and the Department of Health and Children.

The longitudinal study is a major long-term project. In parallel to this initiative, it is also necessary to develop greater research capacity and a greater diversity in the scope of research generally in relation to children and children's supports and services. This should ensure capacity in the system to meet the research and development requirements necessary to implement key aspects of the Strategy, including the measures set out in this chapter.

Children's Research Programme

As an initial boost to research into children's lives, a programme of research is to be funded as a special initiative. The aim is to capitalise immediately on existing capacity. Proposals will be invited from researchers. Selection of the proposals will reflect both the quality of research design and the relevance of the research output to the three National Goals. The Programme will provide an opportunity for European and international collaboration. To encourage international exchange a small number of Visiting Fellowships will be offered under the Programme to children's researchers wishing to work on projects in Ireland and to Irish researchers wishing to spend time in children's research centres in other countries. The Children's Research Programme will liaise with the Children's Trust, operating under the aegis of the Foundation for Investing in Communities.

Better Information Systems

The provision of consistent, timely and relevant information is essential for effective planning and decision-making at all levels. This will be an important way to promote improvement in the quality of children's supports and services. For example, following EU approval, a feasibility study, *Sharing Information to Improve Life Quality Project (SILQ)*, is being developed with the aim of providing shared information on an inter-agency basis to support children in crisis. The priority will be to improve the quality of the State's information on children and to develop a reliable core of statistical information for use by a wide range of national and international interests.

A wide range of data sets currently exist. However, the quality of some of this data is recognised to be poor and important data is not collected in some areas.

An integrated set of core data will be developed, based on the upgrading and where necessary the expansion of existing data sets. To do this it will be necessary to ensure that core elements of information gathered routinely by individual departments are compatible and can be integrated. Reliable information should be collected as a by-product of the normal operation of services. This is a complex technical challenge and also raises important ethical issues around data protection and informed consent. Accordingly the first stage will be a rigorous review covering:

- ★ **what information is needed on a cross departmental basis;**
- ★ **how to identify and pool information drawn from existing departmental databases.**

This will be achieved through the commissioning of a comprehensive review of cross-departmental information needs and capacity. The Government's Reach Initiative will contribute to the achievement of this measure. Resources have already been identified in the National Development Plan to provide the necessary computer systems to support information gathering as a by-product of better IT management systems.

Child Wellbeing Indicators

It is proposed to develop a set of 'child wellbeing' indicators. These are statistical indicators and can include, for example, the level of child immunisation or the percentage of children who smoke or consume alcohol. A range of such indicators will be developed which relate to the three National Goals and to the 'whole child' perspective set out in the Strategy. Some work has already been undertaken in Ireland in developing indicators of children's wellbeing by the ESRI and the Combat Poverty Agency. There are also international examples, developed by UNICEF, WHO and the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. An expert committee, selected to encompass the full range of dimensions covered by the 'whole child' perspective, will be established to develop a first set of wellbeing indicators. In considering appropriate indicators, regard will be had to the ongoing review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy targets in relation to child poverty.

State of the Nation's Children Report

A report to be known as The State of the Nation's Children will be produced bi-annually under the aegis of the Minister for Children. There is a considerable volume of data available and this can be expected to increase to meet evolving needs. The aim is to provide, in a readily accessible form, a regularly updated statement of key indicators of children's wellbeing, referred to above, which will serve both as a general source of information and a report on the progress in achieving the Goals of the Strategy. It will be targeted at both a national and international audience. Where possible, international comparisons will be made and the development of the report will be used as an opportunity for cross-border collaboration.

National Children's Research Dissemination Unit

The availability of information and research is no guarantee of its use. Effective use of such resources must be actively promoted. This will require better communication and co-ordination among those individuals and agencies already involved in commissioning and undertaking research. Research will be promoted as a shared concern and activity. This process will engage the broad range of interested parties that already exists and will extend to include children themselves.

A National Children's Research Dissemination Unit, possibly located in an existing research institution, will be core funded to gather together and disseminate research on children in Ireland. The Unit will provide an effective and efficient means of ensuring that research is known about and can be accessed by a wide constituency of users, such as government departments, the voluntary sector, operational managers, staff in the services, the academic community, commercial interests, the media and the general public. It will also aim to draw together a network of established researchers around the 'whole child' perspective. It will act as a forum to allow them to exchange information, explore priorities, avoid duplication, share methodologies and streamline the dissemination of results. The network will aim to promote cross-institutional and multidisciplinary working and co-operation.

Child Impact Statements

When seeking a government decision all departments will be required, where relevant, to identify the impact of their policies on children. The value of child impact statements is derived from the early identification of the potential impact of policies on children and their families. Potential effects of decisions can be identified to assist decision-making which is positive for children. The impact on particularly vulnerable children will be highlighted. In this way they will contribute to keeping children's issues to the fore in the government decision-making process. All government departments will be required to include child impact analysis as part of their Departmental Strategy Statements, which are produced every three years and guide departmental actions over the relevant period. This practice will be extended where possible to state agencies.

Quality Standards

The development of standards for children's service provision will be an essential part of ensuring that such services contribute to good outcomes for children. Work has already begun in this area. An example is the national standards adopted by the Department of Health and Children in association with the Irish Social Services Inspectorate which set criteria for the inspection of children's residential centres. The adoption of standards for children's services and supports will be developed, drawing on quality research and examples of good practice. This should include developing specific standards for children's services which are provided as part of a universal service.

4.4

MAINTAINING THE FOCUS

Maintaining progress in building the research and information base and enhancing research capacity over the ten years of the Strategy will be assisted by the establishment of a Research Development Advisory Group. The Group will comprise researchers specialising in children, policy makers, service providers and international experts. This is one way in which links between the research community and

the planning and service delivery sectors will be created. The Group will be tasked to report on:

- ★ **maintaining a focus in research on the Strategy and its principles;**
- ★ **advising on the allocation of funding under the Children's Research Programme;**
- ★ **priority areas for research on children's lives and children's services;**
- ★ **mechanisms for the expansion of education and training in research and the development of career paths in the area of children's research.**

Building a strong research and information base will support the delivery of both the other two National Goals.



Chapter 5

National Goal

Children will Receive Quality Supports and Services

"I just need a chance in life to show people who I really am and to reach my potential, a chance to have a nice life - a chance is not too much to ask for!"

"In order for services to be directed more towards prevention, it is important to consider child welfare as part of a broader remit. Changes are required at a number of different levels, including national policy level in relation to prioritising prevention, at agency level in relation to mandating and prioritising such work and at individual level in relation to providing adequate support to staff such as supervision and training to facilitate this work to be carried out."

Quotes from the public consultation

5.1

ADDRESSING ALL ASPECTS OF CHILDREN'S LIVES

A key aim of this National Goal of the Strategy is to refocus the supports and services provided to children so that they address children's basic needs, provide for the additional needs of some children and support families and communities in supporting children. This will be achieved by ensuring that supports and services address the full range of children's needs, that they are provided in child-friendly settings and delivered in ways which make them accessible to all children, removing the barriers which prevent access for some children.

Parents want their children to have a happy and successful childhood and are quick to act to provide them with the things that will help them achieve this. They recognise the wide range of their children's needs, their need for love and security, for the basics of food and shelter and for a good education and a good start in life. When it is seen that a child is not coping, parents do not delay intervention but act quickly to prevent problems developing. These responses by parents can be characterised as positive, holistic, comprehensive and proactive. These are also the characteristics which should be reflected in the services provided to children by schools, local crèches, sports or youth clubs or community health services. To achieve this it will be necessary to reorientate the supports and services so that:

- ★ they provide a strong community-based response;
- ★ there is a renewed emphasis on prevention and early intervention;
- ★ the supports and services are fully integrated and more easily accessed.

Providing a Strong Community-Based Response

The range of supports and services which all children need is broad. This is reflected in the nine developmental dimensions of the 'whole child' perspective (see Box 2.1). The perspective also highlights the importance of family and community in meeting children's needs. Accordingly, supports and services which children and parents need should be provided primarily through the activities and relationships which children and parents have in their local communities. In doing this, account must be taken of the needs of individual children and the preferences of parents. This will require opening up access to schools, health services, play areas, youth activities and cultural activities. Supporting and expanding the variety of these services will be an important part of the Strategy so that children in all parts of the country have access to a range of supports and services in ways which are inclusive and non-stigmatising.

By means of the Strategy the Government is providing a lead to be followed by local communities in developing their own plans, identifying the range of services to be provided to meet the needs of their area and supporting the particular cultures of some groups. Gaps in services will also be identified and measures to tackle them set out. The Government is particularly committed to providing additional resources to develop more opportunities for play, leisure and cultural activities. The consultation with children made it clear that this is an area requiring significant investment. In allocating resources, particular attention will be given to targeting disadvantaged communities as it is now recognised that they may require a higher level of service over a long period. The development of local plans in all areas must involve service users, particularly children themselves, in partnership with the local, statutory and voluntary providers. The process for developing these plans is set out in Chapter Six.

Integrated and Easily-Accessed Services

Delivering wide-ranging services at national and local levels presents a major challenge of co-ordination. If supports and services are to have optimum impact on children's lives, better ways to link services must be found. Providing a local integrated plan for children is the first step. As well as setting out the range of services to be provided, these plans must also identify which agency is responsible for which aspect of the plan. It must also provide for the links between services which must be created so that children and families are facilitated and their entry to services made easier. In regard to drawing together service providers, it is proposed to explore what lessons can be learnt from having specialist children's professionals trained within the 'pedagogic' tradition of other European countries.

As well as developing new ways of working between mainstream services, it will also be necessary to create more effective links between community services and the special child welfare, child mental and physical health, and juvenile justice services. This approach will require closer working relationships and more innovative approaches to how schools, health services, local youth and community groups and local libraries and other leisure and cultural bodies plan and deliver their services. This type of coherent service provision is still relatively underdeveloped in Ireland. However, there are existing policy initiatives of this type, such as the Springboard Projects, the Integrated Services Projects and the Family and Community Service Resource Centres. Encouraging the use of services will be promoted in part by providing better information.

At national level there are important policy initiatives, such as the new National Health Promotion Strategy and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, that the Strategy will link into in order to ensure that they include a definite children's focus. Similarly, the Strategy will link into and provide a child focus for the investment to be made in projects and infrastructure under the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000 — 2006. Developments under the NDP in areas such as childcare, recreational infrastructure, community development, family services, housing, roads,

transport, and so on, will be informed by the Strategy and advanced in ways which benefit children.

Renewed Emphasis on Prevention and Early Intervention

There has been public concern over the increasing number of children who are presenting with needs that existing services appear unable to meet either because there are barriers to accessing them or because they are not appropriate. There is also disquiet at what appear to be growing levels of substance abuse and violence, the number of children with mental health problems, teenage suicides and the number of children in crisis appearing before the Courts. While it is important to ensure that there is an appropriate response to these problem behaviours, it is also necessary to see them, in part at least, as indicative of an imbalance in service provision leaning towards treatment rather than prevention. There will be a major expansion of preventative and early intervention services to ensure that issues can be addressed in a timely and more effective manner. It is evident from the consultation process that children and those working with them would welcome support for preventative and diversionary programmes. The Government is committed to increasing investment in these services over the period of the Strategy. The thrust of this investment will be to build on existing provision that has been demonstrated to be effective and to encourage and support the piloting of new initiatives.



5.2

THE OBJECTIVES

There are fourteen objectives associated with this National Goal, reflecting the need to encourage a comprehensive response to children's varied needs. This response should reinforce the importance of the community services, which are fully integrated and accessible, and re-emphasise prevention and early intervention. While the objectives are set out individually, it is essential that they are understood as interrelated and reinforcing of each other. It will be an important part of implementing the Strategy that the measures taken reflect their cross-cutting nature. In addition, implementation will reflect the need to ensure higher levels of service over a long period if necessary.

Because of the number of objectives associated with this National Goal, they have been listed alphabetically and grouped under the following three headings:

- ★ All children have a basic range of needs;
- ★ Some children have additional needs;
- ★ All children need the support of family and community.

Group 1:

All children have a basic range of needs

All children need the foundations of a good education which focuses on personal development, health services which address their particular physical and mental needs and access to a range of opportunities to develop positive relationships and supportive networks through sport, play, leisure and cultural activities. These needs are addressed in this grouping. The major gap in these services identified during the consultation process with children was the need for more play and leisure opportunities in local communities. This is given special attention.

Policies and services must prioritise and be assessed by their contribution to the quality of each child's daily living experience in the home, the school, the neighbourhood and beyond. Children are more than mere consumers of services, such as education and

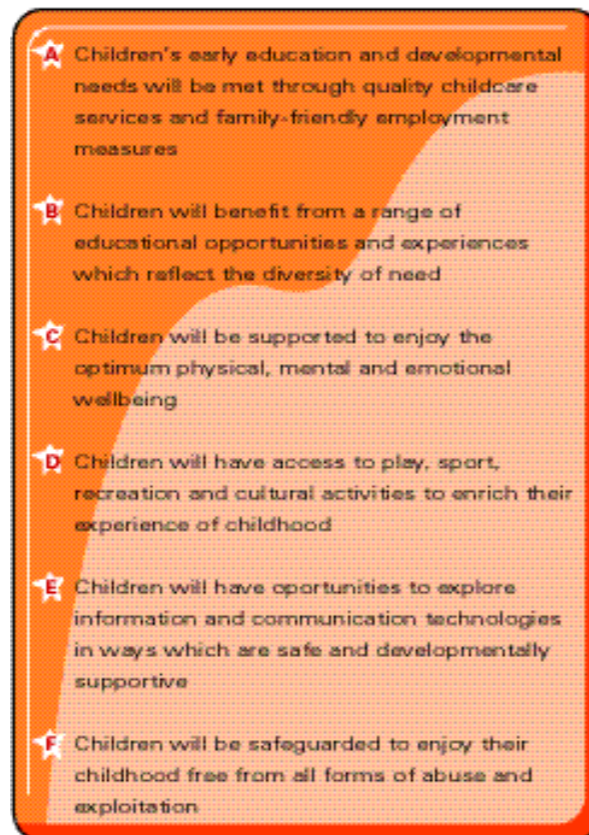
health services, they also need opportunities to relax, have fun, exercise their imaginations and cultivate a sense of the aesthetic.

This view has implications for public policy and key service areas such as pre-school education and health services. For example, individual assessment must be at the heart of these services if each child is to have a service tailored to his or her needs. This will require a re-orientation in many of the services. This is addressed in the objectives under this heading.

The Preamble to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states:

that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.

The following objectives seek to promote quality of life experiences for individual children and to foster social and community values in children.



A vertical infographic box with an orange background and a white wavy shape on the right side. It contains six bullet points, each with a star icon and a letter from A to F.

- A Children's early education and developmental needs will be met through quality childcare services and family-friendly employment measures
- B Children will benefit from a range of educational opportunities and experiences which reflect the diversity of need
- C Children will be supported to enjoy the optimum physical, mental and emotional wellbeing
- D Children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood
- E Children will have opportunities to explore information and communication technologies in ways which are safe and developmentally supportive
- F Children will be safeguarded to enjoy their childhood free from all forms of abuse and exploitation

Group 2:

Some children have additional needs

Because of social exclusion, some children cannot develop the range and quality of relationships and networks that most children enjoy and which are essential to a good quality of childhood.

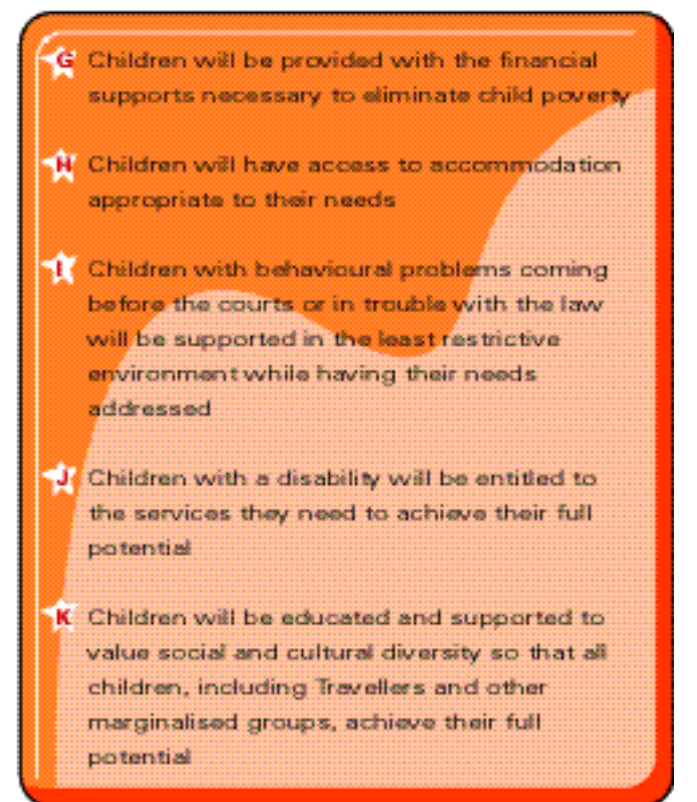
Reflecting the aspirations of the Goal the Government is committed to a policy of social inclusion and equity. That commitment is shared by the Social Partners and is reflected in the terms of the national partnership agreements, including the most recent one, the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*.

Tackling social disadvantage will continue to be a major imperative under the Strategy. The implications for the health and education services have been identified in the objectives set out in group 1. In this group, specific issues which were raised in the consultation process are addressed. Particular barriers which prevent some children from achieving a better quality of life are identified and measures to tackle them are set out.

The Preamble to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises:

that in all countries in the world, there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, and that such children need special consideration.

The following objectives build on the Government's Social Inclusion Initiative and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.



A vertical infographic box with an orange background and a white wavy shape on the right side. It contains four bullet points, each with a star icon and a letter from G to K.

- G Children will be provided with the financial supports necessary to eliminate child poverty
- H Children will have access to accommodation appropriate to their needs
- I Children with behavioural problems coming before the courts or in trouble with the law will be supported in the least restrictive environment while having their needs addressed
- J Children with a disability will be entitled to the services they need to achieve their full potential
- K Children will be educated and supported to value social and cultural diversity so that all children, including Travellers and other marginalised groups, achieve their full potential

Group 3:

All children need the support of family and community

The Final Report of the Commission on the Family, *Strengthening Families For Life*, identified the experience of family living as the single greatest influence on an individual's life. This is also reflected in the family provisions of the Constitution. A supportive family environment is the foundation on which children can build the wider network of relationships they need. Supporting families is, therefore, essential to supporting children.

The Government is committed to protecting the family through political, economic, social and other measures, which will support the stability of the family. The 'Families First' policy approach and the Report of the Commission on the Family promote support for parents and their children in an inclusive way. Both are designed to make families central to policy making and the delivery of services. This theme is continued in the Strategy.

Community involvement is also an essential part of children's support. There is a long tradition of community support in Ireland. A major policy statement on supporting voluntary community activity, The White Paper on *Supporting Voluntary Activity*, has been published. The Strategy seeks to support its approach. Finally, the physical environment in which people live impacts on their lives and this aspect is also addressed.

The approach is supported by the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognises in its Preamble:

that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding

The following objectives build on these and other related initiatives as an effective way of supporting children.

- ★ Children will have the opportunity to experience the qualities of family life
- ★ Children will benefit from and contribute to vibrant local communities
- ★ Children will benefit from a built and natural environment which supports their physical and emotional wellbeing

5.3

DETAILING THE OBJECTIVES

Translating the fourteen objectives associated with this National Goal requires an extensive programme of measures which require implementation at both national and local levels. This detail can be found in the following Schedule of Objectives, which places each objective within its particular policy context, reviews recent initiatives and sets out the further action to be taken in the short to medium term by the relevant government departments. However, to achieve the fourteen objectives they must become a focus for everyone concerned with the delivery of supports and services for children.

These measures will be implemented through the normal government budgetary and decision-making process. They reflect existing government commitments and policies and the current approach to children's issues. The two previous Goals of the Strategy seek to integrate research findings and children's views into policy and service development. Therefore, as the Strategy is implemented and the operational principles and 'whole child' perspective become established, new measures and changes to some of the measures set out in the Schedule should be expected. This capacity for change and redirection is an important aspect of the Strategy, reflecting its ten-year timeframe.



Schedule of Objectives

"I think Ireland is a cool place to grow up. Except perhaps when a child is ill, like I am. Well really, I'm a child with a long-term illness."

"I wish I could be safe on the street when I am on my own."

"I would like to see more done for disabled children in Ireland...My sister is very intelligent, but when she gets bigger there is nowhere near for her to be educated."

"Irish people have a great sense of unity and children who grow up in Ireland feel like they belong to a community, something more than just a family."

"Please make it a law that builders must provide more space for a park and children's facilities and supply access to transport to the nearest shop and town centre."

Quotes from the public consultation

Group 1:

All Children Have a Basic Range of Needs

Objective A

Children's early education and developmental needs will be met through quality childcare services and family-friendly employment measures

Policy Context

The early education and developmental needs of children can be met in a variety of circumstances. Childcare services outside the home are described by the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare as 'day-care facilities and services for pre-school children and school-going children out of school hours'. The aim of this objective is to ensure that all children have access to quality support services offering early education, developmental and socialisation opportunities. Services for school-going children are dealt with under the next objective.

The availability of affordable quality childcare places and supports for parents in their childcare responsibilities are major issues. Compared with our EU partners the Irish childcare sector is underdeveloped and, according to the Report of the Expert Working Group, the cost of childcare services in Ireland as a proportion of average earnings is among the highest in Europe. Changed demographic and socio-economic circumstances, not least of which has been the ongoing increase in labour market participation rates by married women, have brought increased pressure on an underdeveloped childcare sector and, in some circumstances, reduced the affordability of quality childcare services. In response to a tightening labour market, family-friendly employment policies are increasingly becoming a feature of the workplace as

employers endeavour to attract and retain qualified staff. The 1999 EU Employment Guidelines pointed to the importance of family-friendly policies, while the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) referred to the need for a balance to be struck between work and family responsibilities.

Supporting parents with their child-rearing responsibilities and the provision of childcare services and facilities feature in Article 18 of the UN Convention. Much progress is being made towards meeting our obligations in this regard.

Recent Initiatives

- ★ **The identification of childcare as a priority in the National Development Plan under which £250m was provided for the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme, the aim of which is to improve the quality of childcare in Ireland and to increase the number of childcare facilities and places.**
- ★ **The allocation of an additional £40m to the development of childcare, as part of a Government package to counter inflation.**
- ★ **The allocation of £74m in the National Development Plan to implement the *White Paper on Early Childhood Education*.**
- ★ **£5m provided for the provision of out-of-school childcare services by community based groups.**
- ★ **A National Childcare Census has been produced which gives facts and figures on a county basis of group-based childcare service provision, thereby providing baseline information for future planning of childcare services.**

- ★ **The publication of an information booklet detailing childcare funding available from all government departments and agencies.**
- ★ **Statutory entitlements and a range of non-statutory initiatives which support parents to reconcile their work and family lives have been implemented, with most progress being made in the public sector.**
- ★ **A review of Maternity Protection legislation and Ireland's support for an International Labour Organisation Convention and Recommendation on Maternity Protection at Work.**
- ★ **The establishment of a National Framework for Family-Friendly Policies under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness and the inclusion of £4m in the National Development Plan (2000-2006) for a project on family-friendly arrangements in employment. The National Framework Committee will deliver this project.**
- ★ **A variety of income support mechanisms to assist families with children are in place, the principal support being Child Benefit.**

A key challenge in this period of expansion will be to ensure that the needs of children are the primary consideration in the development of new quality places. Quality childcare and early childhood education services provide lasting cognitive, social and emotional benefits for children, particularly those with special needs or who are disadvantaged, and they have the capacity to meet the holistic needs of children as identified in the 'whole child' perspective.

Benefits of Early Childhood Programmes for Children

Changes in	Nature of the Change
Pay the social Development	Improved cognitive development (thinking, reasoning); improved social development (relationship to others); improved emotional development (self-image, security); improved language skills.
Health and Nutrition	Increased survival rates; reduced morbidity; improved hygiene; improved weight/height for age; improved micronutrient balance.
Progress and Performance in Primary School	Learning and better performance; less chance of repeating.

Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare

The *White Paper on Early Childhood Education* sets out proposals for developing the range and quality of early education opportunities, with a particular focus on the disadvantaged and those with special needs. It provides for special assistance to these groups, including support and improvement of existing services, training of service providers and additional provision of early childhood education through local communities and direct State provision. It also provides for the development of a Quality in Education mark which will be awarded to providers of early education services who meet defined standards concerning staff qualifications, training, learning objectives, methodologies and curriculum. The value of involving parents in their children's early education is also recognised in the White Paper and a strategy to facilitate and encourage parents' involvement is proposed.

Family-friendly employment policies have the capacity to reduce the demand for paid childcare and further advances in this area will support the achievement of Objective L. The National Framework for Family-Friendly Policies will identify national-level actions to be taken by the Social

Partners to support the development of family-friendly policies in the workplace.

The aim will be to provide a childcare sector comparable with the best of our EU partners, and services which adopt child developmental standards consistent with the requirements of the 'whole child' perspective. The need to provide appropriate supports to parents undertaking their children's early education and care in the home will also be addressed through home-based child development programmes and other family-friendly employment initiatives.

Further Actions Proposed

- ★ There will be continued investment in the supply of childcare places in the voluntary, community and private sectors to meet identified needs.
- ★ Early education and child development programmes will be developed, based on the *White Paper on Early Childhood Education*, to meet the needs of all children, including children in the home, as part of a quality service programme.
- ★ A draft framework will be developed to address qualification, accreditation and certification for the childcare sector, the final version of which will be submitted to the National Qualifications Authority; related staff training and development will be supported.
- ★ Funding will be provided to further our understanding of children's early developmental needs by commissioning and disseminating research.
- ★ County and City Childcare Committees will be established to develop a co-ordinated strategy for childcare provision in each county and city area.
- ★ The Maternity Protection Act, 1994, will be amended to provide, inter alia, for additional maternity leave.
- ★ The Parental Leave Act, 1998, will be reviewed.
- ★ Further measures will be put in place to promote family-friendly work arrangements.

Objective B

Children will benefit from a range of educational opportunities and experiences which reflect the diversity of need

Policy Context

Our school system provides a formal education for children. However, the family is recognised by the Constitution as the primary and natural educator of the child. The importance of the family and the community in the education of children has been recognised in recent years. As a result, increased links have been made between the family, community and schools. These links will be enhanced in the future.

State expenditure in education has increased from £1.4 billion in 1990 to £3.3 billion in 2000. In the same period, the number of pupils leaving school without a final upper-secondary school-leaving qualification has decreased and more pupils are progressing to third-level education. The education system has changed over the last decade to reflect the changes in society and to meet the needs of our modern economy. This has resulted in increased diversity and choice within the education system for all pupils.

Education must encompass all aspects of the 'whole child' perspective. While it is important that all children leave school with a suitable qualification, the wider focus of education on social, emotional and behavioural wellbeing and physical and mental health is also recognised. The recent introduction of Social, Personal and Health Education to primary schools and to the junior cycle of post-primary schools is a recognition of the importance of this area in children's education.

Recent Initiatives

- ★ The enactment of the Education Act, 1998, which sets out a statutory framework within which the Irish education system can operate and develop, and which entitles all children to receive the support services and quality of education appropriate to their needs and abilities.
- ★ The enactment of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, which provides a comprehensive national system for

ensuring that children of compulsory school-going age attend school, or, if they do not attend school, that they receive at least a minimum education.

- ★ The introduction of a revised primary school curriculum with the focus on the child as a learner.
- ★ The introduction of a number of new programmes at second-level to cater for students whose learning needs were not adequately met by the standard Junior and Leaving Certificates.
- ★ The introduction of the £194 million plan to tackle educational disadvantage at all levels in the period 2000-2002. This expenditure includes:
 - ★ a new disadvantaged schools scheme at primary level;
 - ★ the development of a primary pupil database;
 - ★ promotion of measures to tackle early school leaving;
 - ★ further guidance initiatives;
 - ★ expansion of school development planning;
 - ★ promotion of participation at third-level by students with disabilities, mature students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds through a third-level access fund.
- ★ The creation of an additional 1,100 primary and 1,400 post-primary teaching posts over the years 2000 — 2002.

While the majority of children receive a good quality education, many children suffer from educational disadvantage because of where they live, poverty, unemployment, poor educational attainment of parents and their socio-economic group. These factors are known to be associated with early school leaving, literacy problems and poor or no educational qualifications, which in turn can lead to unemployment, poverty, involvement in crime and diminished life opportunities. In recent years the education system has given increased attention to these problems and the approaches developed to tackle and actively to compensate for these inequalities will be enhanced through the Strategy.

There is a need to develop after-school and out-of-school care services which have an education and play element.

Some initiatives have been taken in this area recently under the programmes to combat early school leaving. The 'Stay in School Initiative' and the '8 to 15 Early School Leaver Initiative', provide after-school learning supports, including homework clubs and activities during the school holidays, to young people in disadvantaged areas. The effectiveness of these programmes will be assessed with a view to expanding their provision into new communities.

For older children, the increasing availability of part-time jobs and the opportunities to leave school early to take up unskilled employment are pressures which can interfere in a young person's successful completion of his/her schooling. Measures will be taken to ensure that benefiting from such opportunities does not interfere in children's education. For those who decide to leave school early, there is a special need to ensure that they receive on-the-job training and that there are opportunities to return to education later. The Education Welfare Act, 2000 provides for the identification of early school leavers who enter the workforce and once identified, the National Educational (Welfare) Board will assist them in accessing continuing education and training.

The Strategy will aim to ensure that the education system delivers a comprehensive, high-quality education service, which provides every child with an education suitable to their needs and which enables children to optimise their social and intellectual skills, with a focus on the personal development of the individual child.

Further Actions Proposed

- ★ A National Educational Psychological Service will be provided to all schools.
- ★ To aim to ensure that all children have the necessary literacy and numeracy skills when leaving school; measures will be implemented which include a public awareness campaign, an improvement of the effectiveness of the school remedial service, better home/school co-operation on literacy, the development of support materials and the systematic monitoring of progress.
- ★ The quality of the teaching profession will be enhanced by continued expenditure on the in-career

development of teachers and trainers and the enactment of the Teaching Council Bill which will provide teachers with a formal structure to regulate their own profession.

- ★ The Education Welfare Board will be established, and Education Welfare Officers will be appointed under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000.
- ★ The effectiveness of the measures which have been taken to address educational disadvantage and early school leaving will be assessed and any necessary remedial action taken, including the introduction of new measures where appropriate.
- ★ A national policy on after-school and out-of-school care services will be developed to support the provision of a quality service.
- ★ The implementation of personal development programmes in schools will be supported and encouraged.
- ★ A review of the effectiveness of the enforcement of the Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act, 1996 will be undertaken to ensure that participation in work does not interfere in children's education.

Objective C

Children will be supported to enjoy the optimum physical, mental and emotional wellbeing

Policy Context

Since the publication of the National Health Strategy, *Shaping a Healthier Future*, in 1994, there has been significant progress in re-orientating the health care system towards a focus on outcomes and measuring health and social gain and this will continue to be a dominant theme.

Nonetheless, there are shortcomings in some areas of our health services for children. The take-up of immunisations remains lower than acceptable. There are waiting lists for certain acute procedures, in particular ENT, cardiac surgery and orthodontics. There is also evidence of a lower health status in disadvantaged groups, including Traveller children. Sometimes children are treated in settings far away from their families or in services which are not tailored to the needs of children. Services to meet the mental health and emotional needs of children continue to need expansion.

The challenge for children's health and personal social services in the next decade will include responding to:

- ★ the changing pattern of disease, rising rates of adolescent suicide, sexually transmitted diseases, asthma, and the increase in child obesity and other eating disorders;
- ★ the need to tackle the social causes of disease, including poverty, homelessness and rural isolation;
- ★ the impact of advances in medicine and surgery which mean that children who would have died are now surviving, particularly children with multiple disabilities;
- ★ the participation of children in damaging behaviours including smoking, alcohol consumption and drug abuse.

Recent Initiatives

- ★ Dedicated health promotion departments have been established in all health boards to oversee the development and implementation of health promotion programmes/initiatives at regional level.
- ★ The second National Health Promotion Strategy was launched in 2000. Its strategic aim in relation to children is 'to support the development of partnerships with families and relevant bodies to promote a holistic approach to the physical and mental wellbeing of children'.
- ★ The development and implementation of support for school and community based programmes and projects under various headings and topics, e.g. Substance Abuse Prevention Programme, Drink Awareness for Everyone, Nutrition Education at Primary School, the National Youth Health Programme.
- ★ A working group to advise the Minister for Health and Children on the development of child and adolescent psychiatric services was established in June 2000 and will make an interim report to the Minister by the end of the year. Funding has been provided under the NDP for a number of child and adolescent in-patient psychiatric units and plans are also under way to develop additional day facilities.
- ★ Considerable progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the National Task Force on Suicide, including the expansion of services for at-risk groups, such as young males aged under 25.
- ★ Social, Personal and Health Education is being introduced to primary schools as part of the core curriculum at junior cycle. This programme includes new initiatives on substance misuse prevention, 'Walk Tall' at primary level and 'On My Own Two Feet' at post-primary level.

Childhood is a developmental period when the foundations for good health in future life will be laid down. More effective health-promotion strategies for

children will be introduced. Timely access to hospital services, provided in appropriate settings, is of vital importance and children's waiting lists will be targeted with special measures. The need to manage children's health services in a more co-ordinated way will also be addressed.

Further Actions Proposed

- ★ Children from birth to twelve years of age will be provided with appropriate health and personal social services through the implementation of the Best Health for Children Programme.
- ★ An appropriate programme will also be provided for twelve - eighteen year-old adolescents which will address:
 - ★ mental and emotional health needs;
 - ★ chronic illness, including diabetes;
 - ★ accidents and injuries;
 - ★ children at risk;
 - ★ co-ordination of community general practitioner and acute hospital services;
- ★ Continued progress towards the national target of 95% uptake in the Primary Childhood Immunisation Programme.
- ★ Efforts will continue to increase the number of mothers who breastfeed their babies. This will include a comprehensive review of the National Breastfeeding Policy (1994).
- ★ Children's waiting lists are to be specially targeted, including waiting times for ENT, cardiac and orthodontic procedures.
- ★ Cross-sectoral programmes which address the issues of sexual health, teenage pregnancy, healthy eating and exercise will be developed as part of the implementation of the National Health Promotion Strategy proposals in relation to the wellbeing of children.

- ★ Specialist drug treatment services for the under-eighteens will be expanded as part of the National Drugs Strategy.
- ★ A national strategy to improve the health status of the Traveller Community will be published by the end of the year 2000.
- ★ New arrangements will be introduced for planning and managing children's services at national and health board levels.

Objective D

Children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood

Policy Context

Play, recreation and cultural activities are essential childhood experiences which enrich the lives of children and provide them with experiences and competencies that will serve them well in later life. They support children's development along all dimensions of the 'whole child' perspective and are central to their development on the social and peer relationships dimension. They have a strong effect on their future health and wellbeing, particularly those affected by disadvantage, substance abuse, crime and social exclusion. Their importance in children's lives is reflected in Article 31 of the UN Convention.

Comparatively little is known about children's participation in recreational and cultural activities outside of the education system. However there is evidence to show that children take less exercise as they get older and that leisure pursuits such as television, video, video games and the internet play a greater part in their socialisation. There is a need for more research in this area.

The need for more opportunities for community-based play, leisure and cultural activities was high on the list of the issues raised by children during the consultation process. The absence of such opportunities may be a contributory factor in their current play and recreational preferences.

Recent Initiatives

- ★ The establishment of a statutory Irish Sports Council with a remit, inter alia, to develop strategies for increasing participation in recreational sport.
- ★ The piloting of programmes by the Irish Sports Council aimed at increasing participation in sport and physical recreation, involving both schools and the community.

- ★ Publication by the Irish Sports Council of its strategy, *A New Era for Irish Sport*, which includes a commitment to the promotion and development of sport at local level.
- ★ An increased focus on physical education and sport in the education system, including a revised P.E. programme at primary level, a pilot programme introducing P.E. onto the leaving certificate curriculum and the launch of a primary school sports initiative.
- ★ The introduction of a revised Sport Capital Programme through which grants are made available to voluntary and community organisations and local authorities towards the development of new facilities or the renovation of existing ones.
- ★ The commencement of a programme of refurbishment of local authority swimming pools.
- ★ Support for the provision of sporting and leisure facilities in areas of high drug misuse under the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund.
- ★ Measures outlined in the *Arts Council Plan* to increase opportunities for children to engage with the arts.

More needs to be done at local level to provide a greater range of experiences and opportunities for children in the wider context, in addition to sport, in the areas of play, leisure and cultural activities. It is clear from submissions to the National Children's Strategy that with additional investment there is scope to expand the work of the voluntary sector in providing leisure opportunities. There is also a very evident need to develop play facilities as part of local government development under the National Development Plan. A recent survey of local authorities found that 53% of respondents (69% response rate) provided play facilities. A number of local authorities are currently developing play policies. These policies will need to address the issue of funding and insurance costs which may have acted as disincentives to investment in this area. Concerns about safety and insurance may also be restricting certain play activities in schools.

The National Children's Strategy will aim to ensure that our response to the play, recreation and cultural needs of children is developed in a strategic way which supports the achievement of positive developmental outcomes.

Further Actions Proposed

- ★ National play and recreation policies will be developed which will provide a comprehensive approach to children's play and recreation including:
 - ★ guiding principles;
 - ★ a partnership approach with the voluntary/ community sector;
 - ★ developing a play infrastructure;
 - ★ funding arrangements.
- ★ Local sport and recreation projects will be developed by the Irish Sports Council through the establishment of Local Sports Partnerships to promote the development of sport and recreation and to develop leadership co-ordination and direction, particularly in disadvantaged areas. In developing these proposals, the Irish Sports Council will liaise with relevant statutory and community groups, local authorities and other agencies towards the provision of sport and recreational facilities.
- ★ Financial supports will be provided to local voluntary and community groups, local authorities and other agencies towards the provision of sport and recreational facilities under the Sport Capital Programme, the National Development Plan and the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund.
- ★ A National Youth Work Development Plan (2002-2006) will be published to promote the development and enhancement of youth work. The plan will seek to identify the role and scope of youth work provision and the structures, funding and human resources necessary for the further development of effective youth work.
- ★ Local play and recreation needs will be incorporated into the Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural

Development being prepared by each County and City Development Board.

- ★ Each local authority will designate an officer to be responsible for the development of play and recreation activity. This officer will liaise with the Irish Sports Council in the development of such activities.
- ★ More opportunities will be provided for participation in arts and cultural activity through the development of proposals to increase children's engagement, beginning with the *Arts Plan 1999-2001*.

Objective E

Children will have opportunities to explore information and communication technologies in ways which are safe and developmentally supportive

Policy Context

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as television, video, video games, mobile phones and the Internet permeate all aspects of our economic and social life. Such technologies have contributed significantly to the growth in our economy. According to the OECD Information Technology Outlook 2000, Ireland is the largest exporter of software goods in the world. Such technology has also contributed to an increase in the pace of change our society has experienced over the past twenty years.

ICTs demand quicker response times, swifter skills updating and a new openness and flexibility to change. Children in particular, having an innate capacity to explore the unknown or unfamiliar, have accepted this change and ICTs play a major part in their socialisation as both a leisure and education tool. ICTs offer new potential for children living in isolated rural areas and children with a disability. However, the impact of the information society on children and childhood is under-explored. As yet, we do not know how many households with children have PC.s and Internet, the number of children with mobile phones, or how often they use these facilities. A small amount of research has been carried out on the use of information technology in schools. Information supplied by the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) shows that 61% of primary teachers, 59% of post-primary teachers and 77% of students in primary and post-primary schools use the Internet to some extent.

Technology has brought with it new threats to children's health and safety. There are concerns about Internet addiction. There are also dangers resulting from exposure to pornography and the risk from paedophile rings. A UN report entitled, *Technology and its Impact on the Family*, identified many of the issues surrounding ICTs

and their effects, and supports this analysis.

In order to ensure that all children have access to ICTs and are educated in the use of these technologies, a comprehensive I.T. programme for schools was launched in 1997. As a result of this programme there are now approximately 60,000 computers in Irish schools. Almost all schools are now connected to the Internet and over 90% of schools use e-mail actively. A comprehensive teacher-training programme in the use of ICTs is ongoing and ICT training is now included in pre-service training for teachers. A comprehensive national and local support network is in place for teachers, parents and pupils to ensure that they can gain maximum benefit from ICTs.

Recent Initiatives

- ★ The establishment of the Information Society Commission to advise the Government on shaping and implementing a strategic framework for the development of the Information Society in Ireland by exploring its potential.
- ★ The establishment of the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) to develop and implement the information technology programme in schools.
- ★ The launch of Scoilnet, the educational website, which provides an on-line advisory and support service for teachers, pupils and parents. This website receives an average of 900,000 hits per month during the school year.
- ★ Publication of a report entitled, *The Illegal and Harmful Use of the Internet*, commissioned by the Government.
- ★ Establishment by the Internet service-provider industry of a self-regulating system overseen by an Internet Advisory Board. Scoilnet addresses this issue by approving all content before it is posted on site and by advising parents and teachers about protecting children while on line.

The positive aspects of ICTs as a means of supporting the development of the child will be promoted, while the need for children to be educated on the potential negative

effects is also recognised. This approach is in line with our obligations under Articles 19, 34 and 36 of the UN Convention.

Further Actions Proposed

- ★ Research will be commissioned into the impact of a wide range of technologies on children.
- ★ Continued investment will be directed to schools' information technology programmes to ensure that every classroom is connected to the Internet, the ratio of computers to pupils is significantly improved, ICT training is available for teachers and technology is used in the implementation of an advanced curriculum support programme.
- ★ To aim to ensure that all children leaving formal education have an appropriate training in the use of technology.
- ★ In progressing *Implementing the Information Society in Ireland: An Action Plan* special attention will be given to addressing the specific needs of children.
- ★ The private and public sector working in information and communication technologies will develop in partnership a code of ethics in relation to children's issues.

Objective F

Children will be safeguarded to enjoy their childhood free from all forms of abuse and exploitation

Policy Context

The decade of the 1990s was one where our society recognised its failure to protect our children from abuse both in the community and in the institutions maintained by the State. However, a concerted effort and substantial progress were also made during the 1990s to strengthen services for the protection and welfare of children, in line with our obligations under Articles 19, 34 and 36 of the UN Convention. This followed the enactment of the Child Care Act, 1991, which updated the law in relation to the care of children, particularly children who were abused or at risk. Over £100 million has been invested in the implementation of the Act, in particular in providing an infrastructure of child care and family support services in all health board areas.

In order to reduce the trauma of child witnesses in court cases, the Criminal Evidence Act, 1992, provided for the giving of evidence by persons under seventeen years of age by live television link. Apart from the video link facility, there are no facilities specifically designed to meet the needs of children in courthouses at present. Children can find the process of attending court daunting, particularly in abuse case hearings. The stress can be reduced by an awareness of the court system and of what is expected of the child witness.

Recent Initiatives

- ★ The enactment of the **Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998**, which provides immunity from civil liability to persons who report child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to the statutory authorities.
- ★ The publication of '*Children First - National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*' in September 1999. These new national guidelines provide a more comprehensive inter-agency approach to protecting children.

- ★ The availability of preparatory packs for child witnesses and their parents or guardians and the development of an information programme for children either appearing before the courts or attending court with their parents or guardian in family law cases.
- ★ The preparation of plans for a new Family Law Centre in Dublin which will have full facilities for children attending court.
- ★ The establishment of the Irish Social Services Inspectorate in 1999. The Inspectorate has concentrated on the inspection of children's residential services during its first year in operation.
- ★ The publication of the Children Bill, 1999, which contains child protection measures.
- ★ The publication of the Sex Offenders Bill, 2000, which provides, inter alia, for the establishment of a sex offenders register in this country.
- ★ Establishment of the Commission to Inquire into Childhood Abuse.
- ★ The amendment of the Statute of Limitations as it applies to actions for damages for child sex abuse.
- ★ The Government commitment to the introduction of mandatory reporting of child abuse and the imminent publication of a White Paper on this subject.

In 1999 a formal government apology was made to victims for the collective failure in relation to abuse in State institutions. The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse was established to listen to victims of childhood abuse who want to recount their experiences to a sympathetic forum; to fully investigate all allegations of abuse made to it, except where the victim does not wish for an investigation and to publish a report on its findings to the general public. The Government has also decided to establish a compensation awarding body for victims of institutional child abuse.

The need for vigilance is constant. If children are to develop supportive relationships it must be in a safe environment. Under the Strategy the additional legislative and administrative measures necessary to ensure the safety of all children will continue to be prioritised. Where abuse is identified, it is important that children are provided with high-quality treatment and care services appropriate to their needs. The Strategy will aim to ensure the availability of such services whenever they are required.

Further Actions Proposed

- ★ Measures will be developed in partnership with parents and the wider community for the prevention and early identification of neglect, abuse and exploitation of children through the expansion of family support services and the full implementation of *Children First* by health boards and all organisations providing services to children.
- ★ The Irish Social Services Inspectorate will be expanded so that it can monitor the quality of all aspects of child care services and provide guidance on standards and good practice for service providers.
- ★ Treatment and counselling services will be developed to try to minimise the trauma for children resulting from abuse.
- ★ A comprehensive child care information system will be developed to improve the efficiency of services at a local level and to allow evaluation of the effectiveness of services at regional and national level.
- ★ The enactment of the Children Bill and the Sex Offenders Bill will receive priority attention.
- ★ A revised *Code of Ethics for Good Practice in Children's Sport* will be published by the Irish Sports Council.
- ★ Over the lifetime of the Strategy, appropriate procedures will be put in place to ensure that Garda clearance is obtained in respect of any person seeking

employment involving regular, unsupervised contact with children.

- ★ All major courthouse refurbishment or building projects will be designed to include facilities for the use of video link and waiting rooms/areas and consultation rooms. The specific needs of children attending court will be considered in the context of a review of the court accommodation programme.
- ★ A general information booklet on the courts system will be distributed through schools, local libraries and information and community centres. Booklets and information leaflets will be made available on the Courts Service Website.
- ★ Court proceedings involving children will be kept under review to assess the best method of dealing with such cases. Any changes necessary will be addressed in the context of legislation which may be introduced in the area.
- ★ The Stockholm Agenda for Action Against Sexual Exploitation of Children² will be implemented.

²Under the Stockholm Agenda for Action, 122 governments, including Ireland, stated that they would develop National Action Plans to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Group 2:

Some Children Have Additional Needs

Objective G

Children will be provided with the financial supports necessary to eliminate child poverty

Policy Context

Poverty is a significant barrier, limiting children's potential and participation. Lack of adequate income is recognised as only one aspect of child poverty. The multi-dimensional nature of child poverty means that it impacts on all aspects of children's lives and therefore curtails their progress along the dimensions of need in the 'whole child' perspective. Poor children tend to do less well in school, suffer more ill health and are more likely to be homeless or become involved in criminal behaviour.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy has highlighted the position of children in poverty. As children do not have a direct income, the level of poverty in households with children is the primary indicator of the level of child poverty. The households most exposed to poverty are those where there are no working adults in the house, where there is one adult employed outside the home and another on household duties and in self-employed households (including farming). Larger families of three or more children and lone parent households are particularly exposed to poverty. Research from 1997³ shows that children are up to 1.27 times more likely to experience poverty than adults.

Early results of the Living in Ireland Survey, 1998 indicate a drop to 12% in the level of 'consistent poverty' among children. This is a drop of five points over one year and a striking decrease from the 1994 figure of 24%. Nonetheless much work remains to be done to tackle the multi-dimensional causes and effects of poverty.

³Living in Ireland Survey (ESRI) 1997

Recent Initiatives

- ★ Substantial increases in monthly rates of Child Benefit.
- ★ A £20 increase in back-to-school, clothing and footwear allowances.
- ★ A new Widowed Parents' Grant being paid to widows and widowers with children who are bereaved on or after 31 December, 1999.
- ★ Sizeable increases in Budget 2000 provided for all families in receipt of Social Welfare payments.

Employment is recognised as the best way out of poverty for families and considerable effort has been invested to facilitate the move for parents back into employment. A systematic approach to improving financial supports for children was adopted in the 1990s to address the anomalies creating unemployment and poverty traps for families; to reduce gradually the role of qualified child dependent increases under the social welfare payments system in favour of an enhanced role for Child Benefit; to taper the withdrawal of secondary benefits on return to employment and to ease parents' re-entry into labour markets. Such measures will be further developed over the lifetime of the Strategy.

Child benefit is an important means of reducing child poverty and supporting the welfare of children, given its universal coverage and its neutral relationship to both the employment incentive and decisions regarding family formation. Significant increases have been allocated directly to support and maintain children in Ireland. Child Benefit will continue to be increased over the lifetime of the Strategy.

Child poverty must be a major concern and it will continue to be a key priority for government. In view of its multi-faceted nature, tackling poverty requires a range of supports and interventions; these will be addressed further under this Goal. The expertise and resources necessary to tackle child poverty are now largely in place. Our strong economic position provides us with the capacity to tackle child poverty. The success of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy needs to be built on and re-orientated under this Strategy towards a more direct focus on children. This approach is consistent with Article 27 of the UN Convention.

Further Actions Proposed

- ★ **Targets for the elimination of child poverty will be set under the National Anti-Poverty Strategy in consultation with the Social Partners.**
- ★ **Child Benefit will be increased over the next three years with priority focus towards £100 per month for third and subsequent children, as provided for in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*.**
- ★ **Initiatives to support money management in families through the Money Advice and Budgeting Service will be expanded.**
- ★ **Legislation will be introduced to establish the Money Advice and Budgeting Service on a statutory basis.**
- ★ **The Working Group set up under the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* on the adequacy of adult and child social welfare payments will report in 2001.**
- ★ **Increased assistance will be provided through active measures for the long-term unemployed and socially excluded under the National Development Plan.**
- ★ **The range of proposals in *Review of One-Parent Family Payment* to further secure financial supports for lone parent families will be pursued.**
- ★ **Existing measures to assist in the return to education and employment will be targeted at single parents and the long-term unemployed.**

Objective H

Children will have access to accommodation appropriate to their needs

Policy Context

All children must have access to good-quality housing appropriate to their needs. Although not homeless, some children are members of families living in inappropriate accommodation. The availability of public housing and the cost of private housing remain major issues for public policy. Measures are being taken arising from the National Development Plan, in particular the Local Authority Housing Programme and the Voluntary Housing Programme, and the Bacon Reports to address these problems.

Youth homelessness is a relatively new phenomenon which is predominately urban and is strongly associated with children leaving care. A 1998 study by Focus Ireland showed 32% of children leaving health board care as having experienced some form of homelessness within the first six months. There are two categories of homeless children, those who are members of homeless families and those who have homes but who have decided to leave their homes for various reasons. The problem of children in homeless families is a separate problem and separate measures are in train under the aegis of the Department of the Environment and Local Government in this regard.

Although there is a need for more research into the causes, nature and extent of child homelessness in Ireland, an approach to tackling it is now emerging. In common with poverty, homelessness, which is also alluded to in Article 27 of the UN Convention, is a significant barrier to participation and progress along the dimensions of children's needs, as it is associated with low educational take-up, high levels of unemployment and high levels of social deprivation. The increasingly complex structure of family life, the weaker structure of community supports available to families in urban areas, and issues such as drug abuse and alcoholism among parents contribute to the incidence of homelessness and combine to make the task of tackling it all the more difficult.

Recent Initiatives

- ★ **Publication of the *Report of the Forum on Youth Homelessness* in April, 2000.**

- ★ **Launch of the Eastern Regional Health Authority action plan, Youth Homelessness, and approval of funding in 2000 to implement the first phase of the plan.**

Tackling the problems which lead to homelessness will require the co-ordinated efforts of the key agencies if the problem is to be overcome. The longer children remain homeless, the more difficult the task of re-integrating them into their families becomes, as they develop other problems such as involvement in drug taking and prostitution. Prevention and early intervention measures need to be taken to assist families and to provide supports within the community, directed towards keeping children with their families or, where that is not possible, providing assistance as soon as they decide to leave home. The measures outlined below are directed towards that end.

Further Actions Proposed

- ★ **To continue to ensure that families with children are prioritised for accommodation under the new streams of housing to become available under the Local Authority and Voluntary Housing Programmes.**
- ★ **A National Strategy for Homeless Youth will be published by the end of the year 2000.**
- ★ **Formal programmes to prepare young people for leaving care and to deliver after-care support will be introduced with the key objective of ensuring that no child leaving care is discharged into homelessness.**
- ★ **The Housing Forum will review the impact on children of housing developments.**
- ★ **Young homeless people will be provided with an adequate emergency response, including a day service, education and training and drug treatment services where necessary, tailored to their special needs.**
- ★ **Preventative and restorative programmes will be developed, both family and community based, and alternative supports to break the cycle of homelessness and reduce its incidence will be put in place.**

Objective I

Children with behavioural problems coming before the courts or in trouble with the law will be supported in the least restrictive environment while having their needs addressed

Policy Context

Children who are non-offending but who have severe emotional and behavioural problems have been coming before the courts and have been the focus of much public attention. The existing residential services will continue to be strengthened but there will be a renewed emphasis on expanding the community-based prevention and early intervention services. In many instances these children have already been in care but the services have been unable to cope with their difficulties. There is an urgent need to develop the capacity of existing residential services to deal more effectively with the emotional and psychological needs of children who have suffered considerable trauma and who may be behaviourally challenging. This will require more investment in staff training. Even though, statistically, the volume of youth offending may be abating in common with recorded crime in general, there is continuing public concern and a need to address systematically the origins, nature and consequences of youth crime.

The need to provide a more coherent response to these children is addressed in the Children Bill, 1999. The Children Bill will provide for a modern structure and court process so that these children will be better understood in terms of the pressures and handicaps they have to deal with. Significant additional resources will be required to implement the Bill, particularly by the juvenile justice system for the provision of facilities, a wide range of care and support services and for the implementation of community sanctions. In the latter regard, the Children Bill crucially depends on these sanctions so as to ensure that only those for whom there is no alternative to detention are so committed.

In the long term, the most effective approach is to build on the prevention and early intervention mechanisms

developed in the 1990s to ensure that these children can be identified early and a range of family supports provided so that emerging problems are tackled before they escalate. The provision of appropriate facilities and services for these children to facilitate their reintegration into their communities will continue to be a priority. Custody, when deemed necessary for offending children, will be the last resort and will be in the least restricted environment consistent with the requirement to maintain the correct balance between safe and secure custody and the care and rehabilitation of the child.

Recent Initiatives

- ★ **Pre-school service interventions which offer support for families in difficulty and the opportunity to identify children at risk.**
- ★ **Family support initiatives, such as parenting courses, community mothers, family resource centres and pilot Springboard projects.**
- ★ **The Stay-in-School Initiative has been established to tackle early school leaving, a known key indicator of later behavioural problems, and the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, which will introduce important new measures including the establishment of an Education Welfare Board and a new post of Education Welfare Officer to tackle the problem of early school leaving.**
- ★ **Thirty-nine Garda community-based projects have been established in disadvantaged areas. The Garda Síochána Youth Diversion Projects are a combination of prevention and intervention measures which aim to divert children from crime. Research has been commissioned to profile a sample of the participants on the Projects.**
- ★ **Additional high-support and special care residential services are currently being put in place to enable the service to respond more effectively to the current need.**
- ★ **A Special Residential Services Board has been established on an administrative basis pending the**

enactment of the Children Bill. The role of the board is, inter alia, to advise on policy relating to the remand and detention of children and to ensure the efficient, effective and co-ordinated delivery of services to children in respect of whom children detention orders or special care orders are made.

In terms of overall effect, the value of our prevention and early intervention efforts could be better focused and have greater impact if there was better co-ordination. There is an urgent need for a fusion of effort by adopting a more strategic prevention and early intervention approach involving an integrated policy framework, which will be guided by the provisions of the Children Bill, 1999.

Over the period of the Strategy, the framework provided for in the Children Bill will be monitored to assess its effectiveness in achieving its goals and, if further legislative developments are deemed necessary, suitable amendments will be made. A range of community-based services will be developed to meet the needs for prevention and alternatives to residential care.

The achievement of this objective should ensure that children at risk experience positive emotional and behavioural developmental outcomes. This approach is compatible with the aspiration of Article 40 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Further Actions Proposed

- ★ **Family support and other community-based early intervention services will be expanded under a new programme of investment.**
- ★ **More structured programmes will be introduced for the identification, assessment and management of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties to ensure a comprehensive response based on individual case plans.**
- ★ **A more effective response to children in crisis will be developed providing an approach involving the staged use of residential care, group family conferencing, multi-disciplinary case conferencing and the courts, including an ongoing monitoring of the framework provided for in the Children Bill, once enacted.**

- ★ **The additional care and support services required to implement the Children Bill will be put in place, including teaching posts, nurses, child psychologists, psychiatric supports and Probation and Welfare Service staff.**
- ★ **Resources will be provided to support projects targeted at children at risk of offending, including a phased expansion of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects, and to support the re-integration of young offenders into the community.**
- ★ **Additional funding will be targeted at expanding the range of community-based alternatives to residential care, including intensive family support, community-based intervention support services and fostering, to ensure the availability of the full range of services needed and to provide a through-care service.**
- ★ **Staff will be supported and developed to ensure that they have the necessary level of knowledge and expertise and have available to them skilled supervision and support.**
- ★ **Appropriate accommodation, including child-centred systems will be provided in new facilities in Dublin and Cork for children who, as a last resort, have to be detained.**

Objective J

Children with a disability will be entitled to the services they need to achieve their full potential

Policy Context

The need to secure the rights and entitlements of people with disabilities to participate fully and equally in social, economic, political and cultural life emerged as a major issue during the 1990s. This new focus on disability culminated in November 1996 with the publication of the Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities: A Strategy for Equality. Implementation of the recommendations which together make up the strategy for equality is now a central plank of disability policy and is closely monitored. A progress report, on the implementation of the Commission's Recommendations, *Towards Equal Citizenship* recorded implementation in full of almost 20% of the Commission's recommendations and progress towards implementation in a further 66% of cases. A key theme of the Commission's Report was that people with disabilities are marginalised and therefore more likely to be unemployed and to experience poverty. In many cases this process begins in childhood. Progress in implementing the strategy for equality will clearly benefit both children and adults with disabilities. This issue has been further highlighted in various claims brought before the courts in which parents have sought access to services to children with special needs.

Recent Initiatives

- ★ Enactment of the Education Act, 1998, with specific provision for the right of equal access to and participation in education of children with special needs. Children with special needs are entitled to special assistance, including resource teachers, special needs assistants, improved access to schools and supportive technology.
- ★ The establishment of a Planning Group to review special education provision for students with disabilities.
- ★ The establishment of two Special Task Forces to examine autism and children with dyslexia across the education spectrum. The Task Forces to report in 2000.

- ★ Provision of additional residential and day care services for children with disabilities.
- ★ Enactment of the Equal Status Act, 2000, prohibiting discrimination in the area of services, including services for children, on nine grounds including disability.
- ★ Establishment of the National Disability Authority (NDA) as a research, standards and monitoring body for disability services, including services specific to children, and as an advisory body in regard to the development of disability policy and practice.
- ★ Mainstreaming of disability services to provide for inclusion and equality for people with disabilities in accessing public services.

While there are fewer children with disabilities in Ireland today, reflecting the general decline in births, the proportion of those with severe problems has increased due to improved survival rates and the high quality of health care. The challenge is to ensure that these children have the range of supports they and their families need and the opportunity to participate equally and effectively in education, employment and social life.

Further Actions Proposed

- ★ A Disabilities Bill which will provide for specific measures to advance and underpin the participation of people with disabilities in society, including the participation of children with disabilities, is being prepared and is expected to be published in 2001. This legislation is being developed in the context of the equality infrastructure in place under the Employment Equality Act, the Equal Status Act and the National Disability Authority Act, the administrative arrangements put in place under mainstreaming, and the recommendations of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities in relation to further legislation.
- ★ Access to services of government departments and agencies will be promoted in conjunction with the National Disability Authority. This programme will be

undertaken in the context of the commitment given under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness to take all reasonable steps to make public services, including services specific to the needs of children, accessible to people with disabilities within a five-year timeframe.

- ★ Key statistical needs in relation to people with disabilities, including children with disabilities, will be reviewed and identified for the purpose of informing policy, planning and delivery of services.
- ★ More effective early intervention and respite services, including access to medical and paramedical support, will be developed and the number of residential and associated day places will be increased to enable all children with disabilities to have a residential place available to them on the basis of assessed need.
- ★ Supports necessary to enable children with disabilities to obtain a quality education will be developed and participation of students with disabilities in third-level education will be promoted through an access fund.
- ★ Development of a primary pupil data base which will allow for more effective identification and response to children with special needs.
- ★ Quality relevant training and placement will be developed to enable young people with disabilities to avail more easily of mainstream employment opportunities and suitable transport and aids and appliances will be provided where their absence is the major barrier to participation in education or training.
- ★ The feasibility of introducing a cost of disability payment will be examined by a working group under the PPF.

Objective K

Children will be educated and supported to value social and cultural diversity so that all children including Travellers and other marginalised groups achieve their full potential

Policy Context

Diversity in family type and social and cultural diversity are becoming ever more significant features of Irish life. Issues surrounding diversity of family forms are addressed in the next objective dealing with family life.

Since the mid-1990s Ireland has moved from being a society where social, cultural and linguistic diversity was represented in the main by the Gaeltacht and Traveller communities, to a society with in excess of 100 different nationalities. The consequent transformation of our social landscape has brought with it significant challenges to a society which has generally considered itself as homogeneous with a tradition of emigration rather than immigration. Instances of racial attack are becoming more common and the attitude of some communities to the provision of Traveller halting sites or accommodation for refugees and persons seeking asylum have given rise to some community tensions. Such instances reinforce the need for education so that we can develop an inclusive society, whose citizens are receptive to and value social and cultural diversity in all its forms. Tackling racism and promoting respect for socially and culturally diverse communities will therefore continue to be a key social policy issue.

Progress is already being made to meet the challenges posed by diversity, to address discrimination including racism and to promote human rights.

Recent Initiatives

- ★ **A Code of Practice for community development projects to address racism and promote equal outcomes for ethnic minority communities has been published.**

- ★ **The recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community continue to be implemented.**

- ★ **The Equal Status Act, 2000, which encompasses children is now in place.**

- ★ **A Human Rights Commission is being established.**

- ★ **Establishment of the Equality Authority and the Office of Director for Equality Investigations.**

- ★ **Establishment of a Directorate for Asylum Support Services.**

- ★ **Establishment of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI).**

- ★ **Ireland's first Refugee Applications Commissioner has been appointed.**

There remain considerable barriers to the participation in Irish society of children from ethnic minority groups including Travellers. Their specific needs must be identified and addressed to the same extent as every other child, but in a way that respects their ethnic and cultural diversity. Culture provides children with their identity and every child should have the opportunity to enjoy with their families the values, traditions, customs and behaviour associated with their cultural heritage. However, it is important to remember that the experience of cultural diversity enriches all children's lives. Learning to appreciate and recognise positively each others' differences and similarities in childhood, should be seen as a critical investment towards Ireland's new multiculturalism.

These developments in Irish society create new challenges for policy makers and society as a whole to plan and implement public services that will both recognise and accommodate this diversity, including public services that impact on children.

Ensuring that civil and public service providers have the necessary skills to meet the diverse needs of a multicultural society in an intercultural environment, and

to meet the commitment to the delivery of quality services, will require a commitment to training which takes account of a changing society, emerging client groups and new social policy issues.

This approach will support Ireland to more fully meet the requirements of Article 30 of the UN Convention.

Further Actions Proposed

- ★ **Learning from experience with measures to support Traveller children, school and community-based initiatives will be developed to promote a more participative and intercultural society which values social and cultural diversity.**
- ★ **Based on the whole school approach, schools will incorporate intercultural strategies in their school plans.**
- ★ **An anti-racism public awareness campaign will be launched, a key part of which will be aimed at children through the education system and youth development groups.**
- ★ **Research will be conducted into the needs of refugees, including refugee children, living in Ireland.**
- ★ **The special needs of non-English-speaking children will be recognised and additional resources targeted to enable them to participate fully in mainstream school classes and activities.**
- ★ **Public services will be provided in ways that take account of and respect the specific needs of children from social, ethnic, cultural and linguistic minority groups and specific staff training will be provided.**
- ★ **Ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity considerations will be taken into account in all relevant national and local level public policy development and service delivery.**
- ★ **Work will continue on implementation of the *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community*, especially in relation to health, education, accommodation and combating discrimination and racism targeted at Traveller children.**

- ★ **Unaccompanied children seeking refugee status will be treated in accordance with best international practice, including the provision of a designated social worker and Guardian-Ad-Litem.**

Group 3:

All Children Need the Support of Family and Community

Objective L

Children will have the opportunity to experience the qualities of family life

Policy Context

The importance of a good experience of family life for children cannot be stressed enough. The changing pattern of family life, partly in response to changing economic conditions and the growing diversity of family formation, indicates the need for a flexible and varied response to ensure that children enjoy their family life. Undoubtedly, change will continue to be a part of family life and is the focus of this objective. Its importance is linked to a range of positive outcomes for children and is a critical aspect of the 'whole child' perspective.

Most families rear their children with little difficulty but all need help at some stage. This starts at the earliest stage of a child's life with post-natal care. For most parents, this help comes from the wider family and neighbours. Some families require small levels of support. This family support covers a range of support and measures on a continuum from professional therapeutic intervention, to voluntary parenting networks, to community development supports, to high-quality day care services. The development of quality childcare services has been addressed under Objective A. Enabling parents to access these supports and services through the provision of information which is available locally is a key aspect of support.

This objective also addresses the needs of children who either have no family, or are out of the family and in state care. The aim of policy should be to provide these children with a family experience as far as possible. Reform of current adoption legislation is required to reflect changes in society and development in adoption

practices. Two key issues are, the limited circumstances in which marital children can be adopted, and the question of introducing a more open form of adoption where there would be some ongoing contact between the child and the birth parents. There is also an awareness that many children in long-term fostering or residential care would benefit from living in a permanent family. Reform of the law would have constitutional implications.

Children in care are a particularly vulnerable group and institutional life, while conferring many benefits, can also have damaging effects on them. While recognising staff commitment, recreating a family environment remains a challenge to be addressed.

Recent Initiatives

★ Report of the Commission on the Family

Building capacity within families as the foundation for children's wellbeing has been an area of significant policy attention. The Final Report of the Commission on the Family, *Strengthening Families for Life*, published in July 1998, contains a number of wide-ranging recommendations across all areas of public policy which affect family life.

★ Family Affairs Unit

The Unit was established within the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs with a range of responsibilities in relation to co-ordinating and developing policy and services to support families. These include: pursuing the findings of the Commission on the Family Report following their consideration by government, undertaking research and promoting awareness about family issues.

★ Supporting Families Locally

In recent years there has been significant expansion and

development in family support services, piloting better ways to co-ordinate local community efforts and focusing on the need to support vulnerable families. These include:

★ Parenting Supports

Teenage parenting support projects, which recognise the developmental needs of the young parents while providing information, advice and counselling on child care and health matters for the baby, are currently being piloted.

★ Providing a Co-ordinated Approach

The Integrated Services Process, piloted in four areas, tackles urban disadvantage and crime through enhanced family support systems.

★ Preventative Action

The Springboard Initiative has fifteen family support projects, established by the health boards in 1998, with the aim of preventing at-risk children from engaging in various forms of anti-social behaviour.

★ Supporting Disadvantaged Families

The Family and Community Service Resource Centres help to combat disadvantage by improving the functioning of the family unit, providing services such as crèche and pre-school facilities, drop-in facilities, after-school/homework clubs, personal development and parenting courses. The number of such centres has increased almost seven-fold since 1997.

★ Improving Access to Information

The pilot Family Services Project was established to provide improved access to information to families using the local offices of the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs as a one-stop-shop. It is an objective of the Project to actively provide programmes for specific groups of clients with complex needs; priorities for these care management programmes will go to lone parent families, carers and families of the unemployed.

★ Families in Conflict

Some children witness conflict within the family, which has a long-term and negative impact on them during their childhood and through to adulthood. There are a number of approaches and interventions to help protect children from this experience and help them to cope with the attendant distress:

★ Support for Voluntary Organisations Providing Counselling

To help support the work of voluntary organisations providing counselling and support to couples who are experiencing difficulties in their relationship and to children in the event of parental separation, grant aid has been radically improved over the past three years with a fourfold increase since 1997.

★ Domestic Violence

The National Steering Committee on Violence against Women was established to provide a multi-agency response on the issue of domestic violence towards women. Their work has beneficial impacts on children.

★ The Family Mediation Service

Where couples have decided to separate, the Family Mediation Service provides a free, professional, confidential service to enable couples to make their own agreements on all issues related to their separation, including parenting arrangements which enable their children to have an ongoing relationship with each parent. The Family Mediation Service is now established nationwide, with its expansion from two to eleven centres in the past two years.

★ Family Law

In recognition of the need to provide child-centred resolutions in family law proceedings, legislative provisions have placed the welfare and protection of children to the forefront. Where a child is at the centre of international family law proceedings, increasing efforts are being made to protect the

child more effectively by co-ordinating legislation internationally relating to the recognition and implementation of court judgements.

★ Families Research Programme

The Families Research Programme is currently funding thirteen family-related studies, which explore a range of topics including marriage and marriage counselling, children and parental separation, the role of grandparents, parenting needs, fathers and processes of family formation in modern Ireland.

★ Support for Lone Parents

★ *One-Parent Family Payment Review*

The *One-Parent Family Payment Review*, published recently, focuses on the objectives of the scheme having regard to the needs of lone parents, the needs of their children and the need to avoid long-term social welfare dependence for this group and contains a range of proposals relevant to lone parents and their families.

★ Providing the Best Possible Alternative to Family Care

★ *Establishment of the Irish Social Services Inspectorate*

The Irish Social Services Inspectorate was established in 1999 to ensure quality in health board residential services for children by monitoring the organisation, operation and management of these services and the development and implementation of service standards.

Over the past decade there has been significant policy attention on the development of family support services in the local community. These have focused on developing a preventative as well as a supportive approach and have worked by improving co-ordination between the statutory and voluntary agencies providing local services. Delivering localised services will continue to be the focus of support to families.

The nature of child rearing is becoming increasingly complex in a fast-changing environment. There is a growing appreciation by parents and service providers of the role of parenting education courses in assisting parents to help their children. This is reflected in the rising demand for parenting courses, which has increased by 74% since 1994. For many families, this is the extent of their need for support. Some families, however, have greater needs as they try to do the best for their families in difficult circumstances such as marital breakdown, unemployment, disadvantage and domestic violence. A small number of families experiencing multiple problems, which require targeted and co-ordinated support, will continue to be a priority.

The UN Convention gives special recognition to the family. The Strategy recognises that the family generally affords the best environment for raising children. It is clear that children's attainment of their developmental goals is dependent on the supports available to them at all levels, but predominantly within their families. The measures to be taken under this objective will promote this approach.

Further Actions Proposed

★ Supporting Families Locally

- ★ Quality parenting programmes are to be made available to all parents, with a special emphasis on the needs of fathers, lone parents, ethnic minority groups, including Travellers and marginalised groups. As part of a policy of ending physical punishment, parenting courses will focus on alternative approaches to managing difficult behaviour in children.
- ★ The teenage parenting initiatives currently being piloted will be expanded to all health boards.
- ★ The Family and Community Resource Centre Programme will be further expanded.
- ★ Following the evaluation of the Family Services Pilot Project, the successful aspects will be extended over the next six years.

- ★ The Community Mothers programmes will be extended to all health board community care areas as appropriate.
- ★ The number of family support workers will be increased.
- ★ Early assessment and intervention for families of children with a disability will be developed.
- ★ To facilitate an improved and proactive service to lone parents, responsibility for payments will be localised: improved information will support this approach through a newsletter, outlining the various employment, training and educational opportunities available.
- ★ Access to services locally will be enhanced through the REACH Initiative, which will assist greater integration of the delivery of public services.
- ★ Measures which will be taken to provide a family-type experience for children in alternative care include:
 - ★ The publication of a bill to implement the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and co-operation in respect of inter-country adoption.
 - ★ Expanding and supporting foster care based on the major review being undertaken by the National Foster Care Working Group.
 - ★ Reviewing domestic adoption law in the light of the recommendations of the Constitution Review Group and the conclusions of the All Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution.
 - ★ Significant funding is being provided under the National Development Plan to upgrade children's homes and this provides an opportunity to improve the physical environment.
 - ★ Inspection of children's residential homes by the Irish Social Services Inspectorate will help to identify best practice and where practice falls short of the agreed standards.
 - ★ Increase the capacity of the residential care services to care for vulnerable children in

partnership with families, as part of a major review of the residential services which will now be undertaken.

- ★ Children will be enabled to learn their own identity through the introduction of a right to birth information in legislation.

★ Families in Conflict

- ★ Further investment in the scheme of grants to voluntary organisations providing marriage, child and bereavement counselling will continue to be a high priority to prevent marital breakdown.
- ★ In order to protect children from the effects of violence within the home, the National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women, working with eight regional committees in health board areas, will promote awareness, research the effects of violence on children and develop protocols for service providers.
- ★ The Family Mediation Service will be established on a statutory basis. The role of children in mediation will be an area of ongoing development in light of experience of the mediation process.
- ★ Court proceedings and the implementation of orders will be adequately resourced with additional Probation and Welfare staff recruited for civil (family law) matters.

- ★ Families Research Programme
Additional research on family-related issues will be initiated under the Families Research Programme.

Objective M

Children will benefit from and contribute to vibrant local communities

Policy Context

Outside their families, the most immediate support for children comes from their local communities. Despite the increased mobility of people, the growth of individualism and other stresses brought on by longer working hours and greater activity, the social networks between children, families and their communities remain significant and strong linkages in the everyday lives of children. These social supports range from the reciprocal material and emotional support between neighbours, to more formalised interventions and services provided by social services and supports and advocacy provided by the community for the community. Strong communities sharing similar needs can be a critical resource for children, supporting and, where necessary, overcoming difficult family and social circumstances.

Ireland has a history of strong community development supported by both the statutory and voluntary sectors. Considerable attention has been given in recent years to community development as the most effective way of providing support to families and children. Community development is defined in the recently published White Paper on the Voluntary Sector, *Supporting Voluntary Activity*, as 'an interactive process of knowledge and action designed to change conditions which marginalise communities and groups and is underpinned by a vision of self-help'. A report published by the Department of Health and Children, as part of the evaluation of the Springboard Projects, defined the role of community development in family support as addressing 'the contextual factors which impinge on, and often exacerbate, the problems of vulnerable families. As such, its focus of action is strengths and weaknesses within the community rather than within the family'.

Recent Initiatives

- ★ **Supporting Voluntary Activity** provides a framework for the development and future funding of the voluntary and community sector. It recognises that the range of supports needed goes beyond funding to include:
 - ★ the role of contributing to policy formulation, including research;
 - ★ management and organisational development and personal/professional development of staff;
 - ★ the relationship with statutory agencies;
 - ★ networking;
 - ★ volunteers and volunteering;
 - ★ training and support in community development skills and in the involvement and participation of the most marginalised;
 - ★ support for information dissemination, to the public, to policy-makers and to membership;
 - ★ production of resource materials and provision of technical advice.

Supporting Voluntary Activity provides a framework to deliver these supports over a phased period while also developing the legislative infrastructure for the regulation of the non-profit and voluntary and community sectors.

- ★ The need to co-ordinate family support and community development services locally has already been discussed and specific measures described which include Springboard, Family and Community Resource Centres services and the Integrated Services Process.
- ★ Co-ordination locally will be supported and developed through the establishment of County and City Development Boards which are charged with responsibility to prepare local development strategies to guide community development in its broadest sense. This improved co-ordination will benefit children.

This objective will be pursued by focusing on initiatives to support capacity building in local communities, while further developing the relationship between the local statutory services and the voluntary and community sector. Building the social economy and local participative democracy will benefit children and their families through the development and regeneration of their communities.

Further Actions Proposed

- ★ The active involvement of children in the community and voluntary activity will be encouraged through the *National Youth Work Development Plan* and the measures to encourage the active citizenship set out in the White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity*.
- ★ The identification of means to ensure the best interest of children are considered in the delivery of voluntary and community services which impact on children.
- ★ Support and training in relation to children's services will be provided through the health boards and the family support centres to develop local self-help groups in relation to addiction, bereavement, mental health and parenting.
- ★ Health board Traveller health units will expand recent pilots targeted at developing the capacity of local Traveller communities to support primary health and health promotion for their own children.
- ★ A more coherent and cohesive policy and administrative framework will be put in place to support voluntary/community activity through the implementation of the White Paper, *Supporting Voluntary Activity*.
- ★ Initiatives such as Springboard, the Family and Community Resource Centres services and the Integrated Services Process which integrate and support voluntary and community services to support children and families will be expanded on the basis of agreed common criteria.
- ★ Additional investment in the Social Economy Programme will benefit children in their communities by providing supports essential for the viability and development of local services.

Objective N

Children will benefit from a built and natural environment which supports their physical and emotional wellbeing.

Policy Context

Responsibility for the environment is a matter for everyone and all sectors of Irish society, including the farming, industrial and energy production sectors, must play their part. Public policy to protect and improve the natural environment by providing for proper waste management, clean air and water, etc., creates an enhanced quality of life and general feeling of wellbeing for everyone, including children.

A well-designed built environment is important for ensuring the physical and emotional wellbeing of the whole community, including children. A high-quality residential environment can facilitate children's play and learning opportunities in a way which goes beyond the facilities offered by playgrounds and other dedicated recreational facilities.

One of the outcomes of our current level of economic growth has been a perception that the built environment has become less safe and accessible for children. Increasing demand for new housing and busier lifestyles with increased levels of traffic in our major urban centres, have combined to limit access to green and other open spaces and reduce the mobility of children in their own communities. These developments have the capacity to reduce opportunities for play, recreation and social interaction with peers and friends and they are a potential barrier to the achievement of Objective D. Children living in rural areas also experience similar reduced opportunities arising from infrastructural deficits in public transport systems. Progress is being made in relation to ensuring a child-friendly built environment.

Recent Initiatives

- ★ The Planning and Development Act, 2000, makes it a mandatory requirement that the local authority development plan, addresses inter alia:

- the integration of the planning and sustainable development of the area and its population;
- the preservation, improvement and extension of amenities, including recreational amenities, and
- the provision, or facilitation of the provision, of services for the community including, in particular, schools, crèches and other education and childcare facilities.

All these objectives of the development plan will be of particular interest to children.

- ★ Guidelines for planning authorities on childcare facilities and residential density have been published. The latter indicate that the achievement of higher residential densities must be coupled with a higher standard of residential environment and the provision of higher quality public and communal open space. Public open space is one of the key elements in defining the quality of the residential environment. It provides passive as well as active amenity and has important ecological and environmental aspects.
- ★ Child-friendly traffic management policies, such as traffic lanes and restrictions on traffic, and traffic-calming measures in residential areas and in the vicinity of schools, are a feature of our bigger urban areas.
- ★ ENFO, the information service of the Department of the Environment and Local Government, provides a range of environmental information and materials particularly suitable for children. Visits from school groups are welcome and can be used to supplement what is being taught in the classroom. ENFO also operates a Children's Club which is open to all children between the ages of four and twelve.
- ★ The Green Schools Programme, promoted by An Taisce in partnership with the local authorities, offers children a very practical way to learn about the environment by involving them in managing the impact of the school on the environment.
- ★ Proposed investment under the National Development Plan, in mainline rail, improved public transport services

in major urban areas and the upgrading of regional bus services, to address regional public transport requirements.

Article 29 of the UN Convention points to the need to educate children to develop respect for the natural environment. In keeping with that and the aims of the Goal: Children Will Have a Voice, the Strategy will promote responsible environmental behaviour in children by giving them an active role, supported by adults as appropriate, in protecting and enhancing the environment. The formal education system has a crucial role in promoting environmental awareness. *Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland*, agreed by Government in 1997, acknowledges that environmental education can provide a sound basis for sustainable development and that it should be integrated into all education systems. Responsible environmental behaviour by children can also be achieved by encouraging their participation in clean-ups, recycling, purchasing products less damaging to the environment and refraining from littering.

The National Children's Strategy will encourage children to protect and enhance the natural environment through access to environmental education and information which encourages environmentally responsible behaviour. The National Children's Strategy will also seek to enhance the built environment in a way that encourages children's play and recreation and their safe participation in community life. This is in line with our obligations under Article 31 of the UN Convention and children achieving their developmental milestones along the physical wellbeing and social and peer relationship dimensions of the 'whole child' perspective.

Further Actions Proposed

- ★ To enhance the design of open space provision and improve safe access to it for children.
- ★ To give consideration in planning and traffic management policies to children's safety while walking or cycling.
- ★ Funding will be provided for the development of pilot public transport initiatives in rural areas with the aim of

encouraging local or community-based initiatives to provide bus services in rural areas.

- ★ To ensure that children can play their part in protecting and enhancing the natural environment by providing access to environmental education in the formal education system.
- ★ To encourage environmentally responsible behaviour by children in the provision of environmental information.

Chapter 6

The Engine for Change

“If there were more people working and helping others, Ireland would be a better place to live in.”

“Any strategy for children must itself try to bring together all those other integrative structures with a view to bringing together and co-ordinating the often mystifying array of proposals emanating from the various statutory and voluntary organisations.”

Quotes from the public consultation



Achieving the Goals and objectives set out in the Strategy will require changes to the way we plan and manage the delivery of services for children.



6.1 ENSURING IMPLEMENTATION

Achieving the Goals and objectives set out in the Strategy will require changes to the way we plan and manage the delivery of services for children. An ambitious and cross-cutting plan of action has been set down which will only be achieved with the fullest collaboration and co-operation between government departments, the statutory and voluntary agencies and the research community in working with and supporting families and children. In this chapter a new framework is set out which will bring the key players and their particular knowledge and expertise together in ways which will encourage co-operative working and add to a shared understanding of children's issues within a 'whole child' perspective. The success of the Strategy will depend on stimulating new thinking and encouraging closer working relationships.

However, practical implementation of the Strategy will occur at local level. Successful implementation will therefore also depend on engaging and supporting families, communities, schools and local agencies. In the previous chapters it was indicated how these groups can play their part and be involved in achieving the three National Goals. Consideration is given in this chapter to how the State can better organise itself to support these local groups through mechanisms which will flow from the new structures.

The need to improve co-ordination at national and local level has been a consistent theme, especially in recent years under the Strategic Management Initiative. There have been improvements in co-operation on certain issues between departments following the appointment of a Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Children. The Strategy brings together a wide range of complex issues into a single agenda for action. To retain this coherence and focus on children into the future will require strong dedicated leadership.

Many countries have established central co-ordinating mechanisms to guide and bring coherence to their child and family services. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its *Guidelines for Initial*

Reports under the Convention emphasises the importance of co-ordinating policy affecting children within and between all levels of government. The structures currently in place at central and local government level and in the voluntary sector have the capacity to deliver the Strategy but they need to be strengthened to allow them to co-ordinate more effectively and combine their respective resources to empower people at local level who are directly involved with the delivery of services to children.

A new framework for change is set out in the following sections which is intended to address the issues outlined above to ensure the successful implementation of the Strategy. The key elements in the new framework are:

- **managing the change through new national level structures;**
- **delivering the change through improved local structures;**
- **promoting the development of human resources.**

Recognising that Strategy implementation will be primarily a matter for individual government departments and their respective national and local agencies, the emphasis in the new framework is on the co-ordination and integration of activity in areas which cut across departmental and agency boundaries. The emphasis will be on progressing issues such as children in crisis and homelessness. The new framework will have the capacity to focus in on these areas and provide the supports necessary to ensure that they are addressed in a planned way. It will, therefore, be primarily concerned with supporting co-operative working in areas which require a multi-agency response.

6.2 MANAGING CHANGE AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Co-ordinating children's policy development and delivery of services is one of the most challenging public service issues. Achieving a better performance in this area will bring major benefits by:

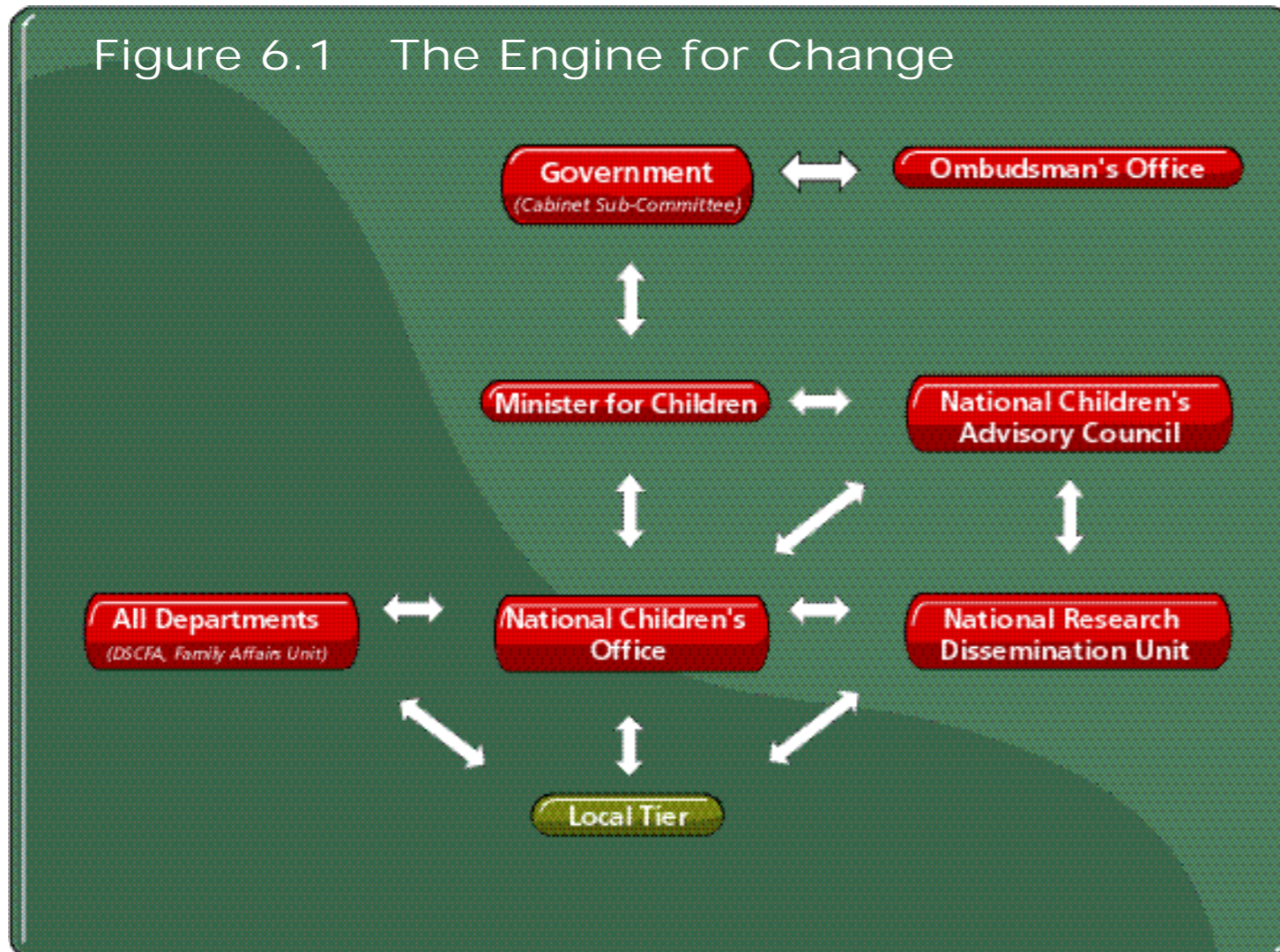
- **harnessing the benefits of cross-fertilisation of ideas and sectoral wisdom in designing new services;**
- **providing a clearer focus for and better value from piloting and experimentation;**
- **avoiding duplication of services and identifying undetected needs;**
- **providing an incentive to joint action by service providers;**
- **achieving less confusion and more impact from services for children and parents through better communication and information systems.**

In view of the complexity of the challenge and the large number of statutory and voluntary agencies involved at both national and local levels clear national leadership is needed. To be effective, national structures must, therefore, provide for:

- **political stewardship of the design and implementation of policy;**
- **the involvement of the key sectors;**
- **internal public service capacity for action;**
- **clear assignment of departmental responsibilities.**

The structures set out at Figure 6.1 are designed to achieve these requirements.

Figure 6.1 The Engine for Change



Political Leadership

Political commitment to oversee and drive the changes set out in the Strategy will be crucial to its success. A Cabinet Sub-Committee will oversee the Strategy and a Minister of State, to be known as the Minister for Children, will be assigned responsibility by the Government for its implementation. Political stewardship of the Strategy at this level will facilitate more effective co-operation between departments and ensure that the Strategy maintains a high profile at government level.

The Cabinet Sub-Committee will be chaired by the Taoiseach and will bring the relevant Ministers together to set priorities. The sub-committee will monitor progress and review how effectively government departments are integrating their efforts and resources to deliver these priorities.

The Minister for Children will have overall responsibility for co-ordinating children's policy. The Minister will report routinely to the Cabinet Sub-Committee in relation to the implementation of the Strategy and drive the implementation of the cross-departmental agenda.

Involvement Of The Key Sectors - National Children's Advisory Council

Development of the Strategy has involved the key sectors concerned with children's issues. These are the voluntary sector and the research community. The agenda for action set out in the Strategy is heavily influenced by what these sectors, and children themselves, had to say. Moving the Strategy forward and ensuring its delivery will be dependent on the continued commitment and involvement of those sectors as they have significant capacity to influence

and effect change. They must therefore be involved in shaping the implementation of the Strategy. The aim of co-ordinating all efforts directed at children, which is the primary purpose of the Strategy, requires the direct involvement of these sectors if this is to be achieved. Their wide breadth of experience and expertise will contribute significantly to debating Strategy issues and advising on solutions. It will energise debate around children's issues and provide forward momentum.

This will be achieved through the establishment of a National Children's Advisory Council. The membership of the Council will reflect the partnership of interests required and will include children's representatives, and representatives of the Social Partners and the research community. The National Children's Office (see below), which will have central-level responsibility for ensuring action in all areas of children's policy development, will also be represented on the Council. In this way, a strong linkage will be created within the Council between the government and non-government sectors. This approach will strengthen and deepen the role of the non-governmental sector in the policy development and implementation processes.

The Council will have an independent advisory and monitoring role in relation to the implementation of the Strategy and it will report to the Minister for Children in that regard. Secretarial support will be provided. Its functions will be:

- to advise the Minister on all aspects of children's lives, including the development of child wellbeing indicators;
- to advise the Minister on the better co-ordination and delivery of services to children;
- to contribute to monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy;
- to undertake and advise on research and to advise on training in relation to the Strategy;
- to advise on the development of mechanisms to consult with children.

Internal Public Service Capacity - National Children's Office

A National Children's Office is to be established to provide a major boost to managing cross-departmental issues. The Children's Office will be an independent body established under the Public Service Management Act, 1997. It will have the expertise and the significant budgetary resources necessary to enable it to provide administrative support to the Minister for Children and to act as a strong support mechanism for departments in relation to the implementation of the Strategy.

The Children's Office will be the catalyst within the Government's administrative system for ensuring inter-departmental co-operation and the integration of activities on children's issues. In this regard, it will have a strong focus on solving problems and finding solutions where better co-ordination between departments and between agencies is required. To support this work, the Office will bring together time-limited cross-departmental project teams with local, statutory and voluntary agency representatives, supported by commissioned experts, to address particular issues and to identify better-tailored solutions. It will seek to develop existing relationships and to build new ones, by encouraging and facilitating links between organisations and between individuals.

The Office will be headed up by a Board comprising Assistant Secretaries from the main departments involved in the implementation of the Strategy. There will also be links created to local-level public bodies. These Assistant Secretaries and local-level representatives will have responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the Strategy in their own departments and organisations. The Children's Office will work to effect change through the Board, building on existing integration mechanisms.

The National Children's Office will be engaged in:

- preparing an annual work programme to translate the three National Goals and objectives into detailed plans for action and the preparation of progress reports for presentation by the Minister for Children to the Cabinet Sub-Committee on a six-monthly basis;

- ensuring that co-ordinated and integrated action takes place by identifying priority cross-cutting issues to be progressed on a two to three-year cycle and supporting cross-departmental action by, inter alia, co-funding new and existing initiatives which are innovative and adaptable and which encourage cross-departmental actions;

- monitoring implementation of the Strategy in departments and public agencies;

- promoting capacity building through encouraging and supporting training initiatives.

The Office will be an influential body headed by a Director and staffed at a level necessary to effect significant influence across the various departments and agencies. It will also routinely contract in expertise as required. The primary functions of the Director will be:

- supporting and advising the Government and the Minister for Children in relation to the implementation of the Strategy and promoting the role of the Children's Office;

- guiding the Children's Office in all aspects of its operations, in particular, progressing the further actions proposed and directing the preparation of action plans in consultation with government departments;

- facilitating the continuation of the consultative and participative process through the National Children's Advisory Council.

The Director will be a key figure at national level in the development of a more cohesive approach to children's policy. At the earliest stages of implementation, the Director will focus on the creation of linkages between the Children's Office and the other elements of the new organisational structures.

A formal link will be established between the National Children's Office and the Family Affairs Unit of the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. The Office and the Unit will be jointly responsible for the management of the National Longitudinal Study, and this will provide further opportunities for joint action.



Role of Government Departments

Individual departments and their respective agencies will carry the main responsibility for implementing the Strategy in relation to their statutory functions. It is essential that government departments retain a responsibility for children to ensure a continued commitment to the implementation of the Strategy through existing programmes of work. This approach will provide for the maintenance of a 'children focus' in each department. The National Goals and objectives and the 'whole child' perspective provide the framework which will facilitate co-ordinated action. In this regard, departments will participate with the National Children's Office, in the preparation and implementation of detailed action plans which will give effect to the National Goals.

Reviewing Departmental Responsibilities

The question of reallocating or changing specific departmental responsibilities for children's services is an issue that requires consideration. Arguments can be made for reviewing the current distribution of responsibilities with a view to moving or amalgamating particular policy areas. However, any decision on this issue should be related to and part of a wider analysis of the organisation of government and distribution of functions between departments and between the centre and local agencies. In the present context further research will be undertaken by the National Children's Office on the international experience of the effectiveness of different models of managing child and family-related services. The Children's Office will also review the current distribution of responsibilities for children's policy for consideration in the context of that research. Recommendations for the rationalisation of functions of government departments which arise from this review will be brought to the Cabinet Sub-Committee.

6.3 DELIVERING AT LOCAL LEVEL

The need to improve delivery at the point where services are accessed by children and their families is a critical issue as it directly impacts on children's

lives. Poorly co-ordinated and integrated local service delivery attracted strong criticism during the consultation process. Addressing problems in this area has been difficult owing to the limited functions delegated to the local government system. This problem is compounded by the absence in key policy areas of local or regional arms of central government agencies. In the educational area, there is a clear need to improve the local responsiveness of key supports and services. The development of the Educational Welfare Board, the National Educational Psychological Service Agency and other specialist services provides an opportunity to focus more closely on local needs. There would be considerable merit in facilitating the greater localisation of services through local offices which would bring together the different entities.

Involvement of Children

If the arrangements to improve co-ordination at national level are to be effectively translated into action for children and their families, then they must be complemented at the local level by services delivery strategies which ensure a more integrated approach. Achieving this will require that services be delivered in ways which are responsive to local needs; involving, in the first instance, consultation with children, their families and their communities, as part of participative planning by the various agencies involved in delivering supports and services to them. Overtly addressing children's views and their needs at local level in this way will advance achievement of the Goals of the Strategy.

Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector

Local delivery must reflect the new initiatives taking place at national level and must be linked into them. It is recognised that problems of coherence will be compounded unless there is some mechanism for ensuring that the many local agencies with responsibility for children's issues operate to the agenda being laid down by the Strategy. This will require the local players, both statutory and non-governmental, to work together in more structured ways and in ways which respect the values and objectives of their organisations and place children

more centrally in local policy formulation and decision making. The voluntary sector continues to make a substantial contribution to the development of policy and services for children and it provides an essential complement to the State's activities. There is also increasing and more structured contact between the State and the sector. The White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity* gives formal recognition to the partnership ethos that informs much of the working relationship between the two sectors, while recognising the differences between them. The aim of the White Paper is to provide a more modern framework of support and encouragement for the community and voluntary sector.

The Strategy will aim to ensure that this framework operates in relation to children's service agencies. Co-operation will grow in a climate:

- where there is parity of esteem;
- which respects the independence and ethos of voluntary organisations;
- which recognises that State agencies have statutory obligations;
- where co-operative values are promoted and local communities are fully involved.

Local Delivery – County and City Development Boards

The issue of local level co-ordination has been addressed in the establishment earlier this year of County and City Development Boards (CDBs). The CDBs are quadripartite bodies from local government, local development agencies, the State sector and the Social Partners. The Boards' functions will be to identify gaps in service provision and overlaps, and to secure coherent delivery arrangements by agencies operating locally. A number of committees already exist at local level, including child care and health board committees. There is a need to clarify the roles and relationships

between these committees. The CDBs will draw up Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development for each county/city to which the whole State sector at local level will subscribe and be guided by in their policies. Guidelines have been issued to the CDBs to assist them in this task (*Preparing the Ground: Guidelines for the Progress from Strategy Groups to County/City Development Boards* - Interdepartmental Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems, 1999). The Guidelines outline how the new structures should operate, how they should be composed and how organisations, agencies and groups that are not represented directly on the Boards can engage with the process. Chapter Three of the Strategy outlines how the voice of children will be an integral part of that process.

Developing the CDBs Strategies essentially involves the conduct of an audit of the various procedures and schemes which exist and taking a lead from national policy initiatives such as the National Development Plan, *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* and Rural Development. The CDBs Strategies will have a ten-year vision with 3 to 5 year targets. Implementation will remain with existing agencies but their policies will operate within the agreed framework of the County and City Strategies. The CDBs structures and strategies provide ideal vehicles for local articulation of the National Children's Strategy and they could contribute much to the improvement of co-ordination around children's issues. The CDBs Strategies are intended to comprehend the full spectrum of policies relating to the economic, social and cultural development of the area in question. The Task Force guidelines suggest a thematic approach to the development of each policy area and that structures to develop particular themes be devised, with members of the Boards having particular interest in or responsibility for those themes actively involved. Broader representation from community and voluntary groups will feature in the structures through the Area Committee and Community and Voluntary Organisations Fora structures to be established as part of the integration process.

The National Children's Strategy will give direction to the development of the CDBs Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development in relation to children. The 'whole child' perspective and the three National Goals for Children will inform the thematic development of the Strategies. The structures to be devised to develop particular themes will support integrated planning and service delivery systems for children and their families by involving the various local interests and agencies, with responsibilities in the particular policy area. The incorporation of the 'whole child' perspective as part of that process will be the responsibility of the national co-ordinating structures through their respective agencies operating at local level.

6.4 PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

The diversity and scope of children's service needs are reflected in the wide range of people, including professionals, other groups of workers and private individuals who provide services and supports to them. The effectiveness and outlook of all these people will impact to varying degrees on the quality of life and wellbeing of the children in their care. It is one of the strengths of our system that we have so many dedicated people who work with children, many in a voluntary capacity. Many took the opportunity to make a submission during the consultation on the development of the Strategy. Their commitment to and involvement in the Strategy are essential to its success. These groups will be involved in the development of the CDBs Strategies outlined above. They will be central to the implementation of the National Children's Strategy. To support this latter process, measures will be required:

- to inform all interested parties of the Strategy to enable them to make a contribution to shaping its implementation;
- to ensure that staff and others working with children are provided with relevant training and support.

The very broad range of people involved with children presents a challenge in developing human resource policies. There are many human resource issues which need to be addressed. These include:

- tackling staff shortages in key areas;
- ensuring that staff working with children are receiving training and development as a continuing part of their employment, including professional registration;
- providing support for staff working in difficult areas;
- developing training initiatives to support inter-professional working;
- providing those individuals who work in the community or in the home with support and recognition;
- encouraging inter-agency training to support improved co-operation between staff working in the voluntary and statutory sectors.

In line with the approach to new structures, identified earlier in this chapter, individual government departments will continue to have operational responsibility for staff recruitment, training and development in relation to the services for which they are responsible. The impact of departmental staff recruitment and development policies on the services provided to children will be monitored by the National Children's Office.

However, additional resources and measures will be required, aimed at developing the more holistic approach to children's issues which is at the centre of the 'whole child' perspective, in the services and among staff. The aim will be to support a greater level of inter-agency and inter-disciplinary work as an effective way of promoting a more seamless service, which is child focused rather than service lead.

The National Children's Office will take on the role of developing training initiatives specifically related to the Strategy. In particular, it will fund innovative

initiatives aimed at developing inter-agency working and training. The Office will also promote knowledge of the Strategy and will develop training materials for dissemination nationally.

The National Children's Advisory Council brings together a range of expertise on children's issues. As the body with responsibility for developing new thinking on children, it will be charged with responsibility for advising the Minister for Children and the National Children's Office on training requirements in relation to the Strategy.



Chapter 7

Making a Strong Start

“In order for change you need to work and spend a lot of time at it but I believe that if you want it bad enough you can always achieve you goal.”

“I notice that there are many bars, restaurants, museums etc. for adults to have a fun day out but there are no rollerblading parks or skate boarding parks for children like me to have fun in.”

“Children need a fun childhood because if they don't their whole life will be miserable and I would like a park.”

Quotes from the public consultation



An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make



7.1
THE STRATEGY APPROACH

It is important to make a strong start in implementing the Strategy. In this chapter we summarise the main features of the Strategy and the immediate actions to be taken to begin implementation.

The Strategy provides a vision, sets goals and establishes an engine for change to improve support for children and to develop children's services over the next ten years. The 'whole child' perspective recognises that children are active participants in a complex set of relationships within families and with friends and communities. These relationships shape children's lives and in turn are shaped by them. They are also affected by the major social and economic changes being experienced at this time. It is within this dynamic environment of change that the Strategy seeks to listen to, think about and act more effectively for children. That task requires the combined efforts of multi-levelled partnerships built around children. The status of children and the quality of their lives will be improved only if these partnerships engage in effective action.

The Strategy is a framework for action. It provides a clear vision for children in Ireland which all those concerned to improve their lives can work towards:

An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and are supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential.

To help realise that vision the Strategy commits to three National Goals:

- ★ **Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity (Chapter Three)**
- ★ **Children's lives will be better understood; their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services (Chapter Four)**

★ **Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development (Chapter Five)**

To ensure the realisation of these three National Goals a series of twenty four objectives has been identified along with the measures and actions necessary to achieve them. In addition, structures are to be put in place, which will maintain a strategic approach to support action at national and local levels and which will keep progress under constant review. These include a Cabinet Sub-Committee, a Minister for Children with a much expanded brief, a National Children's Advisory Council, a National Children's Office, and a National Children's Research Dissemination Unit.

7.2
TAKING ACTION

The publication of the Strategy provides a new framework for action by a wide range of agents. Each must now identify what they can do to contribute to the success of the Strategy. In addition to the new initiatives set out in the Strategy itself, a wide range of measures which are consistent with its aims are currently underway or planned by government departments. These were set out in the Schedule to Chapter Five.

The following actions will now be taken by the Government to commence the implementation of the Strategy:

1. Putting the Infrastructure in Place

Immediate measures will be taken to bring the new structures into operation, as they are required to ensure that other measures set out in the Strategy can take effect.

Structures	Action to be taken	Timing
Office of Ombudsman for Children	Legislation to be published	End 2000
National Children's Advisory Council	Agree membership and make appointments	2000
National Children's Office	Establishment of Office	2000 - 2001
Dáil na nÓg	Minister for Children to set up advisory group on establishment and operation First Meeting	2000 2001
National Children's Research Dissemination Unit	Set up review group to advise on how the unit should operate and be established	2001

2. Embedding the National Goals in Current Policy Development and Service Delivery

All government departments will consider how their current activities might promote the three National Goals. To help them with that task, the National Children's Office will review all Departmental Strategy Statements in order to identify existing, or potential cross-cutting children's issues, and will agree with departments action to be included in individual departmental business plans for 2001. Based on this review, the National Children's Office will draw up its first annual work programme which will identify the detailed actions to be taken to commence the implementation of the National Goals and objectives. Existing departmental initiatives which advance the three National Goals will continue to be implemented.

The Government will continue to provide the resources needed to develop the supports and services for children consistent with the Strategy. The funding of the developments outlined in the Schedule to Chapter Five will be provided as part of the Government's existing budgetary and decision-making process. The Government is continuing its commitment to children with disabilities and to Traveller children. The expansion of early intervention services, the completion of the new high-support and special-care places for children in crisis before the courts and the construction of two new units in Dublin and Cork for young offenders will continue to be a priority. The measures to eliminate child poverty and youth homelessness will be fast tracked. The substantial investment in the development of our childcare sector will continue and further inroads will be made to support parents in reconciling their work and family lives.

3. Special Strategy Initiatives

Special additional funding will be provided by the Government through the National Children's Office to support specific actions targeted at advancing the achievement of the three National Goals of the Strategy. This funding is to support direct action by a wide range of bodies, but there will be a special emphasis on funding innovative ideas from local voluntary groups and clubs working with children.

Projects will be considered for funding which might not otherwise receive funding from local statutory sources because of the demands on their resources.

This approach is intended to ensure that the special additional investment brings added value and ensures progress on all aspects of the Strategy. The new streams of funding are set out under the relevant goals below.

Goal Children will have a voice

- ☞ funding will be provided to develop a local network in support of Dáil na nÓg;
- ☞ funding will be made available to local bodies, including sports and youth clubs and child care services to support children's involvement in their structures.

Goal Children's lives will be better understood

- ☞ research bodies will be invited to submit specific proposals for projects which will support implementation of the Strategy;
- ☞ funding will be made available for research-evaluation projects by local voluntary or community groups working with children.

Goal Children will receive quality supports and services

- ☞ in addition to existing priorities, a national children's play and recreation policy will be developed as a new priority area for action. The Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation will take the lead role supported by the National Children's Office;
- ☞ funding will be introduced to support the provision of special play and recreation activities by local voluntary or community groups. Preference will be given to rural areas or disadvantaged areas. The funding criteria will include:
 - ☞ the involvement of children in their planning and operation;
 - ☞ the involvement of more than one agency and an emphasis on developing cross-agency working.

These initiatives will be developed by the National Children's Office as part of its first annual work programme, which it is required to prepare by the end of the first quarter of 2001.

4. Communicating the Message

Both children and a wider constituency have been engaged in the process of developing the Strategy through the consultation programme. It is important to retain and develop that interest and involvement, especially among children. The intention is to develop a dialogue and a two-way flow of ideas between people working at the different levels and services throughout the country.

The Minister for Children and the National Children's Office will now carry out a communications programme on the implementation of the Strategy. Its purpose will be to create awareness of the Strategy in local communities, including schools, sports and youth clubs, and to encourage and hear ideas about local action to implement the Strategy. It will provide local communities with the opportunity to help shape implementation of the Strategy. In addition, a comprehensive information and training programme will be designed and undertaken across all children's services to promote awareness of the Strategy.

A website and e-mail address will also be established by the Office to provide a two-way flow of information and to help in implementing the Strategy. Information on the funding available to implement the Strategy will be provided on the website. Information will be disseminated on innovative measures which are being taken. The site will provide routine updates on implementation.

A newsletter, targeted at children, their families and at the wider community, will be published periodically. The newsletter will provide a forum for debate about children's issues, for comment and for providing updates on progress in implementing the Strategy.

7.3

MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION

A critical success factor will be effective and independent routine monitoring and periodic evaluation of the National Children's Strategy. Such monitoring must have a national and international dimension. The role of the Cabinet Sub-Committee, the National Children's Advisory Council and the National Children's Office in monitoring implementation of the Strategy was set out in Chapter Six. In addition, two further monitoring mechanisms will be available. These are:

I Independent Evaluation

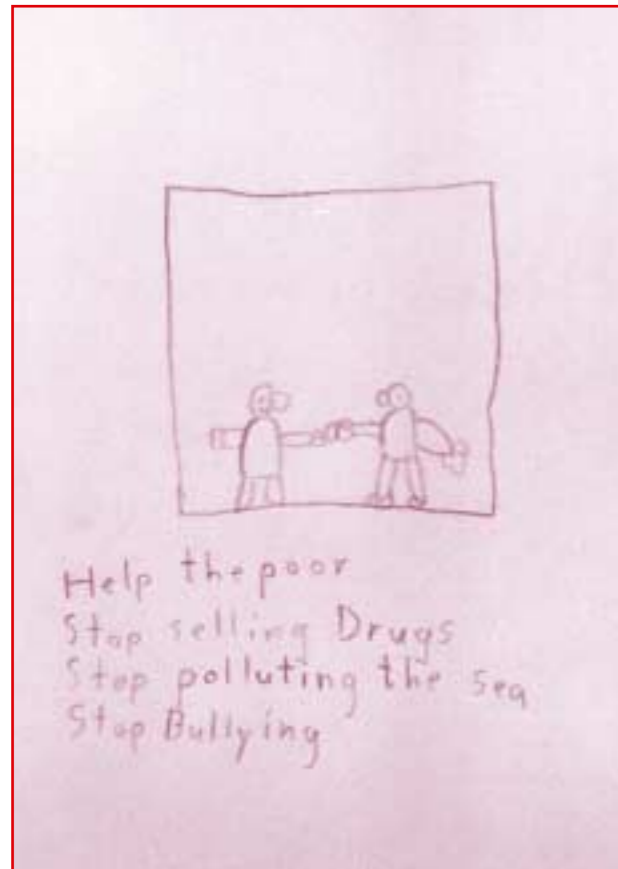
Every three years an international panel will be convened by the Minister for Children to undertake an independent review of the progress of the Strategy. The panel will comprise of interdisciplinary experts with a knowledge of international developments relating to children's policy and service delivery.

II Report to United Nations on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child


National reports will be prepared by the National Children's Office on the implementation of the Convention by Ireland every five years in accordance with the requirements of the Convention. This review will advise the UN of the progress being made through the National Children's Strategy and indicate plans being prepared to further realise the rights of children.

Appendix A

Development of the Strategy



Dear Minister
I'm older to make childrens
Lives better here are some
parties. We need more adventures
we need slides in the swimming
pool and we need park to play
in with playgrounds in it and we
need a cleaner place in our area
They need more school nice ones
They need more places to play
in.



If I had a Magic Wand.....

- ... I'd like to have pets
- ... I'd like there to be a real choice of placements for each child and young person that is suitable to their needs
- ... I'd like if the social worker didn't have to ask my parents to sign forms for hospital operations
- ... I'd like to see more of my family
- ... I'd like to live in a smaller group
- ... I'd like to change the rules of the house
- ... I'd like the staff to have more money for bills so that they won't be moaning to us about how much the phone bill is all of the time
- ... I'd like to have more choices for myself
- ... I'd like to go home
- ... I'd like to make people more aware about care and the stigma
- ... I'd like to turn back the clocks of all the children in care so that they would never have to go into care in the first place
- ... I'd like more pocket money
- ... I'd like the bars to be taken off the windows of the house and I'd like if I could have my friends in
- ... I'd like to change people's opinion about being in care
- ... I'd like more professional staff rather than just anybody working there
- ... I'd like a young person to be on the management committee of their home
- ... I'd like to have a choice of when we go into care, where we go and what we do

Contribution by the Irish Association of Young People in Care to the Public Consultation.

1. DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

In view of the priority attached by the Government and the complexity of the task, an Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) was established to oversee the development of the National Children's Strategy. This was in recognition of the wide range of diverse issues to be considered and to ensure the full range of children's needs and children's services were taken into account. The IDG consisted of Assistant Secretaries from eight key government departments and a legal adviser from the Attorney General's Office. The IDG was chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of Health and Children.

The work of the IDG was supported by a Cross-Departmental Team (CDT) comprised of officials from four government departments for which children were a core concern. The officials represented the Departments of Education and Science; Health and Children; Social, Community and Family Affairs and Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Additional expertise was brought to the work of the CDT through the secondment of a senior member of staff from the Centre for Child Care Research, Queen's University Belfast.

2. PROCESS FOR INPUTS

The IDG decided to adopt a number of approaches to getting the necessary inputs through:

- (i) the establishment of two advisory panels;
- (ii) the undertaking of a structured consultation programme;
- (iii) consultation with statutory bodies.

(i) Advisory Panels

Two expert panels were established to provide advice and guidance to the IDG. One panel was a Research and Information group of professional academics from national and international research centres, with a special interest in issues concerning children. The second was a Non-Governmental Service-Providers' group comprising representatives from voluntary organisations which provide services to children. The intention was to ensure that the

development of the Strategy was based on up-to-date, reliable and relevant information.

(ii) Consultation Process

A key element in the development of the Strategy was consultation with all stakeholders and particularly with children. An independent consultant was taken on to advise on and assist in the development of the consultation programme and to provide independent analysis of the issues and concerns raised in the submissions received.

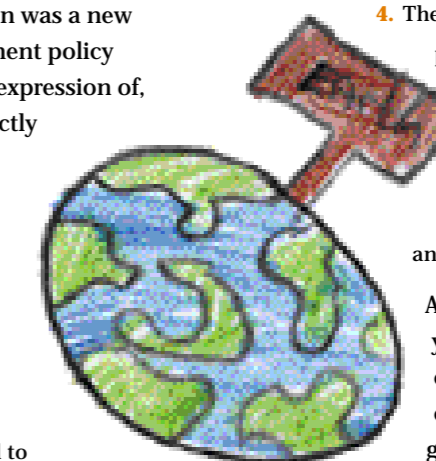
The first strand of the consultation was to seek submissions from the general public through advertisements in national newspapers. Advertisements were placed in the national media in November 1999 and again in January 2000. Those making submissions were asked to organise their material around the following set of questions:

1. Towards 2010: What are the opportunities and challenges facing children and young people over the next ten years?
2. Provision of services and supports for children and young people: What works well and why? How should these be developed over the next ten years having regard to these opportunities and challenges?
3. Delivery of services and supports for children and young people: What works well and why? What changes would improve service delivery over the next ten years having regard to these opportunities and challenges?

Three hundred and sixteen (316) submissions were received, ranging from hand-written letters to substantial documents, many of which were supplemented with detailed policy statements about all aspects of children's wellbeing. Private individuals accounted for 34% of submissions, as did service-providing organisations, including community development groups and representative bodies. Professional personnel in the health, child care, education and related fields constituted 28% of contributors. State bodies accounted for 4%.

The process of consultation with children was a new departure in the formulation of government policy and acted as both a stimulus to, and an expression of, the need to ensure that the Strategy directly addressed children's concerns as they expressed them. In association with the Children's Rights Alliance (an umbrella organisation for over sixty organisations involved with children) a programme was developed. The consultation with children had three strands:

1. Children and young people were invited to respond by e-mail or letter to an invitation from the Minister of State with responsibility for Children, Mary Hanafin T.D., to give their views on the following questions:
 - Is Ireland a good place for you to grow up in?
 - What's good about it?
 - What would make it better?The invitation was placed in national daily and evening newspapers, magazines and journals. These included *The Farmers Journal*, *The RTÉ Guide* and *The Big Issue*. It was circulated to all the libraries in the country and the Minister went on Den2 TV to promote the initiative.
2. The Minister of State visited five primary and five post-primary schools, where she met with a number of students (about 60 in each school) and discussed a range of issues with them. Posting the information on the Scoilnet website, which is widely accessed by teachers, parents and children, facilitated consultation through the school system.
3. Ten organisations working with children and young people undertook in-depth consultation with children and young people connected with their organisations. The Minister of State attended some of these consultation fora including ISPCCC fora in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Drogheda and a forum organised by the South-West Inner-City Network Ltd, Dublin.



4. The organisations were assisted in preparing for their consultations through a one-day workshop, which provided facilitators with background information on the National Children's Strategy and resource material for use.

A total of 2,488 children and young people took part in the consultation process. Sixty per cent (60%) of respondents were girls and forty per cent (40%) were boys. Sixty five percent (65%)

were thirteen and over and thirty five per cent (35%) were under thirteen. The participants ranged in age from three years to nineteen years. Each of the children who wrote or e-mailed in response to the invitations for submissions received a personalised reply to their contribution.

A consultation forum was held in June 2000 to review the findings of the consultation process, hosted by the Minister of State, Mary Hanafin T.D.. Those invited to the morning session were some of the younger children who made submissions through their organisations and schools. Those invited in the afternoon included older children, adults and organisations that made submissions.

The Report of the Public Consultation for the National Children's Strategy was published in September 2000. An executive summary, suitable for teenagers and a special report for younger children, were also published.

(iii) Consultations with other bodies

A Health Board Liaison Group was established as a multi-disciplinary group at senior levels of the health boards around the country. The purpose of the group was to provide the specialist advice necessary to the IDG and provide the linkages needed with the health boards in the development of the Strategy.

A meeting was held with the County Managers of the local government authorities to brief them on the National Children's Strategy and discuss the role of local authorities in contributing to and developing services and supports for children. The role of the

new County Development Boards was seen as being important in terms of mapping interdependencies and collaborating to implement the Strategy. A meeting was held with the education partners to brief them on the National Children's Strategy and to obtain their views on the issues which should be addressed by the Strategy and the impact that it will have on the education of children.

Discussions were held with the National, Economic and Social Council and the Economic and Social Research Institute was commissioned by the IDG to prepare a paper identifying the social and economic trends affecting children's wellbeing to assist in the deliberation on future policy directions for children in Ireland. The ESRI also addressed the need for children's wellbeing indicators. (Fahey and Nolan: *Social and Economic Trends Affecting Children and Policy for Children 1990-2010, ESRI 2000*)

The Institute of Public Administration was commissioned to provide a paper to the IDG exploring some of the main issues associated with the development of structures and processes to promote the effective co-ordination of services for children.

Two main concerns are addressed:

- the development of national-level structures and processes to oversee the co-ordination of policy and implementation;
- the importance of developing a service-user perspective, involving children themselves in the process, as a means of improving the quality of services.

(Boyle R: *The National Children's Strategy Enhancing Policy Co-ordination: Key Structures and Process Issues, IPA 2000*).

3. INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

Two advisory seminars were convened during the development process at which seven international child care experts reviewed proposals and offered advice based on international experience. Particular

attention was given to meeting obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, policy evaluation, child outcomes measurement and delivery structures.

Appendix B

Glossary of terms

Glossary of Terms

Annual Business Plans	Business Plans create the link between departmental strategy statements and strategy implementation. Through the business planning process, divisions and sections within government departments identify the detailed actions to be taken, including the allocation of budgets and resources to achieve the objectives of the organisation.
Childcare	The term childcare describes daycare facilities and services for pre-school children and school-going children out of school hours.
Child Care	The term child care applies to the services coming under the remit of the Department of Health and Children for children who are not receiving adequate care and protection.
Citizenship	The terms citizen and citizenship are used in their non-legal sense in the Strategy.
Commission on the Family	The Commission on the Family was established in 1995 by the Minister for Social Welfare to examine the effects of legislation and policies on families and to recommend proposals for strengthening the capacity of families to carry out their functions in a changing environment. The Report of the Commission, "Strengthening Families for Life" was published in July, 1998.
Community and Voluntary Organisations Fora	Supporting structures linked to the County and City Development Boards to provide a voice for the community and voluntary sector at CDB level.
County and City Development Boards (CDB's)	Quadripartite bodies from local government, local development agencies, the State sector and the social partners. They were established in each of the 29 county councils and the 5 county borough corporations to operate from 1 January, 2000. The primary functions of CDB's are to draw up a comprehensive Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development within the county/city.
Cross-Cutting Issues	The term used to describe policy issues which involve more than one department or agency and require co-ordinated action to address them.
Departmental Strategy Statements	The Public Service Management Act, 1997 requires all government departments to produce a strategy statement once every three years or within six months of the appointment of a new Minister. Strategy Statements provide the link between Government policy and the implementation of that policy by articulating the key objectives, outputs and related strategies of the department concerned.

Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme	The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform provides funding for the development of childcare under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme which is administered by Area Development Management Ltd..
Families Research Programme	Provides grant aid to support research projects which have the ability to inform the future development of aspects of public policy which relate to families and family services. The Programme is overseen by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.
Family and Community Service Resource Centres	The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs supports the work of locally-based resource centres by providing funding to these centres under the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme. The aim of centres funded under this programme is essentially to help combat disadvantage by improving the functioning of the family unit.
Integrated Services Process	The Integrated Services Process (ISP) was launched as a means towards achieving a more focused and better co-ordinated response by the statutory authorities to addressing the needs of severely disadvantaged urban communities. The Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation oversees the operation of the ISP.
Local Authority Housing Programme	Local Authorities support the provision of housing for people who cannot afford it under the Local Authority Housing Programme. The Programme is one of a range of housing measures under the National Development Plan 2000 - 2006 which aims to meet the social housing needs of up to 100,000 households over its lifetime.
Money Advice and Budgeting Service	An independent voluntary service for individuals or families, primarily those on low incomes who need guidance in managing their finances. The service is nationwide and comprises local voluntary and community groups, credit unions and representatives from local statutory agencies, including the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, Local Authorities and Health Boards.
PPF	The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness is the latest national agreements between the Government and the Social Partners.
REACH	A cross-departmental agency established by the Government to develop the strategy for the integration of public services delivery to the customer and to take the lead in developing and implementing the framework for e-Government in Ireland.
Social Capital	The term 'social capital' is commonly used as a shorthand description for those features of social life - networks, norms and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to enhance civic society.

Social Economy Programme	The key objective of the Social Economy Programme is to regenerate both urban and rural communities by providing urgently needed local services as well as employment opportunities and experience for those at most disadvantage when it comes to finding a job. The Programme is operated by FÁS.
Social Exclusion	Social exclusion is described as cumulative marginalisation: from production (unemployment), from consumption (income poverty), from social networks (community, family and neighbours), from decision making and from an adequate quality of life.
Social Partners	The parties to the negotiations on national agreements. They include employers, trade unions, farmers and community and voluntary sector organisations.
Voluntary Housing Programme	The Department of the Environment and Local Government supports the voluntary housing sector in providing housing for people who cannot afford it under the Voluntary Housing Programme. The Programme is one of a range of housing measures under the National Development Plan 2000 - 2006 which aims to meet the social housing needs of up to 100,000 households over its lifetime.
Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund	The objective of the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund is to develop a variety of drug prevention strategies in a targeted manner, through an integrated and area based approach to the development of facilities and services for young people at risk of drug misuse, in disadvantaged areas. The fund is administered by the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation.

Appendix C

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PART 1:

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PART 2:

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Appendix D

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child



Convention on the Rights of the Child

Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by
General Assembly resolution 44/25
of 20 November 1989

entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49

Preamble

The States Parties to the present Convention,

Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Bearing in mind that the peoples of the United Nations have, in the Charter, reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person, and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Recognizing that the United Nations has, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenants on Human Rights, proclaimed and agreed that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status,

Recalling that, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance,

Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community,

Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding,

Considering that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity,

Bearing in mind that the need to extend particular care to the child has been stated in the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924 and in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1959 and recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (in particular in articles 23 and 24), in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (in particular in article 10) and in the statutes and relevant instruments of specialized agencies and international organizations concerned with the welfare of children,

Bearing in mind that, as indicated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth",

Recalling the provisions of the Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with Special Reference to Foster Placement and Adoption Nationally and Internationally; the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules) ; and the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict,

Recognizing that, in all countries in the world, there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, and that such children need special consideration,

Taking due account of the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child,

Recognizing the importance of international co-operation for improving the living conditions of children in every country, in particular in the developing countries,

Have agreed as follows:

PART I

Article 1

For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

Article 2

1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

Article 3

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.
3. States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

Article 4

States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation.

Article 5

States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.

Article 6

1. States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.
2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

Article 7

1. The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.
2. States Parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights in accordance with their national law and their obligations under the relevant international instruments in this field, in particular where the child would otherwise be stateless.

Article 8

1. States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.
2. Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity.

Article 9

1. States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. Such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents, or one where the parents are living separately and a decision must be made as to the child's place of residence.
2. In any proceedings pursuant to paragraph 1 of the present article, all interested parties shall be given an opportunity to participate in the proceedings and make their views known.
3. States Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests.
4. Where such separation results from any action initiated by a State Party, such as the detention, imprisonment, exile, deportation or death (including death arising from any cause while the person is in the custody of the State) of one or both parents or of the child, that State Party shall, upon request, provide the parents, the child or, if appropriate, another member of the family with the essential information concerning the whereabouts of the absent member(s) of the family unless the provision of the information would be detrimental to the well-being of the child. States Parties shall further ensure that the submission of such a request shall of itself entail no adverse consequences for the person(s) concerned.

Article 10

1. In accordance with the obligation of States Parties under article 9, paragraph 1, applications by a child or his or her parents to enter or leave a State Party for the purpose of family reunification shall be dealt with by States Parties in a positive, humane and expeditious manner. States Parties shall further ensure that the submission of such a request shall entail no adverse consequences for the applicants and for the members of their family.
2. A child whose parents reside in different States shall have the right to maintain on a regular basis, save in exceptional circumstances personal relations and direct contacts with both parents. Towards that end and in accordance with the obligation of States Parties under article 9, paragraph 1, States Parties shall respect the right of the child and his or her parents to leave any country, including their own, and to enter their own country. The right to leave any country shall be subject only to such restrictions as are prescribed by law and which are necessary to protect the national security, public order (*ordre public*), public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others and are consistent with the other rights recognized in the present Convention.

Article 11

1. States Parties shall take measures to combat the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad.
2. To this end, States Parties shall promote the conclusion of bilateral or multilateral agreements or accession to existing agreements.

Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.
2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
 - (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or
 - (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals.

Article 14

1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Article 15

1. States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.
2. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of these rights other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Article 16

1. No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.
2. The child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 17

States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health. To this end, States Parties shall:

- (a) Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of article 29;
- (b) Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources;
- (c) Encourage the production and dissemination of children's books;
- (d) Encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous;
- (e) Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of articles 13 and 18.

Article 18

1. States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.
2. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.

3. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.

Article 19

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.
2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

Article 20

1. A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State.
2. States Parties shall in accordance with their national laws ensure alternative care for such a child.
3. Such care could include, inter alia, foster placement, kafalah of Islamic law, adoption or if necessary placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. When considering solutions, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.

Article 21

States Parties that recognize and/or permit the system of adoption shall ensure that the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration and they shall:

- (a) Ensure that the adoption of a child is authorized only by competent authorities who determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures and on the basis of all pertinent and reliable information, that the adoption is permissible in view of the child's status concerning parents, relatives and legal guardians and that, if required, the persons concerned have given their informed consent to the adoption on the basis of such counselling as may be necessary;
- (b) Recognize that inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of child's care, if the child cannot be placed in a foster or an adoptive family or cannot in any suitable manner be cared for in the child's country of origin;
- (c) Ensure that the child concerned by inter-country adoption enjoys safeguards and standards equivalent to those existing in the case of national adoption;

- (d) Take all appropriate measures to ensure that, in inter-country adoption, the placement does not result in improper financial gain for those involved in it;

- (e) Promote, where appropriate, the objectives of the present article by concluding bilateral or multilateral arrangements or agreements, and endeavour, within this framework, to ensure that the placement of the child in another country is carried out by competent authorities or organs.

Article 22

1. States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties.
2. For this purpose, States Parties shall provide, as they consider appropriate, co-operation in any efforts by the United Nations and other competent intergovernmental organizations or non-governmental organizations co-operating with the United Nations to protect and assist such a child and to trace the parents or other members of the family of any refugee child in order to obtain information necessary for reunification with his or her family. In cases where no parents or other members of the family can be found, the child shall be accorded the same protection as any other child permanently or temporarily deprived of his or her family environment for any reason, as set forth in the present Convention.

Article 23

1. States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.
2. States Parties recognize the right of the disabled child to special care and shall encourage and ensure the extension, subject to available resources, to the eligible child and those responsible for his or her care, of assistance for which application is made and which is appropriate to the child's condition and to the circumstances of the parents or others caring for the child.
3. Recognizing the special needs of a disabled child, assistance extended in accordance with paragraph 2 of the present article shall be provided free of charge, whenever possible, taking into account the financial resources of the parents or others caring for the child, and shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development.
4. States Parties shall promote, in the spirit of international cooperation, the exchange of appropriate information in the field of preventive health care and of medical, psychological and functional treatment of disabled children, including dissemination of and access to information concerning methods of rehabilitation, education and vocational services, with the aim of enabling States Parties to improve their capabilities and skills and to widen their experience in these areas. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 24

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.
2. States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures:
 - (a) To diminish infant and child mortality;
 - (b) To ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care to all children with emphasis on the development of primary health care;
 - (c) To combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, inter alia, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution;
 - (d) To ensure appropriate pre-natal and post-natal health care for mothers;
 - (e) To ensure that all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, the advantages of breastfeeding, hygiene and environmental sanitation and the prevention of accidents;
 - (f) To develop preventive health care, guidance for parents and family planning education and services.
3. States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.
4. States Parties undertake to promote and encourage international co-operation with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the right recognized in the present article. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 25

States Parties recognize the right of a child who has been placed by the competent authorities for the purposes of care, protection or treatment of his or her physical or mental health, to a periodic review of the treatment provided to the child and all other circumstances relevant to his or her placement.

Article 26

1. States Parties shall recognize for every child the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance, and shall take the necessary measures to achieve the full realization of this right in accordance with their national law.
2. The benefits should, where appropriate, be granted, taking into account the resources and the circumstances of the child and persons having responsibility for the maintenance of the child, as well as any other consideration relevant to an application for benefits made by or on behalf of the child.

Article 27

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
2. The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development.
3. States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.
4. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to secure the recovery of maintenance for the child from the parents or other persons having financial responsibility for the child, both within the State Party and from abroad. In particular, where the person having financial responsibility for the child lives in a State different from that of the child, States Parties shall promote the accession to international agreements or the conclusion of such agreements, as well as the making of other appropriate arrangements.

Article 28

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:
 - (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
 - (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
 - (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
 - (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
 - (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.
3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
 - (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

- (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
 - (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
 - (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
 - (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.
2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

Article 30

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

Article 31

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Article 32

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.
2. States Parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure the implementation of the present article. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of other international instruments, States Parties shall in particular:
 - (a) Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;
 - (b) Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;
 - (c) Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article.

Article 33

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances.

Article 34

States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

- (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
- (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;
- (c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

Article 35

States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.

Article 36

States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.

Article 37

States Parties shall ensure that:

- (a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age;
- (b) No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time;
- (c) Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances;
- (d) Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other

appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action.

Article 38

1. States Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child.
2. States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities.
3. States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, States Parties shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest.
4. In accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population in armed conflicts, States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict.

Article 39

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

Article 40

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others and which takes into account the child's age and the desirability of promoting the child's reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society.
2. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of international instruments, States Parties shall, in particular, ensure that:
 - (a) No child shall be alleged as, be accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law by reason of acts or omissions that were not prohibited by national or international law at the time they were committed;
 - (b) Every child alleged as or accused of having infringed the penal law has at least the following guarantees:
 - (i) To be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law;

- (ii) To be informed promptly and directly of the charges against him or her, and, if appropriate, through his or her parents or legal guardians, and to have legal or other appropriate assistance in the preparation and presentation of his or her defence;
 - (iii) To have the matter determined without delay by a competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body in a fair hearing according to law, in the presence of legal or other appropriate assistance and, unless it is considered not to be in the best interest of the child, in particular, taking into account his or her age or situation, his or her parents or legal guardians;
 - (iv) Not to be compelled to give testimony or to confess guilt; to examine or have examined adverse witnesses and to obtain the participation and examination of witnesses on his or her behalf under conditions of equality;
 - (v) If considered to have infringed the penal law, to have this decision and any measures imposed in consequence thereof reviewed by a higher competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body according to law;
 - (vi) To have the free assistance of an interpreter if the child cannot understand or speak the language used;
 - (vii) To have his or her privacy fully respected at all stages of the proceedings.
3. States Parties shall seek to promote the establishment of laws, procedures, authorities and institutions specifically applicable to children alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law, and, in particular:
 - (a) The establishment of a minimum age below which children shall be presumed not to have the capacity to infringe the penal law;
 - (b) Whenever appropriate and desirable, measures for dealing with such children without resorting to judicial proceedings, providing that human rights and legal safeguards are fully respected.
4. A variety of dispositions, such as care, guidance and supervision orders; counselling; probation; foster care; education and vocational training programmes and other alternatives to institutional care shall be available to ensure that children are dealt with in a manner appropriate to their well-being and proportionate both to their circumstances and the offence.

Article 41

Nothing in the present Convention shall affect any provisions which are more conducive to the realization of the rights of the child and which may be contained in:

- (a) The law of a State party; or
- (b) International law in force for that State.

PART II

Article 42

States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.

Article 43

1. For the purpose of examining the progress made by States Parties in achieving the realization of the obligations undertaken in the present Convention, there shall be established a Committee on the Rights of the Child, which shall carry out the functions hereinafter provided.
2. The Committee shall consist of ten experts of high moral standing and recognized competence in the field covered by this Convention. The members of the Committee shall be elected by States Parties from among their nationals and shall serve in their personal capacity, consideration being given to equitable geographical distribution, as well as to the principal legal systems.
3. The members of the Committee shall be elected by secret ballot from a list of persons nominated by States Parties. Each State Party may nominate one person from among its own nationals.
4. The initial election to the Committee shall be held no later than six months after the date of the entry into force of the present Convention and thereafter every second year. At least four months before the date of each election, the Secretary-General of the United Nations shall address a letter to States Parties inviting them to submit their nominations within two months. The Secretary-General shall subsequently prepare a list in alphabetical order of all persons thus nominated, indicating States Parties which have nominated them, and shall submit it to the States Parties to the present Convention.
5. The elections shall be held at meetings of States Parties convened by the Secretary-General at United Nations Headquarters. At those meetings, for which two thirds of States Parties shall constitute a quorum, the persons elected to the Committee shall be those who obtain the largest number of votes and an absolute majority of the votes of the representatives of States Parties present and voting.
6. The members of the Committee shall be elected for a term of four years. They shall be eligible for re-election if renominated. The term of five of the members elected at the first election shall expire at the end of two years; immediately after the first election, the names of these five members shall be chosen by lot by the Chairman of the meeting.
7. If a member of the Committee dies or resigns or declares that for any other cause he or she can no longer perform the duties of the Committee, the State Party which nominated the member shall appoint another expert from among its nationals to serve for the remainder of the term, subject to the approval of the Committee.
8. The Committee shall establish its own rules of procedure.
9. The Committee shall elect its officers for a period of two years.
10. The meetings of the Committee shall normally be held at United Nations Headquarters or at any other

convenient place as determined by the Committee. The Committee shall normally meet annually. The duration of the meetings of the Committee shall be determined, and reviewed, if necessary, by a meeting of the States Parties to the present Convention, subject to the approval of the General Assembly.

11. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall provide the necessary staff and facilities for the effective performance of the functions of the Committee under the present Convention.
12. With the approval of the General Assembly, the members of the Committee established under the present Convention shall receive emoluments from United Nations resources on such terms and conditions as the Assembly may decide.

Article 44

1. States Parties undertake to submit to the Committee, through the Secretary-General of the United Nations, reports on the measures they have adopted which give effect to the rights recognized herein and on the progress made on the enjoyment of those rights:
 - (a) Within two years of the entry into force of the Convention for the State Party concerned;
 - (b) Thereafter every five years.
2. Reports made under the present article shall indicate factors and difficulties, if any, affecting the degree of fulfilment of the obligations under the present Convention. Reports shall also contain sufficient information to provide the Committee with a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Convention in the country concerned.
3. A State Party which has submitted a comprehensive initial report to the Committee need not, in its subsequent reports submitted in accordance with paragraph 1 (b) of the present article, repeat basic information previously provided.
4. The Committee may request from States Parties further information relevant to the implementation of the Convention.
5. The Committee shall submit to the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, every two years, reports on its activities.
6. States Parties shall make their reports widely available to the public in their own countries.

Article 45

In order to foster the effective implementation of the Convention and to encourage international co-operation in the field covered by the Convention:

- (a) The specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund, and other United Nations organs shall be entitled to be represented at the consideration of the implementation of such provisions of the present Convention as fall within the scope of their mandate. The Committee may invite the specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund and other competent bodies as it may consider appropriate to provide expert advice on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their respective mandates. The Committee may invite the specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund, and

other United Nations organs to submit reports on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their activities;

- (b) The Committee shall transmit, as it may consider appropriate, to the specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund and other competent bodies, any reports from States Parties that contain a request, or indicate a need, for technical advice or assistance, along with the Committee's observations and suggestions, if any, on these requests or indications;
- (c) The Committee may recommend to the General Assembly to request the Secretary-General to undertake on its behalf studies on specific issues relating to the rights of the child;
- (d) The Committee may make suggestions and general recommendations based on information received pursuant to articles 44 and 45 of the present Convention. Such suggestions and general recommendations shall be transmitted to any State Party concerned and reported to the General Assembly, together with comments, if any, from States Parties.

PART III

Article 46

The present Convention shall be open for signature by all States.

Article 47

The present Convention is subject to ratification. Instruments of ratification shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Article 48

The present Convention shall remain open for accession by any State. The instruments of accession shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Article 49

- 1. The present Convention shall enter into force on the thirtieth day following the date of deposit with the Secretary-General of the United Nations of the twentieth instrument of ratification or accession.
- 2. For each State ratifying or acceding to the Convention after the deposit of the twentieth instrument of ratification or accession, the Convention shall enter into force on the thirtieth day after the deposit by such State of its instrument of ratification or accession.

Article 50

- 1. Any State Party may propose an amendment and file it with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Secretary-General shall thereupon communicate the proposed amendment to States Parties, with a

request that they indicate whether they favour a conference of States Parties for the purpose of considering and voting upon the proposals. In the event that, within four months from the date of such communication, at least one third of the States Parties favour such a conference, the Secretary-General shall convene the conference under the auspices of the United Nations. Any amendment adopted by a majority of States Parties present and voting at the conference shall be submitted to the General Assembly for approval.

- 2. An amendment adopted in accordance with paragraph 1 of the present article shall enter into force when it has been approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations and accepted by a two-thirds majority of States Parties.
- 3. When an amendment enters into force, it shall be binding on those States Parties which have accepted it, other States Parties still being bound by the provisions of the present Convention and any earlier amendments which they have accepted.

Article 51

- 1. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall receive and circulate to all States the text of reservations made by States at the time of ratification or accession.
- 2. A reservation incompatible with the object and purpose of the present Convention shall not be permitted.
- 3. Reservations may be withdrawn at any time by notification to that effect addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall then inform all States. Such notification shall take effect on the date on which it is received by the Secretary-General.

Article 52

A State Party may denounce the present Convention by written notification to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Denunciation becomes effective one year after the date of receipt of the notification by the Secretary-General.

Article 53

The Secretary-General of the United Nations is designated as the depositary of the present Convention.

Article 54

The original of the present Convention, of which the Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish texts are equally authentic, shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

IN WITNESS THEREOF the undersigned plenipotentiaries, being duly authorized thereto by their respective governments, have signed the present Convention.

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Geneva, Switzerland APPENDIX C

