



Relate

The journal of developments in social services,
policy and legislation in Ireland

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Children and the law in Ireland

Children have long been recognised as a special group within society, mainly due to their vulnerability. Historically, children were granted fewer rights and had fewer responsibilities than adults. They were seen primarily as the responsibility of their parents and guardians, who had a great deal of autonomy in deciding how they would be treated.

However, our understanding of children has grown considerably over the past century, and a much more involved and nuanced approach to the treatment of children can now be seen in Ireland and many other parts of the world. One of the key drivers of these changes has been the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The last decade has seen further constitutional change in Ireland to reinforce children's rights, and this has led to other changes in the legislation affecting children and, as a result, changes to their rights, responsibilities and treatment.

International law and principles

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989. It followed on from previous, less binding, Declarations on the Rights of the Child. Ireland is one of 196 countries that have ratified the Convention. Ireland signed the UN Convention in 1990, and ratified it in 1992.

The Convention is based on four core principles:

- Non-discrimination
- The best interests of the child as a primary consideration
- The right to life, survival and development
- Respect for the views of the child

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These are the fundamental principles of the Convention, and all its other provisions are to be interpreted and applied in accordance with these four principles.

The Convention consists of a number of Articles setting out the basic rights to which every child is entitled. Those rights can broadly be grouped into four categories:

1. **Survival rights** – including the rights to life, food, shelter and access to medical care
2. **Development rights** – including the rights to education, play, and freedom of conscience and religion
3. **Protection rights** – including protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation
4. **Participation rights** – including the rights to express views and participate in family life and society

To protect these rights, the Convention sets minimum standards that governments agree to meet in providing healthcare, education, and legal and social services to children in their countries.

Ireland's performance in relation to the Convention is periodically assessed by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, an elected group of independent human rights experts specialising in children's rights.

The Convention is not directly enforceable in Ireland as it has not been transposed in full into Irish law. However, many of its principles are similar to the rights set out in the Irish Constitution and many pieces of legislation, and can therefore be enforced by reference to the Constitution or legislation. In addition, the Convention has led to many changes in Irish law, such as the children's rights referendum and the establishment of the Ombudsman for Children's Office.

Other international instruments

While the European Convention on Human Rights does not specifically mention the rights of children, it states that the rights it covers apply to 'everyone'. These include the rights to life, family and private life, non-discrimination and freedom of expression. In particular, the right to family life has been interpreted to mean that children born within marriage and outside marriage in Ireland should receive similar treatment.

The European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights builds on the European Convention on Human Rights and places additional obligations on member states. Article 24 contains the main child-specific rights, such as:

- The right to such protection and care as is necessary for children's well-being
- The right to express their views freely and have those views considered in accordance with their age and maturity
- The need to make the child's best interests a primary consideration in all action relating to that child
- The right for the child to maintain a regular personal

relationship, and direct contact, with both parents, unless that is contrary to the child's interests

Another UN convention, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is discussed later.

Irish law

The Children Referendum and the Irish Constitution

A proposal to insert a new Article 42A into the Irish Constitution was approved in a referendum on 10 November 2012. The amendment was finally signed into law on 28 April 2015 through the Thirty-First Amendment of the Constitution (Children) Act 2012.

Before this change, children had many, if not all, of the same fundamental rights as adults. However, there were very few child-specific rights and, in some cases, the rights of children were trumped by the rights of the family and the authority of the child's parents or guardians to make decisions. As a result of the referendum, Article 42A now provides express and independent protection for children's rights at a constitutional level for the first time.

The express provisions include:

- A recognition of the fundamental rights of the child
- A duty on the State to uphold children's rights as far as practicable through its laws
- A duty on the State to take on the role of a child's parents or guardians in exceptional circumstances
- The principle that the best interests of the child must be the paramount consideration in any decision relating to the safety and welfare of a child or in any proceedings relating to the adoption, guardianship or custody of, or access to, a child
- The recognition of the child's right to be heard in those proceedings and the obligation on the State to introduce legislation to that effect
- Allowing for the adoption of children born to a married couple (marital children)

The definition of a child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as any person under the age of 18 unless the relevant domestic law specifies an earlier age.

In Ireland, in many pieces of legislation such as the Child Care Act 1991 and the Children Act 2001, a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18.

It was previously possible for a 16-year-old or 17-year-old to seek permission from a court to get married. If permission was granted and they married, they were then deemed to be an adult under many pieces of legislation, even though they were under 18. Since 1 January 2019, a court can no longer grant such permission.

Children and Family Relationships Act 2015

The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 was one of the most significant family law developments in Ireland in decades. In particular, it ensured the State complied with its constitutional obligation to legislate on the best interests principle and the right of a child to be heard.

While versions of the best interests of the child principle had appeared in earlier legislation, the 2015 Act specifies a list of factors that a court must consider when deciding what is in the best interests of the child. These include:

- The child's age
- The benefit to the child of having a meaningful relationship with both parents, other relatives and people involved in his or her upbringing
- The physical, psychological and emotional needs of the child
- The child's religious, spiritual, cultural and linguistic upbringing and needs
- The child's social, intellectual and educational upbringing and needs
- Any harm which the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering
- The capacities of the child's parents and the attitudes of one parent to another
- The views of the child, as far as these can be ascertained

While the 2015 Act does not state any particular way to ascertain a child's views, it does allow a court to appoint an expert, known as a *guardian ad litem*, to determine and convey these views. The expert's role is to ascertain the maturity of the child. In addition:

- Where requested by the court, the expert will ascertain the capacity of the child to form their own views on the matters at issue.
- Where the expert finds that the child is capable of forming their own views on the matters at issue, the expert must ascertain these views and report them to the court. This provision upholds the right of the child to be heard in court proceedings.

Alternatively, a judge can meet the child in private to ascertain their views, if that is deemed appropriate.

Children and health

GP visit cards for children under six

Children under the age of six are entitled to a GP visit card, which allows free visits to a participating GP. A child must be registered for the card with the HSE to avail of free visits.

In addition to free GP visits, the GP visit card for children under six covers specific assessments at ages two and five, and care for children with asthma. These assessments are preventive checks that include charting age, weight and height, and taking appropriate follow-up action.

Medical cards/GP visit cards for children over six

Children in Ireland are dependants of their parents and have the same entitlement to health services as their parents. This means that if a child's parents have a medical card, the child is included as a dependant on that card and is entitled to the same range of services as their parents. A child over 16 may be considered as independent in the medical card assessment on the basis of their income or living circumstances.

A child under 18 who has been diagnosed with cancer within the previous five years is entitled to a medical card regardless of their parents' means. A child for whom a Domiciliary Care Allowance is paid is also eligible for a medical card without a means test.

Medical procedures and consent

In general, children aged 16 or over may give consent to surgical, medical or dental procedures themselves, without requiring the consent of their parents or guardians. This is provided for in the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997. It is the practice to get parental consent to medical procedures for children under 16 even though it is not entirely clear that parents have the ultimate decision.

Previously, the Supreme Court held that a health board (now replaced by the Health Service Executive) did not have the right to insist on a test being carried out on a child without parental permission. This case involved the PKU or heel pin-prick test, which is usually carried out on babies shortly after birth. The Supreme Court held that only in exceptional circumstances would the court intervene and make an order contrary to the wishes of the parents. It remains to be seen whether the Supreme Court would reach the same decision in light of the new Article 42A of the Constitution.

Abortion

Like other medical procedures, a child aged 16 or over may consent to have an abortion. However, for the consent to be valid, the doctor providing the service must be confident that the child fully understands the information she receives.

A child aged 16 or 17 will normally be encouraged to involve their parents or another supportive adult. However, a child over 16 has the right not to involve an adult.

In exceptional circumstances, a child aged 15 or under can choose to have an abortion and not involve her parents or another supportive adult. She can do this only after undergoing an appropriate assessment and if the doctor believes the child is capable of consenting.

Generally, all information concerning an abortion must remain confidential.

However, regardless of whether an abortion is performed or not, a doctor is under a statutory obligation to report the following to Tusla The Child and Family Agency:

- A child under 15 who is involved in sexual activity
- A child aged 15 or 16 who is involved in sexual activity with someone who is at least two years older
- A child under 17 who the doctor believes is at risk of sexual abuse or harm
- A child under 17 who the doctor believes has been sexually abused or harmed

Contraception

There is no set minimum age in Ireland for getting contraceptive advice and prescriptions. The age of consent to sexual activity is 17 and it is a criminal offence to have sex with a person under 17. This means that providers of contraceptive services may refuse to provide those services to people under 17.

National Donor-Conceived Person Register

The Minister for Health is to establish and maintain the National Donor-Conceived Person Register from 4 May 2020. This register will contain information about a donor-conceived child, the parent(s), the donor and the facility where the procedure took place. After the child turns 18, the parents and the donor have different rights of access to the information on the register. In all cases, the Minister must be satisfied that the child or the donor has received counselling on the implications of seeking or providing the information. Also covered in *Relate's* Family law update (November/December 2019).

Children and education

The State has a constitutional obligation to make free primary education available to all children. It does this by funding educational institutions under the patronage of a particular body. Children can attend primary school from the age of four and must be in primary education (although not necessarily in a school) from the age of six.

There is also an Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme for children of pre-school age. To be eligible for the scheme, children must be at least two years and eight months old.

To attend second-level education, children must be aged 12 or over on 1 January in the first school year of attendance.

Under the Education Welfare Act 2000, attendance at school (or receiving an education) is compulsory from the age of six up to 16 or until students have completed three years of second-level education, whichever is the later. Parents must by law ensure their child attends school. Tusla can take legal action against any parent who it believes is not complying with their obligations. In addition, parents must inform the school if their child will be absent from school on a school day and must give the reason for the absence, for example, illness. This should be done in writing.

Children with special educational needs have the right to free primary education up to the age of 18. The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 provides

that children are to be educated in an inclusive (mainstream) setting unless this would not be in the best interests of the child or would effectively prevent other children in mainstream schooling from getting their education.

Under the Equal Status Acts 2000-2015, a school may not discriminate in relation to:

- The admission or the terms and conditions of admission of a student
- The access of a student to any course, facility or benefit provided
- Any other term or condition of participation in the school by the student
- The expulsion of a student or any other sanction

A school must take steps to meet the needs of a child with a disability, if it would be impossible or unduly difficult for that person to participate in school without special treatment, facilities or adjustments. However, the school has no duty to provide special treatment, facilities or adjustments if they give rise to anything more than a nominal cost. The meaning of nominal cost will depend on the circumstances, such as the size of, and resources available to, the organisation.

Corporal punishment

Corporal punishment in Irish schools was first prohibited under a direction by the Department of Education in 1982. Since criminal liability for teachers or others using corporal punishment was introduced under Section 24 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997, corporal punishment of students may be a crime. The justifiable use of force is still allowed in certain circumstances, such as in self-defence or in the defence of others. It is not allowed where a child is being punished.

Corporal punishment of children outside of schools, particularly by parents and guardians, used to be generally protected by the defence of reasonable chastisement. This defence was removed by Section 28 of the Children First Act 2015. Therefore, since 11 December 2015, it is no longer lawful to punish a child using force.

Digital age of consent

The digital age of consent refers to the age at which a person can consent to the holding and processing of their personal data online. It is unlawful to process the data of a child who is under the age of consent without the consent of a person who holds parental authority. Under Article 8 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), each EU member state was free to fix a digital age of consent between the ages of 13 and 16.

The online service companies which process the data of a child under the digital age of consent must make reasonable efforts to verify that the necessary consent has been given. Ireland chose to set the digital age at 16 through Section 31 of the Data Protection Act 2018. A review of that decision must be completed by 24 May 2022.

Online Safety Commissioner

Before the general election in February 2020, the Government proposed the establishment of an Online Safety Commissioner as part of a broader Media Commission in its Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill.

If the Media Commission is established, its functions will include publishing statutory codes on harmful and inappropriate online content. Relevant and designated online service providers, which will likely include many social media companies, will need to follow these codes in providing their services. A significant number of these codes will relate to age-appropriate content for children of different ages. The proposed Online Safety Commissioner will have the power to fine, prosecute and name and shame services that fail to comply.

Criminal law and children

The criminal justice system treats children differently from adults. The law dealing with children found in breach of criminal law is set out in the Children Act 2001, which has been amended on a number of occasions.

Age of criminal responsibility

The general age of criminal responsibility for children is 12. This means that children under 12 cannot be charged with an offence. There is an exception however, for children aged 10 or 11, who can be charged with murder, manslaughter, rape or aggravated sexual assault.

Where a child under 14 is charged with an offence, no further proceedings can be taken without the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). Similarly, where a child under 17 is alleged to have engaged in a sexual activity with another child aged between 15 and 17, the DPP must consent to any prosecution.

Although the 2001 Act in general prohibits children under 12 from being charged and convicted of a criminal offence, they do not have total immunity from action being taken against them. The Gardaí must take a child under 12 to their parents or guardian where they have reasonable grounds for believing that the child has committed an offence but cannot be charged for it due to his or her age. Where this is not possible, the Gardaí will arrange for the child to be taken into the custody of Tusla for the area where the child normally lives.

The Children Court

The Children Act 2001 also established the Children Court to separate, as far as possible, court cases involving children from those which involve adults. In Dublin, hearings against children take place at a separate Children Court venue in Smithfield. Outside Dublin, Children Court cases are often held in the District Court on different days or at different times from when adult cases are heard. The president of the District Court can require judges who sit in the Children

Court to undertake special training.

Hearings for all minor offences are held in the Children Court, as are the most serious, indictable offences. Indictable offences are crimes so serious that the charges would normally be heard before a jury in the higher courts.

However, certain offences cannot be heard by the Children Court and must be heard in the Central Criminal Court. These offences include:

- Murder
- Attempted murder
- Conspiracy to murder
- Manslaughter
- Rape
- Aggravated sexual assault

The Children Court is a private court and there are restrictions on who can be present when the court is sitting. The following people are allowed in the courtroom during Children Court proceedings:

- Officers of the court
- The parents or guardians of the child concerned
- The child and their legal representatives
- People directly involved in the proceedings (for example, witnesses)
- An adult relative of the child, or another adult, if the child's parents or guardian are not present
- *Bona fide* representatives of the press
- Other people who are allowed to remain at the proceedings at the court's discretion

The orders or decisions of the Children Court are made available to the public. However, as proceedings are held in private, a report which reveals the child's name, address or school, or includes information likely to identify the child, can only be published or broadcast if the court expressly allows it.

Detention of a child following conviction for a criminal offence

A court may impose a period of detention on a child who is found guilty of a criminal offence, but only if the court believes that this is the only suitable way of dealing with the child. Girls and boys from the age of 10 up to 18 who are sentenced to a period of detention are detained at the Oberstown Children Detention Campus in County Dublin.

Spent convictions

An offence committed by a child under the age of 18, for which they have been found guilty, can be automatically expunged from the record as if never committed, once the following conditions are met:

- The offence was committed before the child reached the age of 18 years.
- The offence is not one required to be tried by the Central Criminal Court (such as murder or rape).

- The child has complied with any order made against them for that offence.
- At least three years have elapsed since the finding of guilt.
- The child has not been dealt with for another offence in that three-year period.

If these conditions are met, the child or young person is no longer regarded under Irish law as having committed an offence.

Anti-social behaviour by children

The Criminal Justice Act 2006 introduced provisions within the criminal law for dealing with anti-social behaviour by children who are aged between 12 and 18. These provisions are designed to allow the Gardaí to deal effectively with anti-social behaviour, while keeping the child out of the criminal justice system.

A child's behaviour towards someone who does not live with them is anti-social if it causes or, in the circumstances, is likely to:

- Cause them harassment, or
- Cause significant or persistent alarm, distress, fear or intimidation, or
- Would significantly or persistently prevent their full use or enjoyment of their property

Anti-social behaviour includes intimidation, abusive or threatening behaviour, and vandalism. The Gardaí can deal with such anti-social behaviour in a number of ways, including:

- Issuing anti-social behaviour warnings to children
- Convening meetings to discuss a child's anti-social behaviour
- Requesting a child and their parents or guardians to enter into a good behaviour contract
- Applying to the courts for an anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) in respect of a child

Garda Youth Diversion Programme

The Garda Youth Diversion Programme allows children who commit criminal offences or anti-social behaviour to receive a *caution* instead of getting an ASBO or being formally charged and prosecuted for an offence. A caution is a warning from the Gardaí against committing certain types of behaviour.

Before the child is considered for admission to the programme, they must admit responsibility for their criminal or anti-social behaviour. Generally, they must also consent to take part in the programme and, if necessary, to be supervised by a juvenile liaison officer.

The programme may also include holding one or more conferences to mediate between the child and the victim, if appropriate, and to draw up an action plan for the child.

Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities have the same rights as other children. In addition to ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992, Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2018.

The purpose of the UNCRPD is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all people with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. It also recognises that children with disabilities should have full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children.

It requires each signatory state to act in accordance with the principles contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child by making the best interests of the child the primary consideration and by ensuring that the child's views carry due weight on any decision affecting them.

Ireland has not yet ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention, which allows individuals or groups to take a complaint to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities if they feel that their rights have not been met.

A parent or guardian may get Domiciliary Care Allowance, if their child has a disability, is under 16 and needs continuous care and attention substantially in excess of that required by a child of the same age without a disability. If so, the child will also automatically be entitled to a medical card, regardless of their parent's means. A child over 16 may be eligible for Disability Allowance.

If a child has a disability or may potentially have a disability, a parent or guardian can apply to the HSE for an Assessment of Need. A person aged 16 or 17 can apply for their own Assessment of Need. The assessment officer will decide whether a team or individual assessment is appropriate in each case. The assessment is a short screening test resulting in an assessment report. It will identify the child's health needs and list the services required to meet them. See also *Relate's* Disability legislation update (April 2018).

Children from ethnic minorities

Traveller and Roma children

Travellers were formally recognised as a distinct ethnic group within the Irish State in March 2017. *The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021* is a cross-departmental initiative to improve the lives of the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland. To improve Traveller engagement with education, the Department of Education and Skills, Tusla and Traveller representative groups collaborate on the education-related measures proposed in the strategy.

Traveller and Roma children have the same rights to education as settled children. They are also subject to the same rules on school attendance. Traveller children can access additional learning supports in primary school and post-primary school if they have an identified educational need.

Asylum-seeking and refugee children

An asylum-seeking child is one who has yet to receive a decision on their application for refugee status or subsidiary protection.

A refugee child is one who has been granted refugee status, meaning that they can remain in Ireland after having to leave their home country due to a fear of persecution. If a person is not granted refugee status, they may be eligible to stay as a person entitled to subsidiary protection.

Most asylum-seeking children arrive in Ireland with a parent or guardian and are placed in direct provision centres until their application is processed. Parents or guardians receive an allowance of €29.80 per child per week when in direct provision, called a Daily Expenses Allowance. Children in direct provision are also eligible for a medical card.

A child who arrives in Ireland without a parent or guardian, and seeks asylum, is called a 'separated child seeking asylum'. Previously, they were called 'unaccompanied minors'. These children are normally placed in foster care until they reach 18. Once they turn 18, they are moved ('aged out') to Direct Provision or Emergency Centres with other adult asylum seekers.

All children and young people, including young asylum seekers, are entitled to free primary and post-primary education. Young asylum seekers can apply for a grant for third-level or further education if they have completed their Leaving Certificate and have been in the Irish education system for three years. People with refugee status or subsidiary protection and those with humanitarian leave to remain are entitled to free third-level education, in the same way as children with Irish citizenship, if they have been living in Ireland for three years or more.

Youth homelessness

Youth homelessness can arise due to a child's parent or guardian being made homeless or due to events which mean it is no longer suitable for a child to continue living in the family home.

Under the Community Childcare Subvention Resettlement (Transitional) Programme, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs funds free childcare for children and families experiencing homelessness. This includes a daily meal for each child.

Tusla has the right to intervene for the child's safety if they are at risk of homelessness and can no longer safely remain at or return home. Depending on their specific

circumstances, the child may be placed in foster care or residential care, or provided with suitable alternative accommodation.

Certain young people leaving residential care, foster care, prison or juvenile detention services may be at particular risk of homelessness. Tusla works to reduce this risk by setting up aftercare supports for them.

Many children and young people come into contact with homeless services through voluntary agencies, social workers or the Gardaí. There are many organisations working specifically with homeless young people. Tusla's homelessness liaison officer leads its work with these organisations.

Through the School Completion Programme, Tusla also supports homeless families experiencing problems with school attendance. Children whose families are homeless are prioritised for services such as homework clubs and breakfast clubs.

Key bodies involved in protecting children's rights

Department of Children and Youth Affairs

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs was established in 2011 and brings together a number of key areas of policy and service provision for children, young people and families. It focuses on policy issues that affect children in areas such as early childhood care and education, youth justice, child welfare and protection, children and young people's participation, research on children and young people, and youth work.

The Department has developed various national policies, including a national policy framework for children and young people, a national strategy on children and young people's participation in decision-making, and a national youth strategy. For more information, see dcya.gov.ie.

Tusla – the Child and Family Agency

Tusla – the Child and Family Agency is a statutory organisation, established in January 2014 under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013. Under the Act, it is required to:

- Support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children
- Support and encourage the effective functioning of families

Tusla has responsibility for the following range of services, aimed at promoting the welfare of children:

- Child welfare and protection services
- Educational welfare services
- Alternative care
- Early years services
- Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services

The Citizens Information Board provides independent information, advice and advocacy on public and social services through citizensinformation.ie, the Citizens Information Phone Service and the network of Citizens Information Services. It is responsible for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service and provides advocacy services for people with disabilities.

Head Office t 0761 07 9000
Ground Floor f 01 605 9099
George's Quay House e info@ciboard.ie
43 Townsend Street w citizensinformationboard.ie
Dublin 2
D02 VK65

- Services related to the psychological welfare of children
- Locally-based community supports for families

Tusla also provides information and advice to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on matters relating to its areas of responsibility. For more information, see tusla.ie.

Ombudsman for Children

The Ombudsman for Children in Ireland is a statutory office established under the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002. The main functions of the Ombudsman are:

- To promote the rights and welfare of children and young people up to 18
- To investigate complaints made by children, or on behalf of children, against public bodies, schools and hospitals

The Ombudsman for Children can investigate complaints about public bodies providing services or making decisions about children and families, or complaints about organisations providing services on behalf of the State.

The Ombudsman for Children also:

- Advises the Government
- Encourages the development of policies, practices and procedures to promote children's rights and welfare
- Highlights issues that concern children
- Monitors and reviews how legislation works in regard to children
- Helps children and young people to find out about their rights and how these can be protected and put into effect

Since 3 April 2017, the Ombudsman can accept complaints about the treatment of children in direct provision. For more information, see oco.ie.

Special Rapporteur on Child Protection

The Government established the position of Special Rapporteur on Child Protection in 2006 to advise it on developments affecting the welfare of children. The rapporteur's current terms of reference include:

- Keeping under review and auditing legal developments for the protection of children
- Assessing what impact, if any, litigation in national and international courts will have on child protection
- Preparing an annual report setting out the results of the previous year's work

- Examining, upon request, the scope and application of existing legislation and making comments or recommendations as appropriate

The rapporteur can consult with Government departments and the Ombudsman for Children about any new legislation on child protection.

Children's Rights Alliance

The Children's Rights Alliance is an independent body composed of over 100 member organisations with roles involving the welfare of children. Its mission is to secure the full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ireland. It does this by shaping national policy and legislation through advocacy and using international and national mechanisms to hold the Government to account.

Its current areas of focus include:

- Children's access to justice
- Reform for child refugees
- Supporting children's early years
- Tackling child poverty

The Children's Rights Alliance has a helpline (01 902 0494) which provides legal information and advice in relation to issues affecting children. It also runs free legal advice clinics around the country. For more information, see childrensrights.ie.

Citizens Information

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