

**Minister Roderic O’Gorman T.D.**

**High-level Launching Conference for the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)**

**7 April 2022**

- Thank you for the opportunity to address you all today.
- Ireland welcomes the launch of the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) of the Council of Europe building on the achievements of the previous strategy from 2016-2021.
- It is critical that protecting and supporting the rights of children remains a central principle as we uphold democracy and preserve the rule of law.
- This strategy is timely, as Ireland embarks on the development of our new national policy framework for children and young people, covering the period up from 2023 to 2028, which will have a strong rights focus.
- This builds on the significant advances achieved in securing improved outcomes for children and young people in Ireland under our previous framework, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures.

- Ireland is proud of its achievements in recent years, protecting and enhancing the rights of the children and young people.
- I would like to highlight some of the developments Ireland has made across the five pillars of the last strategy.

### **Equal opportunities for all children**

- In recent years, Ireland has introduced several strategies, policies and initiatives to support the rights of the child. This includes the publication of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion, which emphasises supporting families and reducing child poverty.
- We also are continuing and expanding the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative, the main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage.
- My Department is leading on First Five, Ireland's first ever cross-departmental strategy to support babies, young children and their families, including such major reforms as:
  - A National Childcare Scheme.
  - Introduction of additional family leave.

- Development of a national model of parenting supports.

## **Participation of all children**

- Since the publication of the National Strategy for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020, Ireland has led the way in ensuring that children and young people are at the heart of government decision making.
- Last year I launched a National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making, to further enhance that work by providing practical tools to ensure that children and young people are included in decision-making in all settings where decisions made by adults will impact their lives.
- We have Hub na nÓg, a national centre of excellence that supports organisations to give children and young people a voice in decision-making, keeping a particular focus on those that are seldom-heard.

## **A life free from violence for all children**

- Ireland is committed to ensuring children live a life free from violence.
- The Children First Act 2015 promotes the protection of children from abuse and neglect.
- The Act places a legal obligation on certain people, many of whom are professionals, to report child protection concerns at or above a defined threshold to social work departments, and what organisations need to do to keep children safe.
- Our third National Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy is being finalised, recognising the child as an individual victim/survivor impacted by DSGBV.

## **Child Friendly Justice for all children**

- We are in the process of significant reforms to achieve enhanced child friendly justice.
- Legislative reforms include a Child Care Amendment Bill that will underline the core objective and focus of a Guardian ad Litem. They will inform the Court of any views expressed by

the child and make recommendations that are in the child's best interests having considered their views.

- If not appointing a Guardian Ad Litem to a child, the courts must have a clear plan on how to hear the child's views.
- The Government has committed to the establishment of specialised family courts to create more family-friendly courts. The reform will involve appointing judges with specialised training, skills and experience, with a dedicated focus on family law. Both public and private family law proceedings will be heard in the new Family Court Division.
- A Family Justice Oversight Group is developing an overall vision for the establishment of specialised family courts and a new family justice system in Ireland.

### **Rights of the child in the digital environment**

- Finally, Ireland recognises the impact of the digital environment on children and young people. We have drafted the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill to establish a regulatory framework for online safety to protect the public, including children, from harmful material.

- It will ensure any online service user has access to an effective complaints mechanism operated by the online service itself.

### **New Strategy**

- Ireland will continue to progress actions to support children and young people's access to their rights across the six priority areas of the new Strategy.
- I thank all involved in preparing this new Strategy for the Rights of the Child and I urge all member states to work together to make this Strategy a success.

Thank you.