

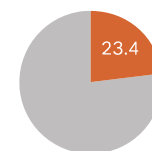
## “ Country Recommendation

Ireland should lower the voting age to 16 to strengthen young people's involvement and participation in decision-making that impacts them.

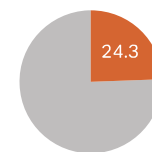
Country Profile 2024



# Ireland



**Child Population:**  
23.4% of total population



**Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:**  
**293,000 (2023)**  
24.3% (2023)  
▲ +2 % compared to 2022

**RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):**

[Children's Rights Alliance \(Ireland\)](#)

<sup>1</sup> Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc\_peps01n).

## Children's Rights in Ireland

In Ireland, international conventions must be given effect in domestic law to be justiciable before the courts.<sup>2</sup> This has not happened. Elements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) have been given legal effect. These include the Adoption Act 2010, the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, and the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015.

The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has responsibility for children's rights. Ireland was last examined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2023. As part of this examination, the Minister led a cross-government delegation of senior officials at the hearing in Geneva, and engaged with civil society organisations (CSOs) and national human rights institutions in this process. The Minister issued a

[press release](#) in response to the publication of the [Concluding Observations](#). A [Child Summit](#) was held in November 2023 to provide policymakers and other stakeholders with opportunities to share their views on the UNCR's recommendations.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2023 recommended that Ireland develop systematic child rights impact assessment (CRIA) procedures for legislation and policies relevant to children. *Young Ireland* acknowledges the importance of CRIs, commits to developing a prototype CRIA tool in 2024, with roll-out in other government departments and agencies between 2024-2028.

In 2023, Ireland launched a new policy framework, [Young Ireland](#) to ensure all children and young people can fully access their rights. It seeks to tackle the biggest challenges facing children and young people and

ensure that children's rights are at the forefront of decision-making about issues affecting their lives. The framework includes three areas of focus called spotlights. These are: The Child Poverty and Wellbeing Office, Child and Youth Mental Health, and Well-Being and Disability Services.

Since 2006, a Special Rapporteur on Child Protection has been appointed by the government. The Special Rapporteur's role includes reporting on national and international legal developments connected to the protection of children.

In 2022, the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) committed to establishing a Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit in his department. In 2023, this unit published its plan [From Poverty to Potential: A Programme Plan for Child Poverty and Well-Being 2023-2025](#) setting out priorities on child poverty for the next 2.5 years.

## Early childhood development

Ireland has a ten-year government strategy - [First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028](#) - which sets out the priorities for early childhood. In November 2023 the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth published the latest [implementation plan](#) for the strategy, for 2023-2025.

Traveller and Roma children are significantly less likely to attend early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, and the latest [First 5 Implementation Plan](#) contains plans to increase their participation in ECEC.

## Children's mental health

Children's Rights Alliance raised a number of concerns regarding access to mental health support. The increased need for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) meant that

<sup>2</sup> Constitution of Ireland, Article 29.6.

there were 3,911 children on a waiting list for services in July 2023. The Mental Health Commission published an [Independent Review](#) of CAMHS provision, raising concerns and making 49 recommendations for action. The current system cannot guarantee that children and families will get the support they need.

The Mental Health Commission's Review also draws renewed attention to some children facing particular difficulties accessing support, such as children from the Traveller Community, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, children in care and young LGBTI people.

It is important for children and young people to have access to mental health support at school, and [the Minister for Education has announced](#) her Department's intention to initiate a process

to deliver additional support for well-being and mental health, to complement existing structures in post-primary schools.

The total allocation in Budget 2024 for mental health services is over €1.3 billion, which provides an increase of €100 million to enable additional CAMHS staff recruitment. One of the challenges in meeting the demand for services is the limited number of newly-qualified psychologists that graduate each year. In the run up to Budget 2024 the [Psychological Society of Ireland](#) estimated that a modest investment of €2.52m per year for five years would help increase the workforce by providing funding for an additional 50 trainee psychologists.

### **Child safety and well-being online**

Many of the digital services children use are not designed to

protect children from online harm and ensure their rights and needs are respected online.

Online Safety Codes are being developed by the new *Commissiún na Méan* (Media Commission) which is also overseeing the implementation of the EU Digital Safety Act in Ireland. There is a need for future Online Safety Codes to require safety by design to be standard for all online and digital services. CRIAs could be conducted by online and digital platforms before their digital products or services reach or affect children. Online and digital platforms could also be required to regularly undertake CRIAs and demonstrate that they are taking reasonable steps to mitigate risks. While age verification tools are not the 'silver bullet' for keeping children safe online, they are an essential mechanism to protect children. Age verification must be carried out in compliance

with children's rights. Without prescriptive guidance on acceptable age verification systems there is simply no way to ensure that children's rights are respected online and that there are sufficiently robust protections to safeguard children from online harm.

Online safety and digital literacy must be fully integrated into the school curriculum, from pre-school to secondary level. While there has been progress in reforming the primary school curriculum<sup>3</sup>, education and training on using digital technology safely needs to be accelerated to ensure that children are equipped with the necessary skills for a safe, rights-based digital future.

### **Child protection systems**

Tusla is the state agency with statutory responsibility to promote the 'welfare' of children under

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<sup>3</sup> Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (2020). The proposed framework includes 'Being a digital learner' as a key competency which aims to ensure children are 'creative, confident and critical users of digital technology'. The new [literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy](#) (2024-2025) was launched on 15 May 2024.

the Child Care Act 1991. In its [Annual Report for 2022](#), Tusla documented a 13% increase in the number of referrals to child protection and welfare services compared to 2021. A steady increase in referrals has been observed in the past four years, with a cumulative increase of 46% since 2019.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, staffing levels have only increased by 13% due to the lack of social workers.<sup>5</sup> The recruitment of sufficient foster carers was identified as another challenge in the Annual Report for 2022. There are ongoing challenges in the recruitment and retention of social workers, in [Quarter 1 2024](#), 17% or 983 children in care were without a designated social worker. One-fifth of all children in care do not have a care plan.

Tusla's services are inspected by the [Health Information and Quality Authority \(HIQA\)](#). A [report](#) on the inspections carried out in 2022

highlights much good practice in these services. The inspection found instances of good practice across all children's services, with staff routinely advocating on behalf of children and encouraging them to participate in decision-making about their support and care. HIQA found that children were regularly consulted during assessments and in their day-to-day lives. As part of the inspection, HIQA engaged and consulted with children about their experience in accessing these services. While the [children and young people reported](#) that they were generally well cared for, they also mentioned areas for improvement including better planning for aftercare, the conditions in one secure setting and better onward placement.

### Education

School completion rates for Travellers are significantly lower

than the general population. In its Concluding Observations the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child called on Ireland to strengthen measures to ensure Roma and Traveller children have equal access to quality education, take targeted measures to improve their educational outcomes, and develop the National Traveller Education Strategy.

### Child participation

The [National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020](#) aimed to ensure children have a voice in their everyday lives and in community, education, health and legal settings. A successor to this strategy, [Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making: Action Plan 2024-2028](#) was published in April 2024. Its purpose is 'to strengthen existing good practice and expand

capacity to include more children and young people in decision-making, maximising opportunities for them to engage meaningfully with the issues relevant to them'.

[Comhairle na nÓg](#) are child and youth councils in Ireland's 31 local authorities, which give children opportunities to engage in the development of local services and policies.

The right to vote is restricted to those aged 18 and above. Despite a commitment to hold a referendum on reducing the voting age to 16, no referendum is currently planned.

<sup>4</sup> In the four-year period 2015 to 2019 the increase in referrals was 26% (rising from 43,596 referrals in 2015 to 55,136 in 2018).

See Tusla Annual Reports, 2015; 2016; 2017 and 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Data from Tusla Quarterly Integrated Performance and Activity Report, Q4 2019; Q4 2020; Q4 2021 and Q4 2022.