

Ombudsman for Children's Office
Strategy 2011-2016



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Mandate

OCO's authority is derived from primary legislation the Ombudsman for Children's Act, 2002. The provisions of the 2002 Act are unique as it combines the traditional ombuds complaints and investigation function with Section 7 'promotion of rights and welfare' function. The Ombudsman for Children is accountable to:

1. The Houses of the Oireachtas.
2. International Human Rights treaty monitoring bodies – the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Council

The Court has also a role in preserving the Ombudsman for Children's authority if it is questioned.

The Ombudsman for Children's has unique powers: she can initiate independent actions through investigations which are necessary to uphold children's rights in Ireland.

It is the Ombudsman for Children's duty to use her unique combination of statutory functions to rebalance power so as children's voices, rights and interests are respected in a challenging environment. This means that the Ombudsman for Children will initiate action to protect children's rights in new and emerging areas as society changes in the future.

Values

All activities of the OCO are underpinned by the following core values:

1. Dedicated to advancing children's rights.
2. Committed to constructive engagement with others.
3. Independence and impartiality.
4. Illuminating children's lived experience and their concerns.
5. Accessibility and responsiveness.

3 Strategic Goals of the Ombudsman for Children's Office are:

1. Enforcement of Children's Rights
2. Systemic Change
3. Capacity Building

Enforcement of children's rights

Constructive engagement with government, public administration, the judiciary and children themselves is essential to mainstream children's rights. The OCO will:

1. Encourage the integration of children's rights into policy making process through constructive engagement.
2. Set guidelines and standards which will assist public bodies including those overseeing schools, health and social care settings to embed children's rights into their policies, procedures and practices.
3. Ensure that at a time of national recovery, the state fulfils its obligation to protect all children's fundamental rights.
4. Review the operation of ongoing legislation relating to rights and welfare of children, prepare special reports to the Oireachtas accordingly and make recommendations for change.
5. Publish reports, case studies and opinion pieces to raise awareness and understanding of children's rights and demonstrate how OCO's interventions have made an impact.

Systemic change

Systemic change in relation to institutional policy and practice will have the widest impact on children's lives. The OCO will:

1. Use Section 7 powers in relation to any area of society and services where issues affect children and initiate enquiries that will deliver systemic change.
2. Carry out a bi-annual review of complaints for systemic investigation and trends in preliminary investigations, to identify key issues arising for children particularly in relation to education and health.
3. Develop a children's rights impact assessment tool compliant with international human rights standards.
4. Maintain constructive relationships with the legislature to ensure that the best interests for children are a primary consideration when developing law.
5. Engage with children, their families, relevant professionals and affiliated bodies (nationally and internationally) to enhance our knowledge about how current practice impacts on children.

Capacity building

A key aspect of being an effective catalyst for change is to build OCO's own and others' capacity to participate in and effect change. The OCO will:

1. Build a sound and diverse evidence base that underpins its work.
2. Highlight any training and capacity deficits which are identified as a result of investigations.
3. Raise awareness of gaps between knowledge of children's rights and actual delivery in practice, to be addressed by professional training.
4. Engage with relevant parties to build skills, commitment and capacity to incorporate children's rights into mainstream organisations.
5. Build public and professional capacity to engage with children and increase general confidence and understanding of children's rights issues.

Purpose statement

OCO exists to bring about measurable change in how children's' rights are upheld in Ireland, by:

1. Influencing decision makers to bring about changes in legislation, policy and practice in accordance with the standards and parameters defined by OCO and acting as a resource to government in anticipating problems which may arise.
2. Guiding the enforcement and calling to account decision makers in systems where children's rights are not upheld.
3. Challenging and removing obstacles such as ways of thinking and attitudes which impede the advancement of children's rights.
4. Creating a culture in Ireland where there is strong public awareness of children's rights which are taken seriously and respected.
5. Being accessible to those who need the support, advice or the intervention of the OCO