

Our path forward



ombudsman
do leanaí
for children

Foreword



Dr. Niall Muldoon
Ombudsman for Children

Our Path Forward 2025-2027 is my fourth Strategic Plan since becoming Ombudsman for Children 10 years ago. It is also significant as it comes following the office's 20th Anniversary in 2024.

This strategy is a response to a rapidly changing socio-political and economic landscape. It recognises the progress that has been made in relation to children's rights, alongside the stagnation and regression in some areas. *Our Path Forward* sets out the ambitions of the Ombudsman for Children's Office amid the backdrop of rising living costs, housing shortages, political shifts, and global uncertainty, all of which threaten children's rights.

Our Path Forward is structured to remain flexible to emerging issues in a changing landscape. We will hold ourselves to account by adopting a systemic approach and an evidence-based decision-making framework to choose priorities. We want to identify root causes of issues and use our powers to the maximum extent for the greatest impact.



In putting together this Strategic Plan we have sought input from external stakeholders, staff and our Youth Advisory Panel. We have drawn on the data available within our Office from investigations, research, policy and from our vast experience of listening to the voices of children.

I am satisfied that this is our most ambitious Strategic Plan yet and this is how it must be as we support the children of today through an unprecedented period of uncertainty and change.

I extend my sincerest thanks to all of those who helped us shape this plan, particularly the young people whose voices guide us every day in the work that we do.





About us

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) was established under the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002 and commenced operations in April 2004. We are an independent statutory body established to promote and monitor the rights and welfare of children and young people up to the age of 18 living in Ireland.

Under the 2002 Act, our main role and responsibilities include:

1. To promote the rights and welfare of children and young people up to the age of 18.
2. To independently examine and investigate complaints made by or on behalf of children and young people about the actions of schools, voluntary hospitals and public bodies that have or may have adversely affected a child or children.

As an independent statutory body, our Office is directly accountable to the Oireachtas for the exercise of its statutory functions under the 2002 Act.

Introduction

Our new Strategic Plan is the result of extensive consultations with stakeholders, including our Youth Advisory Panel (YAP), NGOs, government departments, and our staff.

This Strategic Plan will guide our priorities from 2025 to 2027. We will use this Strategic Plan as a living document, guiding decision-making, planning, and priorities over the next three years. It offers clear direction while maintaining flexibility to address emerging issues for children and young people.

This Strategic Plan is designed to respond to current and emerging challenges while also capitalising on opportunities to strengthen the protection and promotion of children's rights.

We are committed to executing our strategy through using evidence-based decision-making to choose annual priorities, proactive engagement with our stakeholders, and continuous monitoring of our progress.

This Plan represents a significant step towards building a society that upholds the rights and welfare of every child and young person, ensuring a brighter and more equitable future for the next generation.





Our Purpose

Our purpose is to be Ireland's independent children's rights institution.

We deal with complaints made by, or for children about public organisations to improve services for children living in Ireland.

We champion the voice of children and young people under the age of 18 and promote their rights.

We use our power to influence policy and legislation and hold government to account.

Our Vision

All children in Ireland have their rights respected, protected and fulfilled in line with the UNCRC.

All children are aware of their rights and those rights are central to government decision making.

The OCO will use its powers so that all children reach their full potential.





Our Values

Respect

We commit to showing kindness and respect to all people, we engage with, child or adult, whether inside or outside of our Office. We also strive to maintain and support a diverse, inclusive and equal workforce.

Integrity

We pledge to operate with honesty and transparency in all our dealings within the Office and with everyone we deal with.

We will strive to build trust and maintain clear and open communications with children and young people, complainants, public bodies and staff.

Independence

We commit to cherish and protect our independence so that we can say, with authority, the things that need to be said and hold public organisations to account.



Our Values

Courage

We are open to pushing hard for the rights of children and young people. It involves accepting pressure and knockbacks in that pursuit, but it also means we relish constructive challenges so that we can continue to be self-reflective about our work.

Fairness

We promise to always work to be fair in all our dealings with staff, children and young people, complainants and public agencies. Fairness is the backbone of trust and integrity both within the Office and outside of it.

Fun

We are determined to allow for and encourage fun within the work environment. This is an important element of a positive work culture and one that helps us cope with the difficult and emotionally charged work we all engage in every day.

Voices of Children and Young People

The OCO Youth Advisory Panel were a key stakeholder in the consultative process. Their views and opinions were key in the OCO creating a flexible and adaptable plan that can respond to the changing needs of children and young people.

Technology:

“We’re spending way too much time on screens—iPads, phones, everything. It’s affecting our health.”

Unrest:

“A lot of children are immigrating to Ireland because of the war, and it’s causing controversy. Some people are arguing about it.”

Exams in School:

“The Junior Cert and Leaving Cert put so much pressure on students. School gives us so much work, and it’s just overwhelming.”

Hate Crimes and Online Influence:

“Hate crimes, racism, and transphobia are being passed down from adults to children. It’s also spreading so fast online.”

Immigration:

“Refugees are being threatened. It makes children feel unsafe.”



Strategic Goals 2025-2027





Incorporate the UNCRC

Drive the full and direct incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into domestic law.

We will bring together organisations, academics, and young people to develop a strategic pathway for the full and direct incorporation of the UNCRC into Irish domestic law.

We aim to embed children's rights into national policy, laws and decision-making.

We will engage directly with children and young people and deliver a robust, enhanced education programme to promote children's rights across society and secure political agreement and support.

2.

Influence, Educate and Challenge

Influence, educate and challenge Government, public bodies and politicians on children's rights to better inform decision-making, and bring about systemic change for children.

We will bring about long-lasting positive systemic change by challenging, influencing and educating public bodies and politicians on children's rights, and ensuring that children are considered in decision-making processes.

We will monitor and challenge commitments relating to children and young people in the Programme for Government for the 34th Dáil and around the budget cycles.

We will collaborate with government departments and agencies to influence policy change and progress children's rights issues.

3.

Build Knowledge and Carry Out Research

Build knowledge and carry out research on current and emerging issues that affect children, particularly vulnerable groups. This work will be informed by the voice of children.

We will carry out research and consultations with children and young people, engage with NGOs and commission research on current and emerging issues.

We will use our position as a trusted voice for children and young people to stay informed and be proactive on persistent and emerging issues affecting children and young people.

Our work will be informed by the voices of children and young people, complaints we receive, and emerging issues in society where the power of our Office can make a difference.

4.

Increase Awareness of the OCO

Increase awareness of the OCO among children and their advocates.

We will raise awareness of our Office and our role among children, parents, and advocates so they know who we are and how we can support them.

We will promote the work of our Office through advertising and communications, engaging directly with professionals working with children, educating children and providing information to schools.

We will develop our outreach work with children who find us hard to reach, host and attend events and commission public awareness research.

We will ensure that our stakeholders fully understand the work of our Office, including our complaints and investigations role.

5.

Set the Highest Standard in our Complaints Service

Optimise the effectiveness and impact of our complaints and investigations service.

We will ensure that our complaints and investigations service is highly effective and makes an impact in the best interests of children.

We will embed a child rights framework into our complaints management process.

We will streamline our processes and use data to inform decisions so that we can improve the impact of our services for children and young people and their advocates.

6.

Support our People

Support our people to feel valued, to optimise their potential and make the OCO a great place to work.

We will create a supportive and innovative work environment.

We commit to implementing a health and wellbeing framework, and supporting staff learning and development.

We will also focus on internal communication, foster a more innovative culture and encourage cross-unit initiatives.

7

Strengthen the Office

Secure and efficiently utilise human, financial, data, digital and operational resources to fulfil the mandate of the Office.

We will work to secure and efficiently utilise human, financial, data, digital and operational resources to fulfil our Office's mandate.

We will advocate for additional funding where need is identified with a clear evidence base, and we will use our resources creatively and effectively.

We will ensure we are collecting the correct data to support informed decision-making.

We will use the latest accessible technological tools and systems to achieve the Strategic Goals in this plan and upskill staff as required.

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