

# Children's Rights

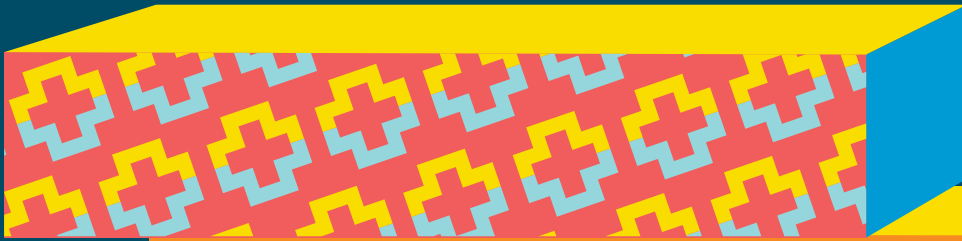
in the Balance



Annual Report **2025**



ombudsman  
do leanaí  
for children



**Education**

**Healthcare**

**Being safe**

**A home**

Family and care

**Having a say**

**Food**

**Play and rest**



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# Message from the Ombudsman for Children

**Dr Niall Muldoon**  
Ombudsman for Children

**At the beginning of 2025, our Youth Advisory Panel laid down a marker for the incoming Government by putting forward their five key asks for its first term in Office. Over the next five years, they want to see improved mental health services for children; a home for everyone; a decent standard of living; high quality and inclusive education, and better services and supports for children with disabilities.**

As wish lists from young people go, this couldn't be considered overly ambitious or particularly daring. In truth, it is really just a set of the most basic standards that children in a country as well off economically as Ireland should expect. And so it begs the question, why are we still not getting those basics right for children?

As we look back on the year, on the work of our Office and the progress made for children in our Annual Report for 2025, it is clear that despite progress made, the State has a way to go in making those asks a reality. Against the backdrop of a growing global shift away from upholding some of the most basic human rights, it seems as though children's rights are hanging in the balance. But we believe that Ireland can be a beacon of light for children's rights by moving toward the full and direct incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Irish law. The State has already shown through ratification of the UNCRC in 1992 that it accepts the principles, so now it is time to bed down this commitment through incorporation. There is an old saying – if you make someone a promise you create hope, but if you follow

through on that promise, you create trust. The ratification of the UNRC was a promise, now our children need to see that followed through on, so they will know they can truly trust the State to fulfil their rights. This would be a game changer for children's rights in Ireland and make us a true leader in Europe on children's issues.

2025 was another extremely busy year across all our functions. We received 1,778 complaints about public bodies in 2025, including 1,552 individual complaints about one or more agency. Education once again topped the list of concerns (31%), followed by complaints about Tusla (20%) and children's health services (14%). Again we noted the complaints have become more complex and often involve multiple agencies. We also saw the impact of AI in our day-to-day work, with the text of a number of the complaints we received being generated by AI, which adds to the time it takes for us to process these complaints.

Our Office engaged with more than 2,500 children directly via our rights awareness workshops with schools around the country and outreach work to IPAS centres, CAMHS, Direct Provision and Oberstown Children's Detention Campus. This work is so important to ensure that as many children as possible know about their rights and understand that their voice matters. In 2025, we also sought the views of young people on some of the emerging social issues and trends that were coming up in our workshops, in public discourse and the media, through our secondary school survey. We wanted to find out if the issues of extremism and discrimination were being picked up by young people in their daily lives, and if so, to what extent. Of the 626 children surveyed, 63% said they come across extremist content online compared to just 7% in real life. This highlights the need to ensure that

children can enjoy their rights online in a safe way. This sentiment was echoed by our YAP when they appeared before the Oireachtas Children’s Committee on AI and in our reports on this topic in 2025. It is clear that with the growth of the AI landscape, the Government and regulators must hold social media companies to account and include a special focus on children in its work on AI to ensure that they are protected from harm.

A major piece of work for our Office in 2025 was our **Child Death Review: The Case for a Statutory Child Death Review Mechanism**, which called for the establishment of an independent statutory child death review system in Ireland - one that is transparent and puts families at the centre. Parents over the years have told us about the battles they have had to fight to get information about their child’s death, and how this is negatively compounding their grief. We welcome the commitment in the Programme for Government in 2025 to establish a statutory mechanism and hope it will provide some solace for the families experiencing the unimaginable pain of losing a child.

The case studies in our Annual Report serve to highlight not only the issues faced by children and families in their dealings with public services, but also the real difference that UNCRC incorporation would make in these instances. We see with 10-year-old Zach for example, a disabled young boy who spent the summer worrying about losing his specially trained SNA that September. Or five- and six-year-old siblings Rebecca and Paul, whose mother faced long delays with an Approved Housing Body (AHB) in having a mould issue rectified in their home that also had no hot water. Had the UNCRC been part of our legislation, the best interests of Zach, Rebecca and Paul would have been paramount when decisions were being made around these situations from the outset.

Our current Strategic Plan is built around incorporation because, for over two decades, this Office has been chasing the solution to a series of individual issues for children. We have placed a strategic focus on children’s issues such as Mental Health, Disability, Homelessness, Direct Provision and being part of a disadvantaged group (e.g. Traveller or Roma) – but during this time, not enough has changed. The Government will point to significant increases in funding

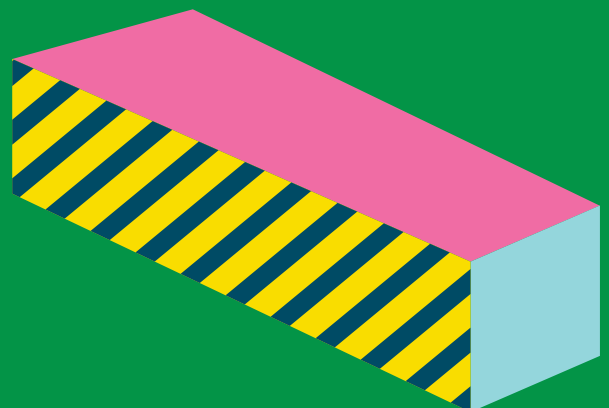
across these areas, but we can see that the reality on the ground for our children doesn’t show sufficient progress to match that extra spend. In truth, the funding is often coming from a very low base following years of neglect or to pay for privately provided stop gap solutions, which are not always in children’s best interests. We only need to look to the €38 million spent on private Special Emergency Arrangements in 2025 as an example of that.

We are at a point now where, 34 years since Ireland ratified the UNCRC, children’s rights are truly in the balance.

So we are asking all of society, NGOs, businesses, clubs, political parties, representative bodies and professional organisations, to get behind the idea that, as a nation, we need to legislate for thinking about children, and their rights, at the start of **every** decision-making process in Government. That means that when they look at their plan for agriculture or roads or housing or health the best interests of children and the impact on children’s rights will be the first thing they consider ahead of anything else. That is how we truly get our children to trust us and fulfil our promise to them, from 1992.

## Who We Are

The Ombudsman for Children’s Office (OCO) is a human rights institution that promotes the rights and welfare of all children and young people under 18 years of age living in Ireland. The OCO investigates complaints about services provided to children by public organisations. The service is free and independent. Dr Niall Muldoon is the Ombudsman for Children.



# 1. OCO Statistics and Highlights

In 2025, the OCO received 1,778 complaints about children’s public services, with 15% relating to multiple public bodies. This is in line with what we received in 2024. Within this overall figure, 1,552 individual complaints were made to the OCO. Once again, we noted an increase in the complexity of the complaints being made to our Office. We also noted AI generated text used in some of the complaints we received, which can increase the time it takes to review that complaint. Most complaints to the OCO came from parents on behalf of their children (81%), while there was a one percentage point increase in the number of complaints from children themselves, rising from 3% to 4% in 2025.

Education was again the most complained about issue, accounting for 31% of all complaints to the OCO. Of this 31%, 15% were about primary schools and 10% related to secondary schools. The most complained about issues in education included Special Educational support, bullying and complaints management in schools. The OCO also received complaints about school transport, the Department of Education, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the State Examinations Committee.

20% of all complaints to the OCO in 2025 concerned Tusla. These related to children in Special Emergency Arrangements (SEAs), Special Care, residential care, interagency work between services, Education Support Services (TESS), access to interventions and support, as well as concerns from young people about complaint handling.

## What were complaints about?

Sector	2025
Education	31%
Tusla	20%
Health	14%
Housing & Local Authority	6%
Justice	3%
DCDE	3%
Other Government Departments	5%
Oberstown Children’s Detention Campus	1%
Other in remit/unspecified	3%
Early Childhood Education (not in our remit)	3%
Out of remit	other 11%

In 2025, 14% of complaints to the OCO were about children’s health services. There were complaints about access to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), children in hospital beyond medical need and a lack of access to dental care and other HSE funded services. The OCO also continued to receive complaints about a lack of access to Assessment of Need. In 2025, 2% of complaints concerned Children’s Health Ireland (CHI).

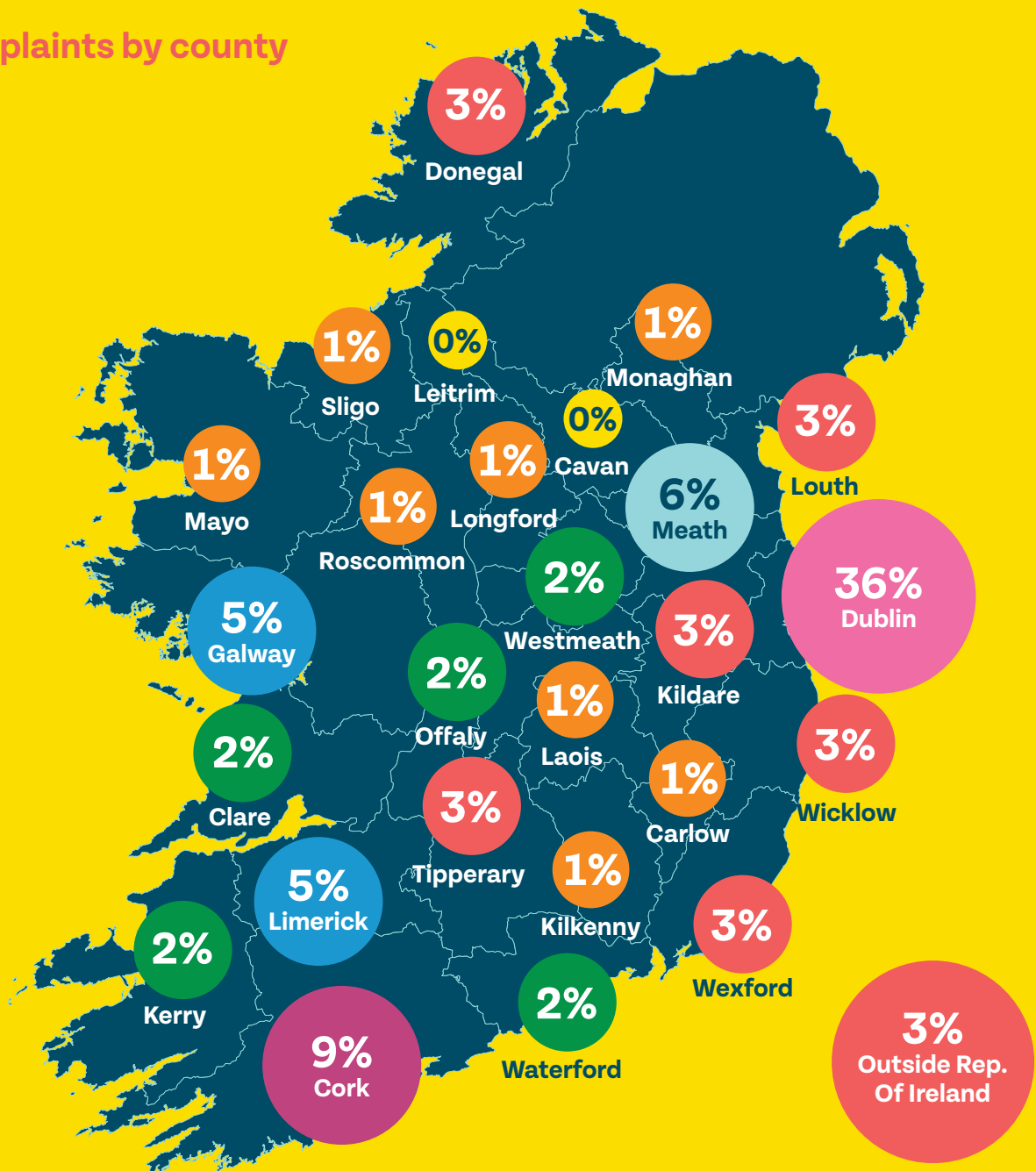
6% of complaints to the OCO in 2025 related to local authorities and the Department of Housing, mainly around a lack of access to appropriate housing for children with disabilities, the

quality of housing, waiting lists and access to emergency accommodation.

In 2025, 3% of complaints were about International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS). These included concerns over poor accommodation, the quality of food and complaint handling.

As we have highlighted in previous years, complaints about Early Years settings (private creches, Montessori and pre-schools) made up 3% of all complaints to the OCO in 2025. That’s despite the OCO not having a remit to examine these settings.

## Complaints by county



\*Not all complainants register what county they are from, so the county breakdown reflects the information we have received from complainants.

## Who were complaints from?

2025	
Parent	81%
Professional/organisation working with children	5%
Child	4%
Extended family	3%
Concerned/unrelated adult	2%
Adult about own childhood/sibling	1%
Anonymous/unspecified	4%

## Ages of the children we received complaints about

2025	
1 - 4 years	14%
5 - 9 years	23%
10 - 14 years	36%
15 - 19 years	26%
20 + years	1%

# Rights Education workshops at a glance in 2025

We met  
**2,550 children**

We facilitated **124** workshops

**86** schools attended Rights  
Education workshops  
(53 Primary and 33 Secondary)

**12** visits from youth groups

**18** 3rd level seminars

**1** professional body

**59%** of workshops were with  
schools or organisations  
from outside Dublin

**41%** of workshops were with  
Dublin-based schools or  
organisations

# Education outreach visits to deliver rights workshops

**IPAS and Direct Provision**

**4** workshops in IPAS and Direct Provision Centres

**Unaccompanied Children**

**2** workshops in centres with Unaccompanied Children

**CAMHS**

**1** workshop in a CAMHS Centre

# OCO in the Oireachtas:

## Policy and legislative engagement in numbers

7

submissions to Government on children's rights issues.

29

letters to Government Ministers and Departments promoting the rights of children including on issues related to voluntary contributions, hot school meals, the role and impact of AI on children, defective blocks and its impact on children, child rights-based budgeting, guidelines on understanding behaviours of concern and youth mental health services in schools.

67

queries from the public examined under section 7 of our legislation and remit for promoting the rights and welfare of children.

132

recommendations to Government and Public bodies to improve the lives of children in Ireland.

8

meetings with Ministers to discuss children rights in the new programme for Government.

1

meeting with the Taoiseach to discuss the programme for Government and children's rights place within it.

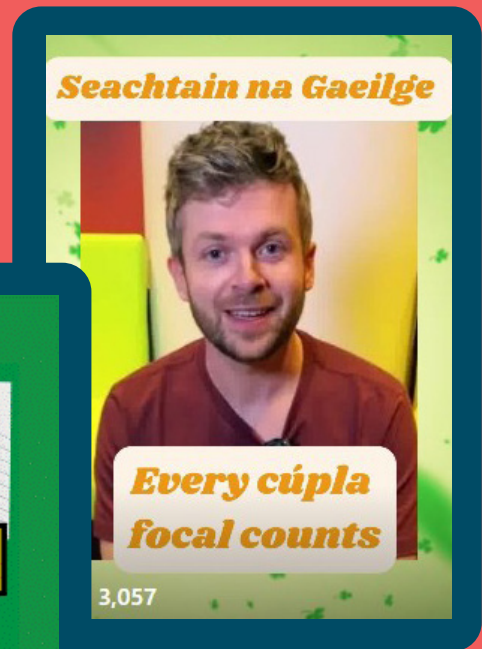
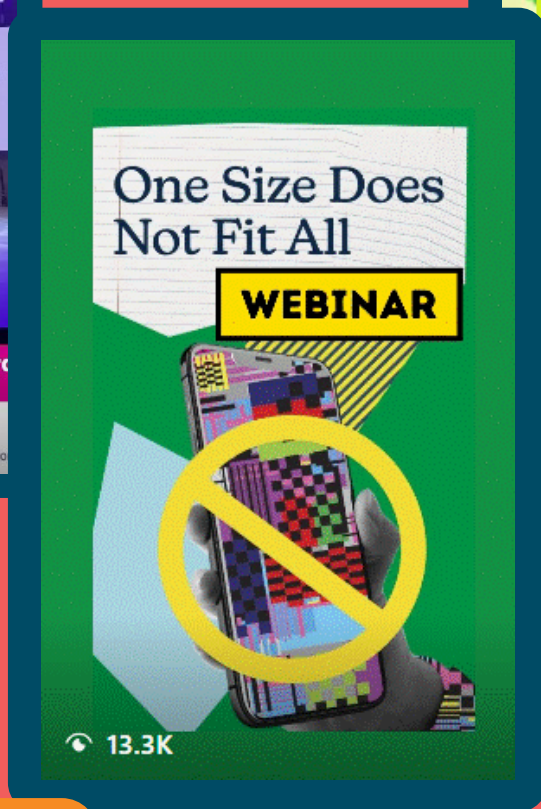
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Oireachtas committee appearances on:

- Child and Family Homelessness (Presentation to the Joint Committee on Housing, Heritage and Local Government – June 2025)
- OCO priority issues (Presentation to the Joint Committee on Children and Equality – June 2025)
- AI and Children's Rights (YAP Presentation to the Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence – October 2025)
- Children's Rights and the International Protection Bill (Presentation to the Joint Committee on Justice, Migration and Home Affairs – November 2025).

# The OCO Online and in the Media

In 2025, the OCO saw strong and consistent growth across our social media channels.





On Instagram, Reels promoting **The Keeper of Rights audiobook (24,000 views)**, the annual **Christmas message (17,000 views)** and **survey-related content** were among the strongest performers.

Facebook posts linked to **education initiatives, recruitment, research and campaigns** also attracted high levels of interest and views.



LinkedIn continued to grow as an important channel for **policy, research, statements and organisational updates, with job-related posts and analysis pieces** performing especially well.



# Social Media Highlights 2025

**9.1M+** views  
across OCO social  
media channels

**12.4M**  
impressions  
across Instagram, Facebook and  
TikTok as part of our advertising  
awareness campaign.

**35,000+**  
followers  
across all social  
media channels by  
year end

Instagram followers grew by over **70%**,  
from 4,601 in January to 8,000+ by December

LinkedIn audience more than doubled,  
growing from 2,330 to 4,727 followers

Facebook reached **10,000** followers,  
marking a key milestone

**X\*** reached **12,085** followers

\*As of 2026, the OCO is no longer posting content on X

**1,396**  
posts shared  
across platforms  
during the year

**8,400+** reactions and **560+** comments,  
showing strong audience engagement

# Top Content Performance



**Best performing Instagram Reel:** The Keeper of Rights audiobook promo with **24,000+ views**



**Strongest Facebook posts:** recruitment and research related content



**LinkedIn top post:** Statement from Dr Muldoon regarding IPAS centre arson attack reached over

**8,500 impressions**

# Child Talks

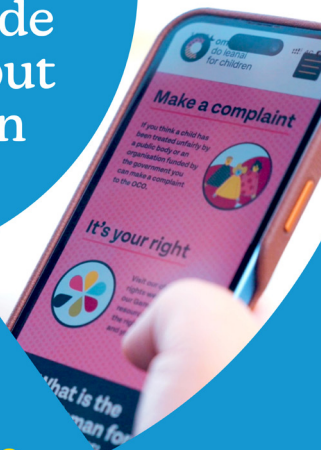


# OCO Advertising Campaign

The OCO launched a major advertising campaign in 2025 to raise awareness of the OCO, with a specific focus on our Complaints and Investigations function. This is part of a three-year plan to drive awareness of the OCO through targeted advertising. We also had spots on national and local radio. Digital ads ran across Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube, with more than 12 million impressions across Meta & TikTok. The campaign performed particularly well with the 35-44 age group and the 45-54s.

Have you made a complaint but it hasn't been resolved?

We may be able to help.



We examine complaints about how children are treated in our public services



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for children

# The OCO in the Media



# Irish Independent

## New book by children explains their rights and the role of the Ombudsman

The book has been published by a Sligo book company



# Irish Examiner

HOME PAGE / NEWS

## Young people being impacted by growing tide of extremist views online, says Ombudsman for Children



...and that 63% hear more extreme views online than in person, while 25% say their views that some people would consider extreme.

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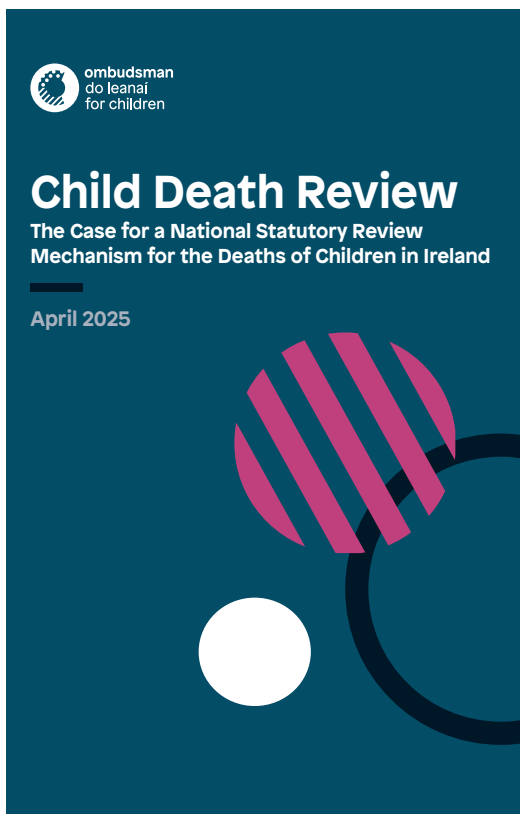
## Government's housing initiatives are failing children, says ombudsman

24/06/2025 - 19:59 PM



Niall Muldoon told the Oireachtas Committee on Housing that families and children are 'sinking' in homelessness. Photo: PA

# 2025 Publications



## Child Death Review: The Case for a Statutory Child Death Review Mechanism

April, 2025

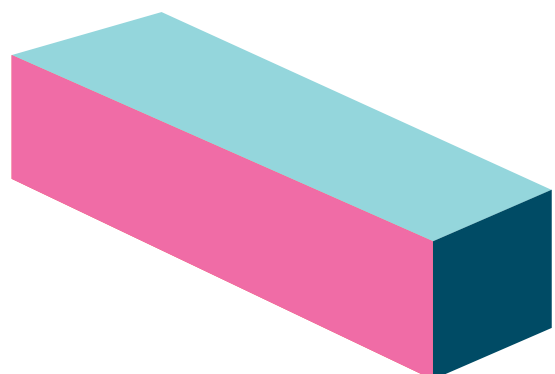
The OCO published [a report outlining the case for a statutory child death review mechanism in Ireland](#). Over the years, the OCO has received many complaints about children who died in tragic, sometimes preventable, circumstances – including suicide, homicide, drug overdoses, accidents, and sudden deaths. Some of these children were in State care or known to services, yet in too many cases, we still don't know how or why they died. Others weren't known to services, but a duty of care still existed – and families deserve answers. The OCO is also concerned by the lack of review following cases of filicide

or familicide, even when parents were known to State agencies.

The recurring themes we hear are that the existing review mechanisms are ad-hoc, have no legislative or statutory basis and have no compellability or enforcement powers. Families have also told us that there are no consistent timelines for reviews which can further compound their grief, as they may be waiting years for answers. For many families, they simply want lessons to be learned from the tragic death of their child to prevent other families experiencing their pain.

In line with the State's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Irish Government has a duty to respect, protect and fulfil children's right to life, survival, and development. The OCO is of the view that a child death review mechanism is a key part of fulfilling this right, to ensure that deaths of children are examined with a view to identifying lessons to inform preventive strategies.

Our report called for the establishment of a statutory child death review system – one that is independent, transparent, and puts families at its heart. We welcome the commitment in the Programme for Government to establish a statutory mechanism and in March, 2025 the Ombudsman for Children met with the Taoiseach and outlined our recommendations for its establishment. The Office also engaged with the Department officials on the appointment of a lead department. This work continued throughout 2025 and into 2026, with an update report planned for 2026.





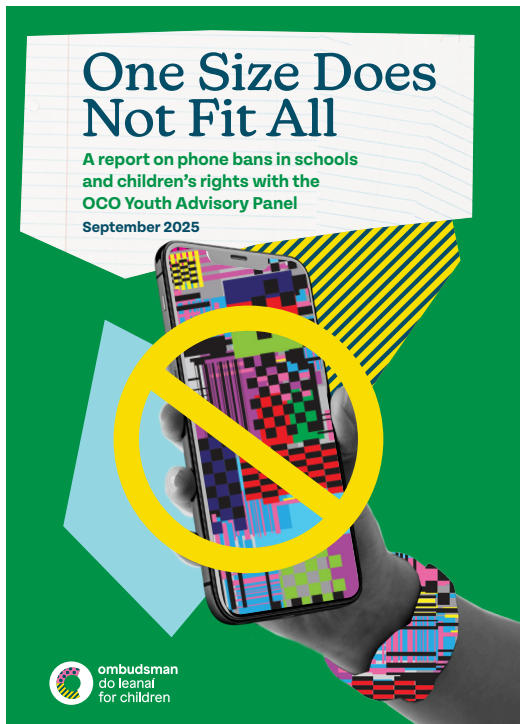
## Policy Spotlight on AI

September, 2025

In 2025, the OCO shone a light on the children's rights implications of AI in our report [Policy spotlight on AI: A Children's Rights Review](#). We put forward a children's rights framework to policy makers, based on international human rights standards, research on AI and its impacts, the views of experts and most importantly, the voices of children and young people.

In preparation for our report, the OCO hosted consultations with young people as well as roundtable discussions with children's rights experts and technology experts to discuss and share ideas on the benefits and risks of AI to children and their rights.

Our report highlighted four key areas where AI posed challenges to children and their rights. Firstly, gaps in regulation and oversight of AI demonstrated the need for the Government and regulators to take a child rights-based approach to law, policy and decision-making on AI. We recommended that recommender algorithms are turned off by default for all children. The report emphasised the importance of teaching children digital literacy, and ensuring AI technologies used in Irish education adhere to children's rights standards. Our report also brought to light the need to identify and close any gaps in Irish legislation relating to child sexual abuse facilitated or generated by AI, including a prohibition of deepfake abuse.



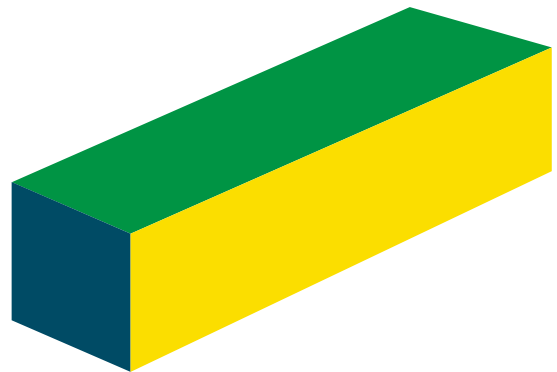
# One Size Does Not Fit All:

## Joint work with YAP

September, 2025

Working with our Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) the OCO published [One Size Does Not Fit All](#), a report on phone bans in schools and children's rights. The report brings together key national and international research from a children's rights perspective, as well as presenting the views of young people on the 2025 ban on phones in schools.

In the report, the YAP identified five overarching recommendations to guide policymakers and schools to consider children's views and their



rights. Of which, the most significant was that blanket bans on phones are not the right way to go. This is echoed by international and national research, with evidence suggesting that blanket bans are not effective, and they overlook children's rights. The OCO raised concerns that children's rights, including those enshrined in the UNCRC, have not been considered by decision makers in the conversation around banning phones in schools in Ireland.

Other recommendations from the YAP included investing more in resources for digital education, communicating research in a child-friendly way to young people, designing different approaches to phone rules depending on age and maturity levels of children, and increasing support and education for parents, teachers and other adults to better understand technology and the challenges facing students.



# OCO in the Oireachtas

Nuala Ward, Director of Investigations and Dr. Tricia Keilthy, Head of Policy appeared before the Joint Oireachtas Justice Committee for pre-legislative scrutiny of the International Protection Bill 2025.

Our Youth Advisory Panel met the Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence to launch their report **AI and Us**. The report showcased how vital young people's voices are in shaping Ireland's approach to AI and protecting children's rights.



## 2. Complaint Case Studies

### Health

#### Sophia's\* case

##### The need for child friendly complaint handling at CHI

###### The complaint:

Sophia (17) was in State care and made a complaint directly to the OCO about how long Children's Health Ireland's (CHI) was taking to respond to her complaint. She was also unhappy with the lack of communication from them in the process. Sophia told us that she had to follow up with CHI a number of times to get an update, which she said was not in line with their own policies and procedures.

###### What we did:

We contacted CHI to encourage local resolution and to find out when Sophia could expect a response. However, they said they weren't in a position to tell us. Due to this we decided to undertake an examination into Sophia's complaint. This examination focused on child friendly complaint handling. When we met with Sophia she told us she came to the OCO to prevent another young person experiencing the same issue.

###### The result:

Our response from CHI was very positive. They outlined the learning they had taken and apologised for the delay in responding to Sophia's complaint and not updating her regularly on those delays. They told us about the changes they have made since then, and that this was the first complaint they had received directly from a child. CHI developed and

implemented a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the implementation of the Your Service Your Say (YSYS) policy, to standardise complaints management across CHI. They also started developing a complaints policy statement, which included a statement that CHI would handle complaints using a child centred approach. They offered to meet with Sophia to discuss her complaint and learn from her experience as a child navigating the CHI complaints process, along with the issues she raised in her original complaint to them.

Sophia was happy with the result of our examination and the changes that were made because of her complaint. Sophia's case shows the importance of young people raising their voice and being listened to, and the changes that can be made as a result.

###### If the UNCRC was part of Irish law:

If the UNCRC was fully and directly incorporated in Irish law, all public bodies, like CHI, would be legally obliged to ensure that children have the right to express their views in matters affecting them and these views would have to be given due weight, in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

In Sophia's case, CHI would likely have had an established child friendly complaints process, which could have sped up the process for her, while ensuring Sophia was kept up to date.

\*Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the children in our case studies

# Transport

## Parking permits

### for children with severe intellectual disabilities

#### The complaint:

The OCO received two complaints from two separate families whose children with severe intellectual disabilities were denied a disabled parking permit.

#### What we did:

We initially undertook two separate examinations into the Disabled Driver Association of Ireland (DDAI) based on information from the parents. We concluded that while the relevant legislation had been applied correctly, and therefore we couldn't identify maladministration, we still had outstanding concerns about that legislation.

As a result, the OCO's Complaints and Investigations team, along with our Policy team, wrote to the Minister of Transport and the Department of Transport to consider the following recommendations as part of the Department's review of the scheme.

The recommendations include:

- Adopt a needs led, rights-based model of disability that focuses on the needs of children with disabilities, in line with the UNCRPD and UNCRC.
- We encouraged the Minister and the Department to consider extending and clarifying the eligibility criteria for the Disabled Driver's Parking Permit to include children that have severe intellectual disabilities which impact their mobility, safety and capability to access services.
- Making provision in the 1997 Regulations for discretion to be exercised by decision-makers to ensure that the individual circumstances of children with severe intellectual disabilities are considered. The Department should also provide additional resources to the administrators of the Scheme in this regard.

- Introducing an automatic entitlement to a Disabled Driver's Parking Permit for families of children who are in receipt of the domiciliary care allowance.
- The UNCRPD and UNCRC should be at the forefront of the decision-making process and guide the review of the Disabled Drivers Parking Permit Scheme to create a more inclusive eligibility criterion.
- Make provision in the scheme to allow applicants to apply for a review of decisions made under the Scheme, particularly in cases where a permit was previously granted on behalf of a child but has subsequently been refused.
- The current scheme requires repeat applications for a permit every two years, even in cases where a child's permanent disability has been evidenced in previous applications. The Department should provide for exemptions from the requirement to re-apply in cases where a child's family has provided evidence of a permanent disability that severely limits mobility.
- Accessible and clear information in Plain English should be provided on the Disabled Drivers' Association of Ireland and Irish Wheelchair Association's websites on the eligibility criteria.
- The Department should adopt measures to increase accessibility and inclusion, prioritising the creation of parking facilities for people with disabilities to achieve this.

#### The result:

The Minister acknowledged the OCO's concerns about the scheme and thanked us for the detailed set of policy recommendations. We were advised that Officials in the Department would consider these recommendations as part of the ongoing review process and will contact our Office directly should further information be required.

# Tusla

## Ira's\* case

### Miscommunication leading to no suitable placement for Ira

#### The complaint:

Ira (16) came to Ireland with her parent after the war in Ukraine broke out and they lived with a host family. After some time, that family was no longer able to continue the arrangement due to a change in circumstances. Ira's parent also had to return to Ukraine for medical treatment and it was decided that it was better for Ira to stay in Ireland.

Ira's family had been engaged with Tusla before these latest circumstances had emerged. The agency was contacted again once the situation unfolded, but no resolution was found. Ira and her host family were concerned about what was going to happen next, so they contacted the OCO for help.

#### What we did:

We carried out an examination of this complaint to get a better understanding of Tusla's perspective of the situation. Tusla said it had no role to play, as a private family arrangement was in place for Ira. On reviewing this, it appeared there had been a series of miscommunications about Ira's circumstances. We contacted Tusla to provide some clarity around her situation and ensure that her best interests were given due consideration.

#### The result:

Tusla was able to provide a suitable care arrangement for Ira. She told us that she was very happy that the situation had been resolved and was looking forward to completing her school exams and thinking of her future.

# Education

## Zach's\* case

### A disabled young boy left worried all summer about losing his SNA at school

#### The complaint:

Zach is a 10-year-old boy who has quadriplegia, is a wheelchair user and relies on a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) for a variety of primary care needs including toileting, comfort repositioning, hydration, moving, feeding and communication - as well as support with using his assistive technology. Zach has no functional use of his arms or legs and relies entirely on a wheelchair and assistive technology to access the curriculum and engage in school life.

Zach learned to use a complex assistive technology system involving eye gaze and a mouth-controlled joystick to work independently over a split-screen interface. This technology is complex and requires training and the development of skills to assist him. Zach's mother had stressed just how vital this technology was for Zach in developing his confidence, independence and autonomy to allow him to communicate and participate fully in the curriculum and the school community.

The complaint was about his SNA, who is fully trained in the use of his assistive technology, being reassigned by his school to another child who did not use assistive technology. This meant that Zach would have to be assigned a new SNA who had not received the training needed.

Zach wrote a very compelling letter to us outlining exactly why he felt this decision was unfair and not in his best interests.

\*Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the children in our case studies

### What we did:

We wrote to Zach's school asking them to demonstrate how his best interests were considered in their decision-making process. We also wanted to understand why the professional advice given by the Community Disability Network Team (CDNT) and Disability service had not been considered. Finally, we asked for any relevant policies and procedures.

### The result:

The school outlined the rationale for changing Zach's SNA. They said it was standard practice to change SNA responsibilities every year or two years to ensure staff development.

They also said this offers opportunities for developing independence for pupils moving on to post primary school. The school emphasised the importance of the welfare of all the students requiring SNA support and consideration of their needs.

We outlined to the school that the main administrative issue was that planning, training and engagement to ensure a smooth transfer between SNAs appeared absent. Our primary concern was how Zach's best interests were upheld alongside the professional recommendation from the Disability service that Zach must have an SNA who is trained in the use of his assistive technology.

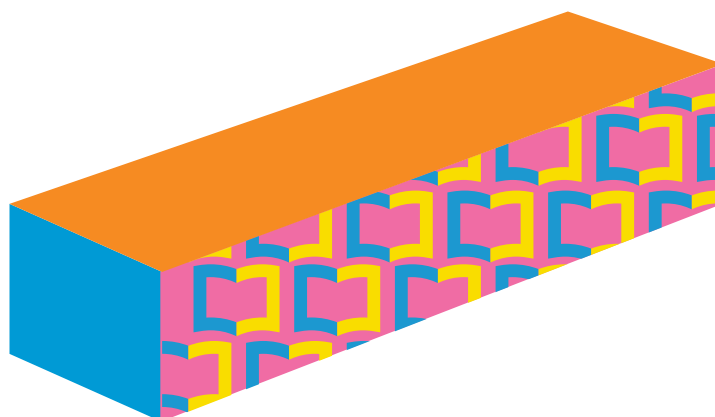
We further pointed out that while we recognised that children should be supported to develop independence, Zach's needs are unique and it wasn't the case that he would have diminishing needs or possible opportunities for developing further independence in the future given his specific disability. The school was open to considering our views and through negotiation we came to a resolution that was in Zach's best interests.

We were delighted that Zach could return to the care of his original SNA until his new SNA could be trained to allow for future, planned change. We believe every complaint is an opportunity for learning and we encouraged Zach's school to adopt this approach.

Although Zach and his parents were pleased with this decision, it is important to emphasise that Zach spent the whole summer stressed and worried that he wouldn't be able to return to school in September. He was concerned that he would be unable to participate equally alongside his peers, as his SNA would be unfamiliar with the technology that supports his participation and inclusion in school. Zach's mother went to extensive lengths throughout the summer to source a resolution.

### If the UNCRC was part of Irish law:

Public bodies, like Zach's school, would have to ensure that the best interests of the child are considered in all matters relating to them. In Zach's case, if the UNCRC been part of Irish law, his school would have had to consider if it was in his best interest to switch to an SNA that wasn't trained in the vital assistive technology he needed for school life. Additionally, if provisions for Child Rights Impact Assessments were included in incorporation of the UNCRC, a pre-emptive assessment would have had to have been carried out by the school on the impact this decision would have had on Zach's wellbeing and his rights.



# Adam's\* case

## Concern over the handling of child protection and welfare concerns by a primary school

### The complaint:

We received a complaint from a mother about her 11-year-old son, Adam, which had two elements. The first was that Adam's school had not managed child protection concerns in keeping with the relevant child protection and welfare policies and procedures. The second was that when she raised this with the school's Board of Management (BOM) they had not dealt with her complaint appropriately.

A member of staff at the school had witnessed an incident where a teacher touched Adam inappropriately on his bottom in a school corridor. This was brought to the attention of the school principal who took advice from the Chair of the BOM and the school's trustee body. The principal also met with the teacher concerned. However, this serious concern was not brought to the attention of Tusla, or importantly, to Adam's mother at that time.

In the months after, two further concerns were raised by school staff about the same teacher's behaviour and a decision was made to make a notification of possible abuse to Tusla. It was only at this point that Adam's mother was informed of the original incident against her son months before. The concerns about the teacher were subsequently investigated by both Tusla and Gardaí.

Adam's mother was alarmed at the delay in telling her about what had happened and the safeguarding issues this raised. When she was satisfied Adam did not need any further intervention or support around what happened, she raised her concerns as a formal complaint to the BOM. The BOM said they believed the matter had been dealt with appropriately and in keeping with the school and the department of education's child protection and welfare policies. It was highlighted to Adam's mother, and

subsequently to the OCO, that the staff member who witnessed the concerns for Adam had not done so in writing and that the school had sought the advice from the trustee body and the Chair of the BOM. The BOM told Adam's mother that they were closing her complaint.

### What we did:

Given the very serious issues involved we both spoke with and wrote to, the BOM to get their perspective. Having considered the BOM's response to us, we remained concerned about the school's administrative actions in this instance and it was determined that a full statutory investigation was warranted under the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002.

We met with Adam and his mother and conducted interviews with several school staff members and the Chair of the BOM. During this time the Chair of the BOM stood down and we engaged with the patron to be assured there were appropriate governance arrangements in place in light of the investigation underway.

### The result:

A significant development in this investigation was the appointment of a new Chair of the BOM by the Patron. The BOM decided to revisit the issues involved in the complaint and our subsequent investigation. The new Chair also reached out to our Office to explore further why we believed an investigation was necessary and the specific administrative actions we were concerned about.

Following this the BOM wrote to us to advise that they had reconsidered their position and now unequivocally accepted that the concerns raised by Adam's mother about the handling of child protection and welfare concerns and the management of her complaint, did have merit.

The BOM told us they were committed to putting systems in place to ensure this will never happen again. The Chair met with Adam's mother to express the BOM's regret that her concerns had not been addressed in a direct and timely manner, and this was followed up in writing with her. The Chair also advised Adam's mother and our Office that they had scheduled further

\*Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the children in our case studies

specific training for school staff and the BOM on Child Safeguarding Procedure's and complaints handling.

The OCO discussed these developments with Adam's mother, and it was agreed that it would be appropriate to discontinue the investigation.

## Housing

### Rebecca and Paul\*

#### Two small children in Approved Housing Body home with mould and no hot water

##### The complaint:

We received a complaint from a mother on behalf of her two children Rebecca\* (6) and Paul\* (5) against an Approved Housing Body (AHB). AHBs are independent, not-for-profit organisations that provide, manage, and build social housing, working closely with local authorities to address local housing needs. The complaint centred on the AHB's administrative actions in resolving issues about the conditions of the family's accommodation and the management of those complaints.

The children's mother told us she had lived in the apartment for 4 ½ years and had raised serious concerns about her living conditions for a significant period of time. These were that there was mould in several rooms including the children's bedroom, bathroom and the kitchen; there was tape holding water and heating pipes in place; there was exposed plaster board and electrical wiring; a radiator was hanging from a wall; there was a damaged cooker hob and; there was no running hot water in the apartment for an extended period of time. Due to these conditions the family were forced to move temporarily out of their home for a four-month period. During this time, they stayed in overcrowded conditions with relatives while continuing to pay rent for their apartment. This move caused serious disruption and was unsettling for her children. We were

also told that the children had attended their GP on several occasions in 2024 due to respiratory issues, which were made worse by the fact that Rebecca suffered with asthma.

##### What we did:

In November 2024 we contacted the AHB to seek local resolution. It was acknowledged that there was merit to the complaints and we were advised that leaks in an apartment above were complicating remedial works taking place. The AHB assured our Office and the complainant at this time that matters would be progressed in the coming weeks.

In January 2025, the children's mother told us she returned the property over Christmas as her relative's home was overcrowded and could no longer facilitate them. She said the upstairs leak was still not fixed and that no works had been carried out on her apartment. In February, we visited the family and saw that the conditions were deplorable. We sought a meeting with the AHB, which was attended by the CEO of the AHB and members of its senior management team.

##### The result:

In June, the AHB told us there had been much progress in the months since. A new water pump was installed which reinstated the hot water supply and a schedule of works was agreed with the children's mother about the other issues. Given the update and the continued proactive engagement by the AHB with the family, we closed the complaint with the parents agreement. We also made encouragements to the AHB about how they could improve engagement on these sorts of issues with tenants going forward.

##### If the UNCRC was part of Irish law:

Article 27 of the UNCRC recognises every child's right to an adequate standard of living, including housing needed for physical, mental, and social development. If the UNCRC was incorporated in Irish law for this family, the AHB would have been obliged to ensure the issues in the apartment were rectified straight away, so that the young children and their mother had access to safe, secure and habitable home and ensure that their best interest was considered.

\*Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the children in our case studies

## Quick Wins

In line with Ombudsman principles, the OCO encourages the local resolution of complaints and respects the local complaint processes of public bodies. We receive a lot of complaints about a delay in complaint handling. In these cases, we encourage local and early resolution of complaints as appropriate, which would usually result in quick wins for everyone. Sometimes these complaints can be resolved by a simple phone call or letter.

\*Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the children in our case studies

## Eoin\* missed out on disability service referral due to the wrong address

### The complaint:

OCO received a complaint from the principal of a primary school on behalf of Eoin (11) who is autistic and has additional needs. The principal and parents were not sure of the status of Eoin's referral to both CDNT and Primary Care and he had received no supports to date. The parents were concerned Eoin would move to secondary school without supports.

### What we did:

We asked Eoin's parents about the communication from CDNT and Primary Care. It was unclear where Eoin's referrals were as they appeared to be closed from CDNT. We contacted the CDNT and Primary Care to enquire about Eoin's referral status.

### The result:

Primary care confirmed Eoin was transferred to their service and they had written to the family with an invitation for speech and language. However, the OCO established that Eoin's family never got the invitation over a possible issue with the address given. As a result the referral was closed. Primary Care re-engaged with the family and invited Eoin for Speech and Language again. They confirmed that Eoin was on the waiting list for psychology and that his parents would be invited to group sessions for supporting children with autism and psychology advice clinic until an appointment is available.

## Letter of eligibility for Ella\*

### The complaint:

Ella's mother contacted us because she was unhappy with how long the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was taking to respond to her complaint. She had complained to the NCSE when it didn't accept her daughter's autism diagnosis and so didn't issue an eligibility letter, which Ella needed to get a place in an Autism class. The NCSE told Ella's mum the delay in a decision around Ella's eligibility letter was due to a policy issue.

### What we did:

We wrote to the NCSE asking them when Ella's mum could expect a response to her complaint. They said a complaint response was due to be issued to the parent. When engaging with the parent about the response that she received, there was some confusion regarding what documentation the NCSE required her to submit. We followed up with the NCSE in order to seek clarity.

### The result:

The NCSE told Ella's mum they did not require further documentation, and that Ella was being granted an eligibility letter. This matter was resolved days before the start of the new school year and Ella was able to access the autism class.

### OCO follow-up with NCSE regarding Eligibility Letters

In December 2025, the OCO received further complaints regarding NCSE Eligibility Letters not being issued to children. This was due to a deadline set out in a Circular from the Department of Education and Youth (DEY). We had concerns about whether the best interests of children were considered when that decision was made and about what appeals mechanism was available to the families. We engaged extensively with the NCSE on this and received positive outcomes for the families that contacted us. The NCSE and Department of Education and Youth (DEY) later advised they would consider applications received after the deadline. This was a welcome outcome for the families, with one parent telling the OCO they felt as though 'the weight of the world had been lifted off their shoulders'.

## Barriers to Patrick\* accessing psychology services

### The complaint:

Patrick's parents told us that the Child and Family Psychology Unit at their local Primary Care Centre had failed to provide any communication or support regarding Patrick's needs, despite his diagnosis of ASD in late 2022. Patrick had remained on the waiting list for psychology services without any update or progress.

### What we did:

After OCO intervention, it became clear that there were no psychologists in place, and that the post had been vacant for some time. We asked the HSE how it was planning to manage the waiting list in light of this challenge and how this would be communicated to Patrick's family.

### The result:

The HSE provided us with a comprehensive outline of the steps it would be taking to manage the situation effectively. A short time later, Patrick's family contacted us to let us know that Patrick had received a letter for his first psychology appointment in the coming weeks.

# 3. Children's Rights in the Spotlight



## Spotlight Issue 1:

### Child Centred Justice

During visits to Oberstown Children Detention Campus, children told us they didn't always understand what was being asked of them, or said about them, in court. We noted that advocates working with children also had the same concerns and warned that this lack of understanding can lead to increased rates of reoffending.

#### What we did:

We highlighted these issues in our report, [Child Centred Justice: support for child defendants in the Irish court system](#), published in April, 2025, and brought our concerns to the Department of Justice who responded extremely positively.

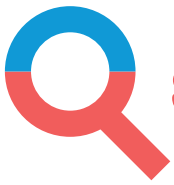
#### Outcome:

Following OCO engagement, the Department introduced a new court accompaniment service for child defendants to be rolled out in over 100 youth diversion projects across the country throughout 2025. The change will mean that every young person before the courts (District/ Circuit/ Children's Court) will be offered access

to this support, impacting approximately 1,000 children who appear in court every year.

It will also have a presence in the Central Criminal Court and has been included in the new protocol to expediate rape and murder cases involving victims and defendants under 18 years of age. Following the publication of our report, we also met with the Law Society to see how we could support training initiatives on child centred justice. In May, the OCO delivered a training module on child centred justice as part of the Criminal Justice elective for trainee solicitors. In November, the Ombudsman for Children delivered a talk on the same topic to practicing legal professionals. These were great opportunities to highlight child rights standards and practical advice on working with children, to ensure their voices are heard and rights respected in all aspects of criminal and family law. The OCO welcomes the positive and child-centred response from the Department of Justice in our engagement with them on this matter. We also welcome the support we have received from the Judiciary through the President of the District Court. We hope these changes will bring about positive improvements for children.





## Spotlight Issue 2:

### Child and Family Homelessness

The OCO has been raising the issue of child homelessness and unstable living conditions for families as far back as 2012. During this time we have made recommendations and met with Ministers and officials, but still the number of children in homeless accommodation continues to grow. In 2019, we published [No Place Like Home](#), which highlighted the views and experiences of children living in Family Hubs. At that time, there were 3,784 children in homeless accommodation, but by the end of 2025 approximately 5,000 children lived in emergency accommodation. The impact of homelessness and unstable living conditions on children is catastrophic. It affects every aspect of their lives; education, well-being, self-development and violates their rights.

#### What we did:

In early 2025, we wrote to the Joint Committee on Housing and the Minister for Housing seeking a specific child and family homelessness strategy. A specific plan would address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of children, ensuring their well-being and rights are prioritised. The letter to the Committee was co-signed by Focus Ireland, Crosscare, Simon Communities of Ireland, SVP, Threshold, Respond, Depaul Ireland and Clúid Housing – all organisations who work directly with children and families experiencing homelessness. In June, the Ombudsman for Children was invited to speak to the Joint Committee on Housing for a special session on child homelessness. In July, the Ombudsman met with the Minister for Housing and had a very productive meeting about the actions required to address child and family homelessness. Again, we spoke about the need for a specific plan for children.

#### Outcome:

In November, the Government published [Delivering Homes, Building Communities 2025-2030](#) and we were delighted to see that the Government were committing to developing a dedicated cross-Departmental and agency-led

Child and Family Homelessness Action Plan. This will be guided by the UNCRC. The Government also committed to implementing a number of other OCO recommendations, including fully incorporating the best interest principle into our housing legislation and prioritising families in long term homelessness for social housing. We look forward to continued engagement on this issue as they develop and roll out the plan in 2026.



## Spotlight Issue 3:

### Homecare and Support Services for Children

The lack of regulation of paediatric homecare packages to children with complex healthcare needs has long been a concern of the OCO. We have received a number of complaints about the provision of home care and support services for children with complex health needs and disabilities, including concerns about safety, the competence of staff to meet the child's needs, and management of service, including the management of complaints about the service. Children have a right to an adequate standard of healthcare in such circumstances, and that can only be guaranteed with proper oversight.

#### What we did:

We have, since 2012, been advocating for a national standardised approach to homecare packages, and for children to be included in the development of a regulatory framework for home care packages since 2021. In February 2025, the OCO consolidated this work and published its report [Homecare and Support Services for Children](#). The 2025 report includes the story of Baby Luke, a child with complex healthcare needs whose father had made a complaint to the OCO about the management of Luke's home care, showing first hand why regulation is needed. The report received national media coverage and prompted questions to the Minister in the Dáil. The Ombudsman for Children raised these concerns and the regulatory gap with Minister for Health at a meeting in May 2025.

### Outcome:

It was clear that the Minister listened, as the OCO were delighted to see that children are now included in regulations following the publication of the [Health \(Amendment\) \(Licensing of Professional Home Support Providers\)](#) at the end of 2025. We are hopeful this change will greatly improve the provision of care to children like Luke in the future.



## Spotlight Issue 4:

### Lack of Resources a Barrier to Children's Rights

Every year the OCO receives complaints about waiting lists for housing, Assessment of Need (AON), Children Disability Network Team (CDNT) services, Primary Care services, a lack of school places, and CAMHS. We hear from parents the devastating impact that this can have on the wellbeing of their children, and it is a huge concern to the OCO as we are limited in what we can do for these families. This is because public bodies often tell us those needs can't be met due to staffing shortages.

In 2020, the OCO published our [Unmet Needs](#) report which highlighted the challenges faced by children in Ireland who require an assessment of their needs. It is clear by the complaints we are still receiving that this remains an issue. We have received multiple complaints regarding delays in children receiving treatment and appointments in Children's Disability services and Primary Care. In many of these complaints we followed up with the HSE, and they say that these issues are a result of a lack of staffing.

The OCO is unable to direct Public Bodies on how to use their resources. However, it is clear that these waiting list delays are having a significant adverse impact on children's development, mental health and their rights. We have heard from parents who are in despair as they know their four-year-old son could communicate with them if only he had speech and language therapy; parents who wonder if their 13 year child could have been able to walk if they could

only have secured physiotherapy when she was younger; or a 17 year old autistic boy in residential care because his parents could no longer safely care for him at home due to the lack of services. We are hearing from parents who are on six year waiting lists for respite services.

Behind every statistic of the number of children on the waiting list is a devastated family, burdened by the 'what if'.

The OCO would like to see more open and transparent lines of communication for families that clearly map out pathways for services. From the point of entry, parents should be made aware of likely delays and be given a reasonable timeframe for when their child can expect a service. A dedicated advocacy service should be in place for children with disabilities, to help families navigate these services and act as advocates for them. We would also like to see a review of the Assessment of Needs complaint system, where many parents are directed. While in most cases these complaints are upheld, no resolution is offered, and families are still left waiting for a service.

## 4. Rights Education

Our Education, Rights and Outreach Programmes play a vital role in connecting directly with children and young people across Ireland every year. During each academic term, primary and secondary school students from across the country visit the OCO office to participate in interactive workshops led by our Participation and Rights Education Team. These sessions are designed to be engaging, inclusive and age-appropriate, helping children to understand their rights in a practical and meaningful way, and to better understand the role of the OCO. Above all, we aim to ensure that children can see how their rights apply to their everyday lives – at home, in school and in their communities.

We also work to reach children who may be more vulnerable or at risk of marginalisation. Our targeted outreach work focuses specifically on children living in IPAS centres, unaccompanied minors living in care, and targeted youth services (Traveller young people, migrant young people, LGBTQ+ young people, young people with disabilities). Through this, we make sure we reach children whose voices are often underrepresented and who may face additional barriers in accessing information about their rights. These workshops create safe spaces for discussion, build confidence, and raise awareness of rights in a way that empowers children to speak up and be heard. To maximise accessibility, we deliver sessions both at our offices and by travelling to groups in their own communities. In 2025 we visited, Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Longford as each area had limited engagement with us in the past.

## TY Work Experience

In 2025, we welcomed nine Transition Year students to our office for structured work experience placements in May and November. The TY programme forms an important part of our wider commitment to strengthen participation structures and ensure that children and young people remain central to our work.

The work experience programme is designed to give students insight into the role of the Office and to actively involve them in meaningful, age-appropriate work. Over the course of the week, students are introduced to the UNCRC, the role of the OCO, and the different functions carried out across the organisation.

During their placement, TY students:

- Helped the OCO team at Child Talks in November.
- Sat in on Rights Education Workshops, gaining first-hand experience of how children's rights are delivered and discussed in school settings.
- Carried out research on priority themes for the Participation and Rights Education (P&RE) Unit, contributing to background research and youth perspectives to ongoing projects.
- Met with Niall and staff from each unit to learn about the range of work being carried out across the Office.
- Wrote and published their own blog posts on a children's rights issue of their choice.

# 5. Children's Voices

## OCO Youth Advisory Panel (YAP)

The Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) continues to play an important role in the work of the OCO and we are grateful for their hard work and dedication each year. In 2025, the OCO YAP had 24 members from across the country. The YAP's two main functions are to advise the OCO about the emerging issues and concerns for children and young people and to share their views on topics and themes that are important strategically to the OCO.



# 2025 YAP members

**Ailis Malone**

**Eoin Carpenter**

**Mia Harding**

**Ella Norton**

**Rachel Fleming**

**Amelia Rushe**

**Toby Murphy**

**Hannah Price Li**

**Chris Garvey**

**Daniel Aibuedefe**

**Alicia Kellett**

**Aoibhinn McDermott**

**Faith Langdon**

**Olan Doogan- Bellec**

**Sinead Murray**

**Emilia De Búrca**

**Luke Fagan**

**Aurijus Mikulskis**

**Murphy Alade**

**Holly Cahill**

**Bel Nabulele**

**Grace French**

**Molly Brereton**

**Lenta Ali**

**Killian Byrne**

**Shakar Ali**

**Princess Ogumefu**

**Fionn McWeeney**

**Esther Tamadoe**

# Yap Highlights 2025

## YAP at the European Parliament, Brussels

### May

11 YAP members along with OCO staff travelled to the European Parliament in Brussels on the invite of Kathleen Funchion, MEP for Ireland South. The purpose of the visit was to advocate for children and young people having a genuine seat at the table in European policymaking. This initiative formed part of a broader EU commitment to ensure that children's rights are recognised and upheld in line with the UNCRC and EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. During the trip, the group was given a guided tour of the European Parliament and had an opportunity to take part in a highly engaging and productive Q&A session with several Irish MEPs. No trip to Brussels would be complete without a visit to a Belgian chocolate truffle-making workshop, making it a fun and memorable way to experience the local culture. This was a wonderful chance for young people to experience democracy in action at European level and the YAP was very grateful for the opportunity.



## YAP and the OCO celebrating LGBTQI+ children's rights at Dublin Pride

### June

The theme for Dublin Pride 2025 was "Taking Liberties," marking the 10th anniversary of Ireland's landmark 2015 legal milestones, including the same-sex marriage referendum, the Gender Recognition Act, and the Children and Family Relationships Act.

YAP members engaged with the history of the Pride movement in Ireland and explored the wider social and political context that made the 2025 parade particularly significant. The theme this year highlighted how LGBTQI+ rights were hard-won through sustained activism and on the morning of the Pride Parade, YAP members, alongside OCO staff, attended BelongTo's Pride Breakfast, where they were joined by representatives from youth organisations across the country and marched to Merrion Square.



## YAP at the Oireachtas Joint Committee on AI

### September

The YAP, represented by Fionn McWeeney, Grace French and Holly Cahill, presented the **AI and Us** report to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence (AI) with Niall. The presentation was a chance to highlight the opportunities and risks associated with the emergence of AI. During the session, the YAP urged Committee members to prioritise children's safety in the development and regulation of AI. They called for stronger safeguards, improved digital education, and a clear commitment to ensuring that AI tools are designed with children's rights and wellbeing at their core.



## YAP advisory work:

### **One Size Does Not Fit All- an OCO report on phone bans in schools and children's rights**

The YAP looked at how the proposed school phone ban would impact children's digital rights

### **OCO YAP consultation, AI and US**

The YAP looked at how AI is impacting the rights of children and young people both positively and negatively

### **Extremism, Discrimination and Gender Roles – School survey**

The YAP took part in focus groups that helped us develop and shape the OCO's Secondary School survey questionnaire, providing valuable insights.

### **Voices of Tomorrow report**

The YAP put forward their five key asks for young people for the new Government over the next five years.

### **YAP Terms of Reference**

The YAP were involved in the creation of the Terms of Reference for the OCO's Youth Advisory Panel

### **The OCO's youth UNCRC Incorporation event at Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA)**

The YAP helped in the creation of content and outlining the objectives of the event, along with the overall delivery on the day. They served not only as contributors but as co-creators, and from the earliest planning stages worked with staff to shape the agenda, along with helping to refine key messages that was grounded in their own lived experiences. On the day itself YAP members stepped confidently into leadership roles by delivering speeches, participating in panel discussions, and facilitating discussions. Their involvement set the tone for the event by placing young people at the centre.

### **C&I Child friendly work**

The YAP worked with our Complaints and Investigations team to help make the OCO's complaints process more child friendly

### **OCO resource for teachers on emerging social issues**

The YAP were consulted on the development of a framework for a rights-based educational resource the OCO has commissioned from DCU, which is aimed at tackling negative attitudes and misinformation around immigration amongst young people

## What our departing YAP members told us about their experiences:

“The YAP has given me so many opportunities and memories, from visiting the Áras and speaking in the Oireachtas to travelling to the European Parliament. Always feeling included and like a valued member of the OCO.”

**Luke**

“My time with the YAP was better than I could’ve imagined. I’ve gotten the opportunity to do so many different experiences that I never thought I would be able to do.”

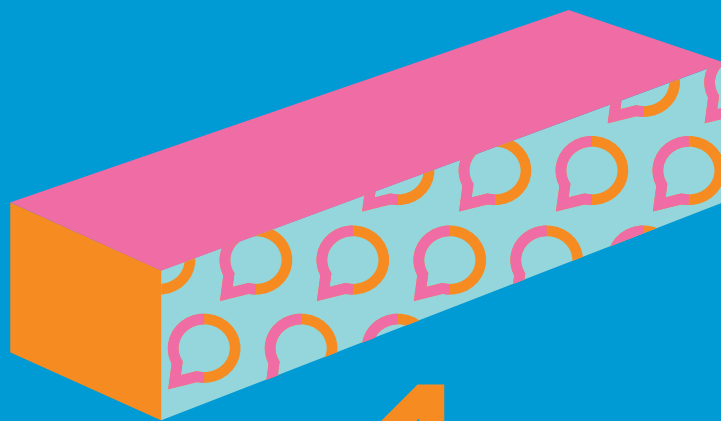
**Faith**

“My time on the YAP was a positive experience. I learned a lot, met some great people and it has also given me a lot of confidence moving forward.”

**Murphy**

“YAP has made me see the good side of things in life, made me feel heard, important and valued. My favourite memory was my first meeting at the Dáil. I was nervous at first but after seeing everyone speak their minds without being judged, I immediately felt confident.”

**Esther**



“I enjoyed being part of meaningful discussions where youth perspectives were valued. I learned more about advocacy, policy, and how youth input can influence real change. I learned a lot from YAP and OCO and my time with them will always be treasured.”

**Killian**

“I’m forever grateful of my experiences and will miss the amazing staff and other YAP members and would encourage anyone to apply no matter your interests or who you are!” **Sinead**

“It's hard to pick just one favourite moment or highlight from my time on the YAP. All I can say is how grateful I am that through it all I never felt unsupported not even for a second. There's a certain community that comes from being a part of the OCO and I'll never forget that.”

**Bel**

# Youth Consultations

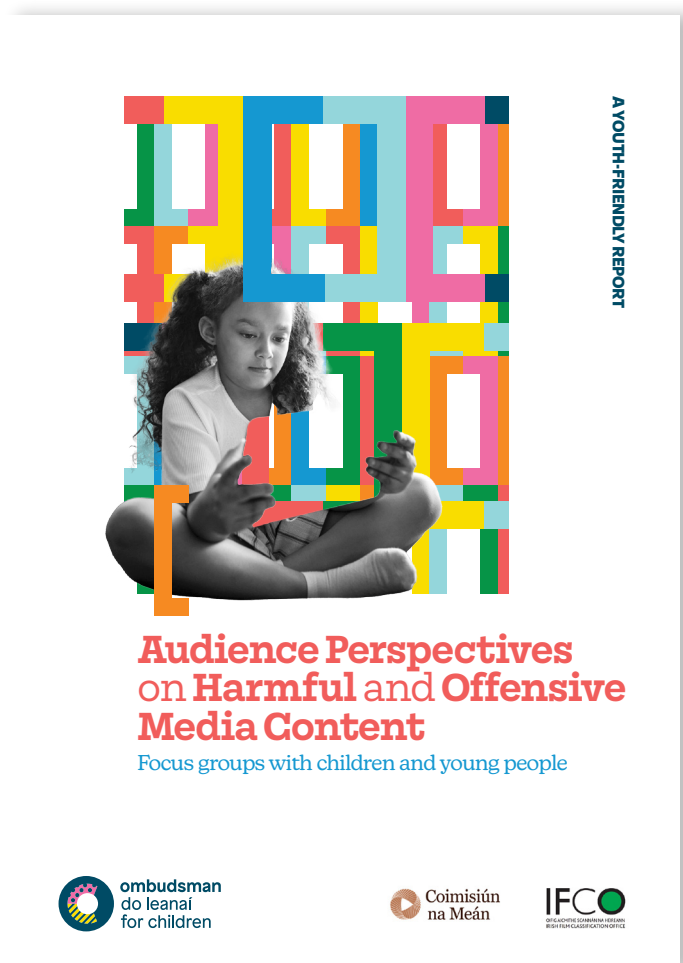
## Coimisiún na Meán (An Coimisiún) and the Irish Film Classification Office (IFCO)

The OCO was pleased to work with Coimisiún na Meán (An Coimisiún) and the Irish Film Classification Office (IFCO) in 2025 to ensure that children’s voices were heard in research on audience attitudes to potentially harmful or offensive media content and the effectiveness of regulatory measures. This research will help to inform future film classification and regulation.

The OCO’s role was to design and deliver a national consultation programme with children and young people. The research examined attitudes to violence, sexual content and nudity, dangerous or harmful behaviours, and strong language. It aimed to inform proportionate and rights-respecting regulation, support effective classification and guidance systems, and help to protect audiences.

Eight in-person focus group discussions were held in March and April 2025 with 61 children aged 8–17.

Key findings from the project showed that children consume media both alone and with others, with older children more likely to watch independently on phones and streaming platforms. Views on harmful content vary by age and context: younger children report limited impact, while older participants feel overexposed—particularly via social media. Strong language is generally more tolerated than other content types. Parental oversight is common among younger children but less so among older participants. While most children understand content ratings and reporting systems, awareness of Coimisiún na Meán is lower than that of IFCO.



## Young Lives at Risk Research Project

The OCO's Young Lives at Risk research project is a major piece of work for the OCO that began in 2025 and aims to identify and address gaps in policy and services for Ireland's most vulnerable children and young people. The 12-month project focuses on the experiences of children as young as 10 who are exposed to adversities such as family breakdown, poverty, educational exclusion, criminal and sexual exploitation, care involvement, addiction, homelessness, and repeated crises in mental health.

Children in these situations can often slip between services and miss out on the help they need. They are also at risk of getting caught up in gangs and the criminal justice system. Evidence shows that these young people face a real risk of premature death or lasting harm if systems continue to fail them.

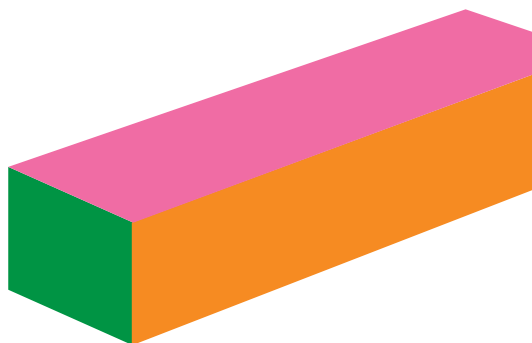
Over the course of a year, the OCO will carry out consultations with children and young people in these situations, which will inform the development of a joined-up action plan that brings together different agencies and services to improve supports and services.

Young Lives at Risk is inspired by the UK's Commission for Young Lives Project but shaped for Ireland. The report on the consultation with young people and the final action plan for Government will be published in 2026.

## OCO School Survey on Extremism, Discrimination and Gender Roles

An important part of the work of the OCO is to seek the views of young people on issues that impact them and our school survey represents a snapshot in time of a particular topic. In 2025, we carried out a survey of secondary school students on extremism, discrimination and gender roles. There had been much discussion in the media and public domain about these topics, but little research on how, and if, children were being impacted. We also noticed that these issues were coming up in our rights education workshops, and in our 2024 school survey, 36% of children told us they had experienced discrimination. In 2025, we worked with our YAP and with children's stakeholder groups in developing the questionnaire. A total of 626 children from 28 secondary schools around Ireland took part in our online survey from a list created with demographic and regional profiles guided by CSO data. This featured DEIS and non-DEIS schools, private schools, gaelscoileanna, as well as schools that have taken part in OCO Rights Education Workshops and the YAP.

Our survey revealed that 63% of young people come across extremist views online, compared to just 6% in real life. 55% of students also feel that boys have more extreme views than girls, and 51% agree that boys are more targeted by these views online. The OCO called on Government to further explore the growth of extremist views among children and put in place a plan to tackle this problem from an early age. The Office also recommends that children's rights have a special focus in regulatory work around AI given the link highlighted between the online world and extremism.



## Child Talks 2025

A calendar highlight for the OCO is our annual Child Talks event on World Children’s Day on November 20th. Taking place at the Helix in DCU, Child Talks saw six young speakers take to the stage in front of a live audience up to 1,000 school children. The show is also live streamed to schools around the country on the OCO website. Every year young people apply to the OCO to take part in Child Talks to discuss an issue that’s important to them. Topics for 2025 included girls in STEM, spaces for children to hang out, the personal impact of the housing crisis on a young person, the importance of youth services and concern over a rise in discrimination in Ireland. Child Talks 2025 was hosted by Mark Langtry ‘the Science Guy’ and past speaker Ben Barrett, and featured entertainment from MGW Wind Band at Music Generation Waterford, singer/song writer Brad Heidi and Music Generations dlr DJ’s Finn O’Brien aka DJ Silt and DJ Jorja Forsyth. A unique event, Child Talks raises awareness of children’s rights, promotes the work of the OCO and gives young people a voice.

## The Keeper of Rights

Marking the 20th anniversary of the OCO, we teamed up with Kids Own Publishing to create a book for children, by children, to learn about their rights and the role of the OCO. **The Keeper of Rights** was written and designed by 15 children aged 6-12 who took part in rights education workshops with the OCO at the beginning of the project. The work of our office and children’s rights are explained so well by the children who took part in writing this book. We will use their great work to help explain our work to the young people we meet, and we hope that children in schools across Ireland also find it helpful to understand their rights and what we do.

**The Keeper of Rights** was also created as an Audiobook, narrated by young Irish actress Alisha Weir, the star of Matilda, and featuring the voices of the children who created the book. The audiobook is available for free on the OCO website and all streaming platforms in both English and Irish. The book was donated to libraries across the country, as well as a variety of schools, after school clubs, and youth groups. It is free to order. We are very grateful to Charlie, Evie, Faye, Ghazal, Heidi, Jack G., Jack H., Katie, Liam, Luke, Maja, Rhianna, Rosie, Sachi and Victoria.



## OCO at the BT Young Scientist Exhibition

The OCO stand at the BT Young Scientist Exhibition at the RDS in January is a great opportunity for us to meet with thousands of children, teachers and parents to promote the work of the Office and children's rights. In 2025 for the second year, we also presented the OCO's Children's Rights award to a project that highlights or promotes children's rights, selected by a panel of YSE judges. The 2025 winners were Julia Kuczawska and Alicia Nic an Bhaird from Roscommon Community College, whose project, 'Words without walls' is a powerful exploration of the emotional impact of language barriers on students. We were delighted to welcome Alicia and Julia up to the OCO Office in Dublin during the year to showcase their project to staff and the OCO School Ambassadors group.



## OCO School Ambassador Programme

The School Ambassador Programme is going from strength to strength, with 2025 seeing the expansion of the programme to include a secondary school. Now in its third year, the School Ambassador Programme sees the OCO team up with two sixth class groups from two primary schools and a first-year group from a secondary school to help us raise awareness of children's rights and promote the voice of the child online and in the classroom.

Our journey starts with the OCO delivering a Rights Education workshop to each Ambassador group and explaining the work of the OCO. There are also visits from the OCO team and Niall throughout the year. Our School Ambassadors give their views on various topics throughout the year, such as children's rights, Seachtain na Gaeilge and Safer Internet Day, which is then shared on our social media channels.

They also attend our annual Child Talks event on World Children's Day. Primary and Secondary schools from around the country apply to take part in the programme and we are delighted to be working with our 2025/2026 School Ambassadors, Scoil Mhuire Na Trócaire in Ardee, Co. Louth, Bracken Educate Together in Balbriggan, Co. Dublin and Roscommon Community College in Ardnanagh, Co. Roscommon.



## 6. Our Campaign for Full and Direct Incorporation of the UNCRC into Irish Law

Let's get it  
**right** !!!

Full and direct incorporation  
of the **UNCRC** into Irish law

The OCO is committed to driving the full and direct incorporation of the UNCRC into Irish law, which we believe would completely transform the landscape of children's rights in Ireland. Despite the State ratifying the UNCRC in 1992, it still has no real power here. We know that full and direct incorporation is possible, as it has already been done in several other countries including Scotland, Norway and Sweden, and doesn't need a referendum to make it happen. Full and direct incorporation is one of the key goals in our Strategic Plan 2025-2027 and 2025 marked the start of our campaign to make children's rights real. The OCO campaign will continue through 2026 and in future years until full and direct incorporation is a reality in Ireland.

### Political Engagement

In 2025, we met with the Taoiseach, Minister for Children, Minister for Health, Minister for Justice, Minister for Education, and Minister for Special Education and outlined why full and direct incorporation of the UNCRC is the single most important thing we can do to safeguard children's rights. Over the summer, we wrote to the Joint Committee on Children and Equality asking that they include incorporation of the UNCRC in their workplan in 2026. We are delighted that they agreed to host a number of sessions on this topic and to invite children and experts to share their views.

### UNCRC Young People's Event

The OCO hosted an event in October 2025 at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), marking the official launch of a youth-led campaign calling for full and direct incorporation. This initiative represented a significant step toward strengthening the legal protection of children's rights in Ireland and ensuring that young people's voices are central to decisions that affect their lives.

The event aimed to urge the Irish Government to make the UNCRC directly enforceable in domestic legislation. Direct incorporation would ensure that children's rights are not only recognised in principle, but are legally protected, consistently considered in policymaking and service delivery, and supported by clear, accessible mechanisms for redress when those rights are violated. In doing so, it would move Ireland closer to fully realising its international commitments to children and young people.

The YAP played a pivotal role in both the preparation and delivery of the event. From shaping the agenda and developing key

messages to speaking on the day and facilitating discussions, young people were at the heart of the campaign's launch. Their leadership and lived experience gave authenticity, urgency, and direction to the call for change.

The event brought together approximately 120 young people from youth groups across Ireland, creating a powerful collective voice for reform. Attendees heard from inspiring speakers including disability activist Cara Darmody and former UN Youth Delegate Mohammed Naeem, who reinforced the importance of youth participation and rights-based advocacy. Organisations represented on the day included Foróige, Youth Work Ireland, and Comhairle na nÓg, demonstrating strong cross-sectoral involvement.

Looking ahead, our campaign will focus on empowering young people to understand, claim, and defend their rights. This will include awareness-raising initiatives, youth-led advocacy, engagement with policymakers, and collaboration with partner organisations nationwide. The campaign will also work to ensure that public bodies and services are legally required to act in the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all decisions affecting them.

By building momentum at both grassroots and national levels, our campaign aims to create lasting legislative change – ensuring that children's rights are not optional considerations, but enforceable standards embedded within Irish law. Ultimately, the campaign seeks to secure a future in which every child in Ireland is heard, respected, and protected.



# 7. Advocating for Children's Rights in Policies and Laws

## Submissions

### International Protection Bill

In 2025, the OCO provided our recommendations to strengthen the International Protection Bill to safeguard the rights of migrant children. The International Protection Bill is set to be the most significant reform of Irish asylum laws in the history of the State. We had significant concerns that the Bill would not provide sufficient safeguards for the rights of migrant children, especially those arriving alone. We focused on the need to prohibit the immigration detention of children, ensure the best interest principle was fully incorporated into the bill, an independent guardianship model for unaccompanied children and an age assessment process that was compliant with children's rights.

The OCO engaged with the Department of Justice and the Joint Committee on Justice consistently throughout 2025 on these issues:

- OCO submission on the [National Implementation Plan for the EU Pact](#) in March
- OCO submission of our [Observations on the General Scheme of the International Protection Bill](#) in June
- Appearing before the [Joint Committee](#) in October

The OCO continues to follow the Bill closely in 2026, and will monitor the implementation of the Pact to ensure that children's rights are protected, respected and fulfilled.

### Children's (Amendment) Bill

The OCO submitted our [Observations on the General Scheme of the Children \(Amendment\) Bill 2024](#) in September 2025, which proposes a series of amendments to the Children Act 2001. The OCO welcomed the general purpose of the Bill, which aims to resolve the issue of children and young people who 'age-out' of the child justice system during proceedings, allowing them to be prosecuted as adults despite being under 18 at time of the offence.

In our submission to the Joint Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, we recommended a number of provisions which would strengthen the amended Act from a children's rights standpoint. These included:

- Raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years
- Introducing a statutory right to integrated and appropriate aftercare for children leaving detention
- Amending the new Deferred Sentence Supervision Orders designed to reduce recourse to adult imprisonment.

Our submission helped to inform the Committee's [Report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Children \(Amendment\) Bill 2024](#). The OCO will engage with the subsequent developments in the legislative process of this Bill in 2026.

## Guardianship of Infants (Amendment) Bill

In June, the OCO made a submission to the Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration on the [General Scheme of the Guardianship of Infants \(Amendment\) Bill 2025](#). This piece of legislation sought to close a loophole whereby a parent convicted of killing another parent retains guardianship of their child or children. The Bill aimed to safeguard vulnerable children from further abuse, manipulation, or control by a violent parent.

In recent years, the OCO had heard from families who had been affected by this loophole and spoke about the further trauma it caused children at a devastating moment in their lives, highlighting the vulnerabilities of children in situations of domestic abuse and their need for protection from violent parents. The OCO welcomes this important piece of legislation, and asked that it be strengthened to ensure respect for the voice of children and their best interests.

## Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2025

In July, the OCO made [Observations on the Draft Child Care \(Amendment\) Bill 2025](#), highlighting how the Bill could be strengthened to ensure that the rights of children in care, or who may be taken into care, are more fully respected and protected.

The OCO's main concerns included placements in voluntary care, insufficient safeguards for homeless children and the lack of provisions for unaccompanied children. We recommended that voluntary care arrangements be subject to a maximum time limit of 12 months, as well as independent reviews. We also called for a ban on unregulated placements.

The OCO believes explicit provisions should be made for unaccompanied children due to their particular vulnerabilities, highlighting that Irish legislation is largely silent on the rights of these children. In this submission, we highlighted our suggestion that Ireland establish an independent guardianship model for unaccompanied children, to ensure each child has their needs and best interests met.

Our Submission was underpinned by the view that appropriate integration of all four general principles of the UNCRC into the Guiding Principles of the Act would ensure the provision of a comprehensive child-rights based approach to decisions and actions that will be taken under the revised Act.

## Review of the Equality Acts

Following the publication of the General Scheme of the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2024, the OCO made a submission to the Joint Committee on Children and Equality to raise our concerns that the published Scheme did not address the issues we had raised in our [2021 submission on the Review of the Equality Acts](#), and was silent on children and their rights.

We also advocated for the UNCRC to be considered and incorporated where necessary into the Equality Acts, in order to fully ensure that the particular rights and vulnerabilities of children are taken into account. Our submission helped to inform the Committee's Report on [Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the Scheme](#) in October. We will continue to engage with the Committee and the Department to ensure these recommendations are fully implemented.

## Children's Rights Briefing Papers

The OCO published a series of briefing papers on different children's rights, [The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), [The Best Interests of the Child](#) and [Respect for the views of the Child](#) in May 2025 to raise awareness and promote a better understanding of children's rights. We hope these will be used to provide standardised guidance on children's rights to all State employees who make decisions that impact children. We believe they would be of particular benefit to legislators, policymakers, civil and public servants in informing their work by giving consideration to children's rights. The OCO's papers highlight Ireland's obligations around the UNCRC, as well as the importance of recognising children as individual rights holders, with interdependent, indivisible rights.

## Understanding Children's Lives:

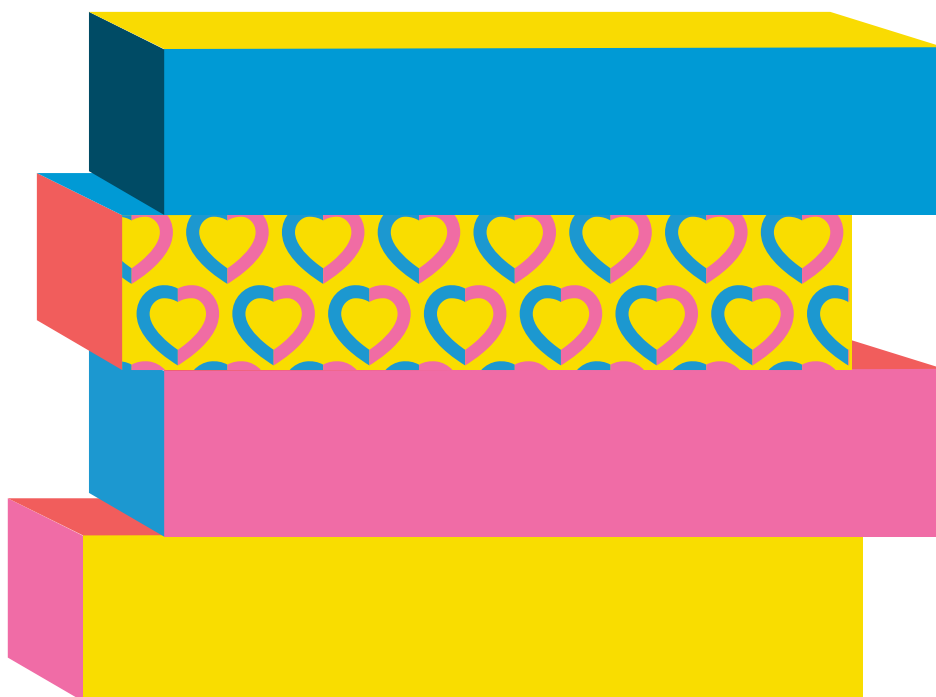
### Research on the Rights of LGBTQ+ children and young people

In 2025, the OCO began commissioning a new research study on the rights and experiences of LGBTQ+ children and young people in Ireland.

LGBTQ+ children are especially vulnerable to rights violations and often experience discrimination, bullying and violence. In 2022, the OCO published *Pieces of Us*, a report including voices of LGBTQ+ youth as part of a broader consultation on children's rights under the UNCRC. It highlighted issues faced by LGBTQ+ children in Ireland, including mental health challenges, isolation, and threats to their well-being. In January 2025, the OCO's Youth Advisory Panel identified a number of changes they believe the Government should make to better support LGBTQ+ children in Ireland.

While this and other inputs (such as the OCO's 2024 submission on the Government's LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy) have been valuable, there has been no dedicated, comprehensive, rights-based research conducted on the experiences of LGBTQ+ children under 18 in Ireland. The purpose our research is to develop a holistic understanding of the needs, challenges and perspectives of LGBTQ+ children and young people in Ireland, and to produce findings and recommendations that will inform public policy and practice to better uphold their rights.

A team of researchers in University College Cork with support from BelongTo will undertake this research in 2026 and will include focus groups and surveys of children and young people. This will also complement work by the European Network for Ombudspersons for Children, who have a thematic focus on the rights of LGBTQI+ children in 2026.



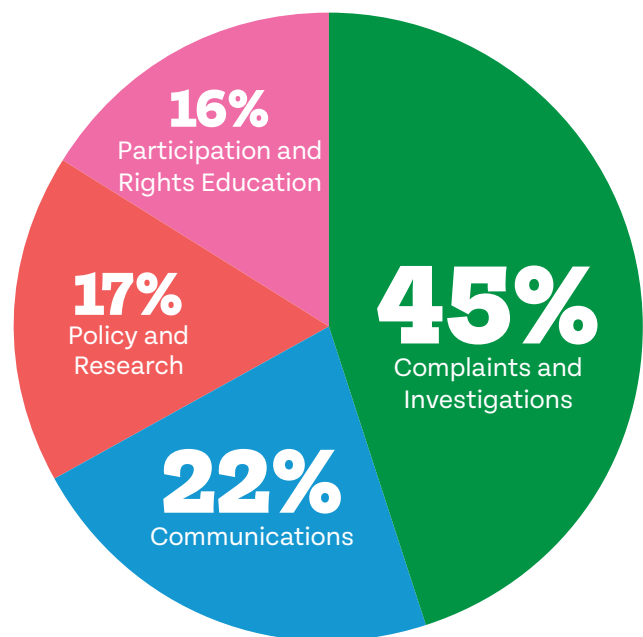
# 8. Running of the Office

## Budget 2025

The OCO's budget is allocated through the Department of Children, Equality and Disability (DCDE) and drawn down on a regular basis throughout the year. In 2025, our budget was €5.026 million which was fully drawn down by year end (2024: €4.317 million budget, of which €4.032 million was drawn down).

As set out in Sections 17(1) and (2) of the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002, the Ombudsman for Children is responsible for preparing Financial Statements, for ensuring the regularity of the Office's transactions, and ensuring compliance with the Code of Practice for Governance of State Bodies. The Financial Statements are subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General. The audit of the 2025 accounts will take place in May 2026 and will be conducted by the Comptroller and Auditor General. In accordance with Section 17 (2) of the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002, the draft Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2025 were submitted for audit by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General by 31st March 2026. Once approved by the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Financial Statements for 2025 will be published on the OCO's website. Mazars Chartered Accountants provided our internal audit function for 2025. Mazars undertook a review of internal controls in Q1 of 2026 (for 2025) and a Data Security audit in Q4 of 2025.

The breakdown of our expenditure (after apportionment of Corporate Services costs including the role of the Ombudsman) is as follows:



## Recruitment 2025

At the beginning of 2025, the OCO had 36 permanent staff members, with that figure rising to 37 by year end.

There was a lot of recruitment activity throughout the year, across all of our teams, and we welcomed nine new staff members throughout the year, across grades and teams.

We also bid farewell to eight staff members throughout the year, including our Head of Communications – they will be wonderful additions to their new workplaces.

## Freedom of Information

In 2025, the OCO received and processed 13 requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

## Child Protection and Welfare Obligations

In 2025 we received 144 child protection and welfare concerns, which are dealt with by our Designated Liaison Officers (DLPs). This was a 3% increase from 2024. In 2025, we formally notified Tusla of 28 of those reports, compared to 19 Tusla notifications in 2024.

The majority of these reports come through our complaint handling function, followed by our Participation, Education and Rights and Policy teams. We noted that these concerns often related to more than one child and to multiple forms of alleged abuse. The OCO may also signpost individuals to statutory services including Tusla and An Garda Síochána, as well as making referrals ourselves.

## Irish Language

Section 10A of the Advertising by Public Bodies came into effect in October 2022 and the OCO fully complied with our obligations in 2025. These state that 20% of all advertising placed by a public body must be in Irish and 5% of its overall advertising budget must be spent on Irish Language Media. In 2025, the OCO achieved 30.32% on placement and 5.76% on the budget requirement.

## Public Sector Duty

As a public body and human rights institution, the OCO has a statutory obligation to have regard to human rights and equality considerations in the performance of our functions. This is known as the Public Sector Duty and is laid out in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 (IHREC 2014 Act). We are required to assess, address and report on our progress in relation to the Public Sector Duty.

## Assess

An assessment of the 3 pillars of the Public Sector Duty was carried out. This included a survey to staff and a workshop to further gather feedback from staff.

## Address

In 2025 a governance structure was created to support the implementation of the Duty. An active Public Sector cross-unit working group was put in place with clear terms of reference.

Following the assessment, an action plan to address issues identified was drafted by the cross-unit working group and approved by the Senior Management Team. Feedback from staff was incorporated into the action plan.

The Public Sector Duty working group has started working on the implementation of the actions planned.

In 2025 all staff undertook Public Sector Duty training to support a common understanding of our Duty under the Act. This took the form of mandatory IHREC Public Sector Duty online training and a workshop was also held with all staff facilitated by IHREC.

The OCO is committed to driving the full and direct incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into domestic law, as clearly stated in the OCO Strategic Plan 2025-2027. This is a direct link between our functions, the pillars of the Public Sector Duty and our service users.

## Report

Along with this report, the OCO's commitment to the Public Sector Duty is available on our website <https://www.oco.ie/about-us/public-sector-duty/>

## Climate Action Mandate

In 2025, the OCO continued to progress its climate-action commitments in line with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 and the strengthened requirements of the Climate Action Mandate 2025. The year focused on delivering practical actions, reducing emissions, and embedding sustainability across operations.

The Act establishes a legally binding framework that applies across all public sector bodies. To meet these statutory obligations, the OCO continues to advance our climate responsibilities by implementing the requirements of the Climate Action Mandate 2025, submitting our Climate Action Roadmap annually, and reporting on climate-related activities and performance via the SEAI Monitoring and Reporting platform.

## Climate Action Roadmap

In 2025, the OCO submitted our Climate Action Roadmap 2025 and implemented several actions to support delivery:

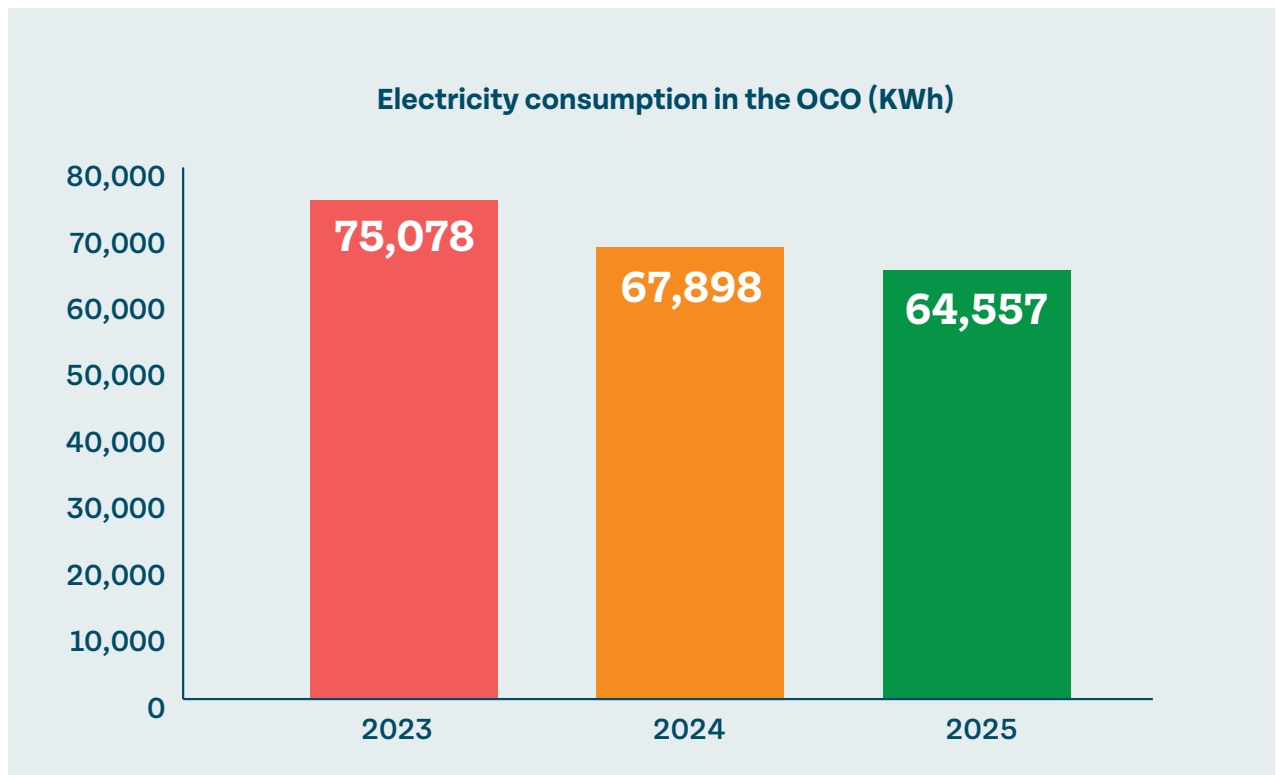
- Established an internal governance structure to oversee and support climate action activities. This includes both the Senior Management Team and a Green Team embedded in a well-established cross-unit committee.
- Provided climate action training for senior leadership and staff.
- Delivered a staff workshop and gathered feedback to inform future actions.

- Initiated the replacement of the building’s Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) system.
- Implemented a new waste management system in the Office into general waste, biodegradable waste and recycling with waste points over the two floors.
- Engaged with our Partnership Support Manager appointed by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).

## Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions

Our premises uses electricity only. The OCO reduced its electricity consumption by 5% in 2025, achieving an annual use of 64,557.42 kWh (2024: 67,897.92KWh) and continuing the downward trend recorded in recent years. Air-travel-related emissions for 2025 totalled 4.5 tonnes CO<sup>2</sup> (2024: 7.6 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>), all of which will be offset in line with national requirements.

The OCO’s CO<sub>2</sub> total emissions for 2025 were 14,613 kg (2024: 17,854 kg)



## Sustainability Activities

Throughout 2025, the OCO advanced a range of sustainability activities that supported compliance with the strengthened and improved day-to-day environmental performance.

Key actions:

- Expanded Green Public Procurement practices and implemented Circular 17/2025.
- Applied low carbon and circular construction principles during the HVAC upgrade project.
- Promoted digital first processes and introduced the use of 100% recycled paper.
- Monitored water consumption and continued providing three water refill points across the office.
- Maintained full segregation of general, biodegradable and recycling waste streams.
- Reduced single use items at internal events and replaced them with reusable alternatives.

These actions contributed to the OCO's continued shift towards more sustainable office practices and reduced environmental impact.

## Compliance with Circular 01/2020

In accordance with Circular 1/2020, the OCO will offset 100% of official air-travel emissions for 2025, totalling 4.5 tonnes CO<sup>2</sup>. All air-travel activity is recorded annually and submitted through the SEAI Monitoring & Reporting process to ensure full compliance with national public-sector requirements.

A payment of €288.56 was submitted to the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) in late February to meet the 2025 offsetting obligation.

## ICT

The OCO continued our Digital Transformation journey in 2025 as documented in our ICT Strategy.

- Important system implementations were completed in the areas of booking management, password management, and case management.
- OCO laptops were upgraded to Windows 11 and Cisco Umbrella was installed to improve IT security.
- OCO staff were trained on the OCO secure file sharing platform, FileCloud, the OCO password management solution, Keeper, and on the essentials of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the use of Microsoft Co-Pilot.

