



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028

Report on the Responses to the Public Consultation

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Abbreviations

(See Appendix 1 for Glossary of Terms)

ACEs	Adverse Childhood Experiences
AIM	Access and Inclusion Model
BOBF	Better Outcome Brighter Futures
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
CYP	Children and Young People
CYPSC	Children and Young People’s Service Committee
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
ECCE	The Early Childhood Care and Education Programme
EPIC	Empowering People in Care
EWO	Educational Welfare Officer
FASD	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
FRC	Family Resources Centres
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IPP	Individual Pupil Plan
HIQA	Health and Information Quality Authority
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NYCI	National Youth Council of Ireland
PPFS	Programme of work for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support

RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
SCP	School Completion Programme
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
SUSI	Student Universal Support Ireland
Tusla	The Child and Family Agency
UBU	Your Place Your Space
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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Executive Summary

Background

On 27 January 2022, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) launched a public consultation to inform the next Government policy framework for children and young people in Ireland which will run from 2023 to 2028. This new policy framework follows on from the previous strategy Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People which ran from 2014 to 2020. Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures contained 5 National Outcomes to support children and young people aged 0-24 to lead fulfilling lives and have positive outcomes into adulthood.

This report presents the findings from a public consultation which invited children and young people, parents and people working with children to share their views, and suggestions to help identify the main issues and to shape further targeted consultations throughout the design and development stages of the new framework.

Approach to consultation

The public were asked to share their opinions by completing an online survey and/or submitting a written submission. The consultation asked 12 open-ended questions centred largely around the five national outcomes in the existing strategy. Respondents were asked to reflect on what is going well and not so well for children and young people in Ireland, how their lives have improved over the past decade, what might be done to ensure positive outcomes, and what might be done to respond to the impact of COVID-19. Participants were also asked to identify the top five priorities for the new policy framework.

Response to the consultation

There were 236 responses to the survey and 43 written responses submitted to the dedicated mailbox. In total, over half (58%) of the responses were from professionals/service providers, 22% from children and young people and 20% from parents. To prepare their written submissions, two service providers undertook

consultations with children. One submission included direct feedback from children and young people and a parent in their response.

Findings

What is going well for children and young people in Ireland?

Two questions explored respondents' views on what is going well for children and young people in Ireland and what has improved over the past 10 years. Seven key themes were identified in response to these two questions, namely that there has been greater emphasis on children's voice and rights; positive reform of early years education and childcare; access to education (free or low cost), healthcare (e.g., free GP care for under 6-year-olds); access to social, cultural and recreational activities; better protection for children and young people; and a more inclusive society.

It is important to note that 1 in 10 of the respondents could not identify anything positive, and many respondents qualified their responses to say that not all children and young people benefit from these improvements.

What is not going well for children and young people in Ireland?

Eleven themes emerged from responses to this question. Poor provision of mental health services and long waiting lists for health services were the most dominant messages. Difficulties in accessing disability support and services within education and health settings were identified. Problems were also identified within education (e.g., limited choice of school type, high class sizes, lack of extra-curricular activities, poor condition of buildings/facilities, problems with staffing levels, and lack of resources available to the schools). Inequalities in the education system (e.g., lack of appropriate support for more vulnerable and disadvantage children and young people) and the hidden cost of education (e.g., cost of uniforms, books, school meals, voluntary contributions) was also raised. Inequalities in society, the ongoing impact of unemployment / insecure work and the increasing cost of living on families as well as the ongoing housing crisis featured in many of

the responses. Concerns included the lack of regulation of online sources, children and young people's access to inappropriate content. the impact of social media on mental health/anxiety levels, and the risk of cyber bullying and online grooming. Whilst improved youth voice featured in responses to what is going well for children and young people, some responses described situations where their voices are not sought or not heard for example in relation to education (e.g., not having a say in school uniform policy, religion in schools, curriculum and assessment matters) and in Family Courts and Justice situations (e.g., where system appears to be adversarial and not child's rights focused).

What can be done to ensure children and young people are active and healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing?

This question elicited seven main themes. Respondents felt that it was important to provide a nurturing environment for children - this had 6 subthemes (support from pregnancy onwards; adequate maternity/paternity leave; health screening for children; universal and non-stigmatising parenting support; preventative and early intervention support; and affordable, quality childcare).

The need to focus on food and nutrition had 5 subthemes (improve regulation of marketing and availability of unhealthy foods, cheaper healthy foods; better regulation of online media platforms that spread misinformation about food and diets; deliver more effective education about nutrition through schools; and provide nutritious meals in schools). The importance of local amenities was recognised for their contribution to positive health and wellbeing, and this had 3 subthemes (the need to create more opportunities for CYP to get out and about, ensure more equitable access to leisure and sports facilities, and support local communities to provide a range of facilities and activities). A theme about proactively promoting positive physical and mental wellbeing had 3 subthemes (undertake multi-media campaigns, encourage children to participate in sports and physical activities from a young age, and encourage CYP to get off their screens). One theme focused on enabling more positive physical and mental wellbeing opportunities through Education - this had 3 subthemes (promote physical activity at all levels of education including enabling CYP to be

outdoors as much as possible; offer non-competitive physical health activities to CYP; and promote mental wellbeing in schools).

The need to improve other services to enhance health and wellbeing included 7 subthemes which focused on the need to improve living standards; health services; mental health services; addiction-support services; youth services; inter-departmental and agency collaborative working; and to implement existing policies to improve services and outcomes. The final theme advocated listening to what CYP have to say about physical and mental wellbeing and the 2 subthemes focused on communicating with CYP and listen to what they have to say; and also involve CYP in service development.

What can be done to ensure children and young people are achieving their full potential in school and all areas of learning and development?

Responses to this question were grouped into 6 main themes. Some respondents felt it was important to recognise parents as primary educators and this included the need to support parents to support their children. Many respondents highlighted that basic needs had to be addressed to enable CYP to achieve their potential particularly for CYP living with poverty, homelessness and inequality. It was suggested that more effort was required to identify and address developmental and educational needs before children start school (this included access to screening, assessment and treatments).

The dominant theme on the need to rethink and reform the education system contained subthemes relating to educational ethos, alternative learning approaches, exam reform, alternative education pathways, curriculum reform, review teaching methods, better use of technology in education, more hybrid teaching / more online learning, more flexible pathways to transition to adulthood, more focus on non-formal education, improve after-school services, secularise education, integrate education, provide more choice about school types, ensure equal and accessible education, provide more inclusive learning environments, including access to 3rd level education, ensure emotional support is more accessible via schools, provide more comprehensive education on mental health and emotional wellbeing, and ensure that schools take bullying more seriously. Associated with this theme, was a theme on the need to improve resources for education - this included 2

sub-themes of funded and free education, and the need for schools to be better equipped and resourced. A theme on the need for specialised support for children with disabilities included suggestions to address the ongoing experiences of some CYP with disabilities who are not having their needs met. The final theme in response to this question was the need for full implementation of previously agreed policy and service delivery relating to CYP achieving their potential.

What can be done to ensure children and young people are safe and protected?

There were 4 key themes in response to this question. The need to do more to prevent harm to children and young people included 3 subthemes (support parents from the outset to prevent harm; ensure accessible additional support for families who are struggling; and increase awareness about keeping children safe from harm). The second theme focused on Children at Risk and Children in Care and this had 3 subthemes (look out for children who are particularly vulnerable; improve systems for reporting abuse and how reporting of abuse is handled; and ensure the safety of children in care). The third theme was about the need for better Child Protection services, this included 4 subthemes (implement existing policies with more focus on prevention and early intervention; more collaboration between agencies and co-ordination of services; address concerns about capacity of agencies responsible for keeping CYP safe; listen to CYP to help stop abuse and to help create better services). A small number of respondents identified that keeping children safe from harm included the need to take climate change seriously, and this had 2 subthemes (the urgent threat of climate change; and the need to give CYP a platform to raise their concerns so that action can be taken now).

What can be done to ensure children and young people have opportunity in life and economic security and what can be done to ensure that children and young people in Ireland are free from poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion?

There was significant overlap in three of the themes identified in the responses to these two questions, namely education, support for families (targeted support and early intervention

particularly for those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable), and specific action from government at a structural level (such as housing, health, eradicating poverty, ensuring equal opportunities for all, more youth services, and better connectivity). Two additional themes specifically associated with opportunity, were the need to focus on training and employment (including more jobs; apprenticeships; facilitating work uptake; and supporting work at Government level), along with youth voice and autonomy (including meaningful participation and involvement in decision-making processes). In relation to poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion, two additional themes were also raised. Firstly, access to social, cultural and recreational spaces (including availability of communal spaces; groups; clubs; youth; community and resource centres; and widening activities to suit all abilities and interests, the natural environment and green spaces) along with inclusion and respect (which focused on the need for greater respect, acceptance, tolerance and kindness to be shown; the delivery of more social inclusion projects including for CYP with additional challenges; and for play deprivation to be addressed).

What can be done to ensure children and young people are respected and able to contribute to their world?

This question elicited 3 themes which each had 3 subthemes. In relation to voice and participation, the subthemes give detail on the spaces and forums where it is felt young people's voice can and should be heard; the ways in which they could be facilitated to participate; and the importance of having their views and contributions listened to and acted on. Empowerment, the second main theme, focuses on how young people can be supported and equipped through education and confidence building, and have a greater awareness of the world they live in, and the social and political issues that impact on them. The third overarching theme, respecting CYP, suggests that young people's ability to participate and be respected in their world is linked to how well they are included, accepted and supported by society; how well informed/aware and accountable those who engage with them are; and the attitude or respect they are shown by adults.

What could be done to respond to the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people?

There were 4 main themes. Within the theme of COVID-19 exacerbating situations that were already challenging for some CYP, 3 subthemes were identified (CYP living in precarious situations including child abuse, domestic abuse and poverty; increase in anxiety and mental health issues; and the potential widening of the educational gap). A theme about the need to assess and address impacts of COVID-19 contained 4 subthemes (the need to deal with urgent issues; the need to deal with the impact on services that support CYP; the need to focus on CYP having fun again; and the need to ask CYP themselves about their experiences and insights). A theme which picked up on some positive aspects of impact of the pandemic included 2 sub-themes: increased online interaction resulted in reduction in barriers for some CYP; and an increase in awareness of the importance of outdoor spaces and local amenities. The fourth main theme considered lessons for any future lockdowns and contained 2 subthemes: learn about the impact of COVID-19 on CYP; and rethink delivery of essential services and support to CYP).

Priorities to focus on in the new Policy Framework

There was a certain amount of overlap in the themes raised in response to the individual questions. In this final question respondents were asked to identify their top 5 priorities for the new framework, and this helps to clarify the dominant themes.

Twenty-one specific themes were identified, and these were further combined into 14 broad themes. The five most frequently occurring themes identified as priorities for the new framework were: the need to rethink, reform and resource education; improve wellbeing and mental health services; address social exclusion; fully implement existing policies and improve service delivery; and improve services to help nurture and protect children and young people.

The other nine themes identified were: health related issues; improve access and facilities for play, leisure and culture; encourage the voice of the child and ensure rights; make better use of technology and improve how it is regulated; improve access and range of youth

services; improve access to childcare and early years; improve disability support and services; address climate/environmental concerns and deal with the COVID-19 deficit.

The following table summarises the five most frequently occurring themes mentioned as priorities for the new framework by children and young people, parents and professionals/service providers:

Priorities for the new policy framework	Children and Young People	Parents	Professionals / Service Providers	Total
First most frequently occurring theme	Rethink, Reform and Resource Education (73.2%)	Rethink, Reform and Resource Education (72.2%)	Rethink, Reform and Resource Education (56.5%)	Rethink, Reform and Resource Education (63.3%)
Second most frequently occurring theme	Improve Wellbeing & Mental Health Services (50%)	Address Social Exclusion (38.9%)	Improve Wellbeing & Mental Health Services (50.6%)	Improve Wellbeing & Mental Health Services (47.7%)
Third more frequently occurring theme	Address Social Exclusion (33.9%)	Improve Wellbeing & Mental Health Services (37%)	Address Social Exclusion (49.4%)	Address Social Exclusion (43.9%)
Fourth most frequently occurring theme	Improve Access to Play, Leisure and Culture (19.6%)	Health related issues (33.3%)	Implement Policies & Improve Service Delivery (40.3%)	Implement Policies & Improve Service Delivery (28.4%)
Fifth most frequently occurring theme	Utilise & Regulate Technology (17.9%)	Improve Access to Play, Leisure and Culture (20.4%)	Improve Services to help nurture & protect CYP (36.4%)	Improve Services to help nurture & protect CYP (26.1%)

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

On 27 January 2022, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) launched a public consultation to inform the next Government policy framework for children and young people (CYP) in Ireland which will run from 2023 to 2028. This new policy framework follows Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF): the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, which ran from 2014-2020. BOBF contained 5 National Outcomes to support CYP aged 0-24 to lead fulfilling lives and have positive outcomes into adulthood. The 5 National Outcomes were:

1. Active and healthy with positive physical and mental wellbeing
2. Achieving their full potential in all areas of learning and development
3. Safe and protected from harm
4. Economic security and opportunity
5. Connected, respected, and contributing to their world

The new policy framework for children and young people is due for publication early in 2023. In August 2022, the DCEDIY published a blueprint¹, which sets out the approach the department will take with the policy framework. As well as setting out the vision and principles of the framework, the blueprint provides more detail on the aims it will pursue, and the ways in which we can realise these aims, ultimately to improve the lives of children and young people.

1.2 Structure of the Public Consultation

This is one of a series of consultations undertaken to inform the development of the new policy framework for CYP. In this public consultation, Minister Roderic O’Gorman invited CYP, parents and people working with children to share their views and suggestions to help

¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b24bf-policy-framework-for-children-and-young-people-2023-2028/>

identify the main issues and to shape further targeted consultations throughout the design and development stage of the framework².

The public was asked to share their opinions in one of two ways:

1. Completing an online survey (in English or Irish) and / or
2. Submitting a written submission (online or via freepost).³

The survey consisted of two background questions (a) designation of respondent e.g., child/young person, parent, professional, service provider, academic; (b) the age of respondent; along with (c) twelve open-ended questions centred largely around the five national outcomes in BOBF.

Respondents were asked to reflect on what is going well and not so well for CYP in Ireland, how the lives of CYP have improved over the past decade, what might be done to ensure positive outcomes for CYP, and what might be done to respond to the impact of COVID-19. Participants were also asked to identify the top five priorities for the new policy framework.

1.3 This Report

This report presents the findings from this public consultation. The report has been compiled by three independent researchers who were commissioned to:

- Analyse the responses to summarise the key themes and issues emerging from different groups of respondents
- Organise the responses thematically with reference to the questions asked and other emergent issues taking into account the background/age range of respondents

The report is presented in 6 sections:

Section 1 provides background and context for this report.

Section 2 of the report presents a profile of the respondents who responded to the survey and / or provided a written submission.

² <https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/b0f0a-public-consultation-on-the-next-government-policy-framework-for-children-and-young-people-in-ireland/>

³ Participants to the consultation were asked to keep their submission to under 2000 words and written submissions could also include drawings or pictures

Section 3 assembles the survey and written responses to present a picture of current life in Ireland for CYP. This section describes participants' views on the current lives of CYP, and what is going well, and not so well, for CYP in Ireland. This section also outlines respondents' views on if, and how, CYP's lives have improved over the past 10 years, before describing their views on how BOBF helped achieve these improvements.

Section 4 places the lens on the future, describing participants' opinions on actions to improve the future lives of CYP with a focus on the 5 National Outcomes of the current BOBF, together with their views on actions that might be taken to respond to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Section 5 provides an overview of respondents' suggested priorities for the future policy. This section describes the key priorities of the different stakeholder groupings – Children and Young People, Parents, and Professionals/Service Providers.

Section 6: this section brings together policy implications that were raised in relation to the proposed new strategy, as well as cross-cutting or theme specific messages relating to service delivery and/or policy implementation.

Section 2: Responses and Analysis of Consultation

Profile Summary

- There were 236 responses to the survey
- There were 43 written responses submitted to the dedicated mailbox, most were from organisations working with or advocating on behalf of children and young people. One organisation sent 3 separate written submissions.
- Two service providers undertook consultations with children and young people and these consultations formed the basis of their response.
- One submission included direct feedback from children and young people in their response, and also included direct feedback from a parent.
- In total, over half (58%) of the responses were from professionals/service providers, 22% were from children and young people, and (20%) were from parents.

2.1 Profile of Respondents to the Consultation

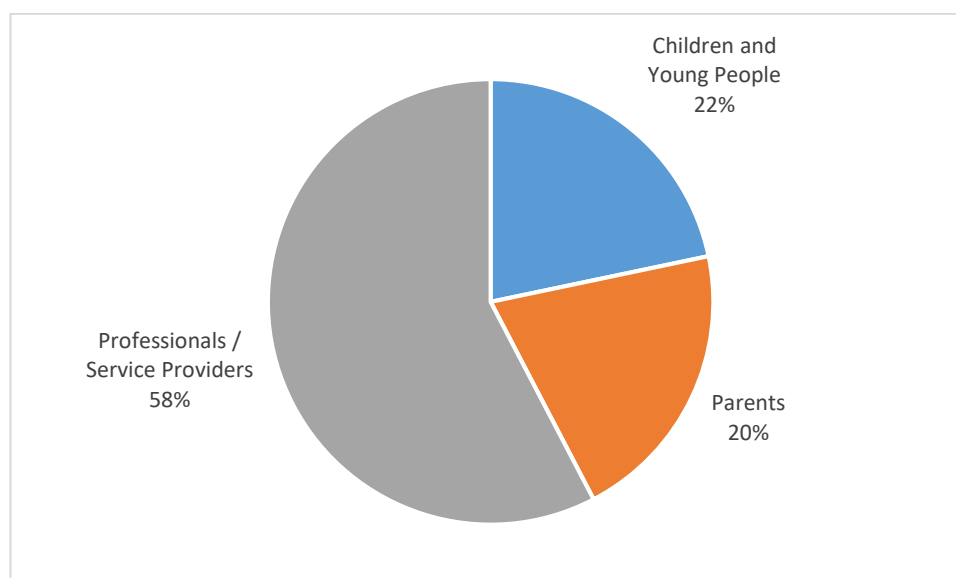
There were a total of 279 responses to the consultation consisting of 236 responses to the survey and 43⁴ written submissions submitted directly to the dedicated mailbox. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the respondents by main designation of children and young people; parents; or professionals/service providers.

⁴ 41 organisations/individuals sent written submissions with one of these organisations sending 3 separate written submissions

Table 1: Responses to the Survey and Written Submissions by Category of Respondent⁵

Designation	Survey Responses	Written Submissions	Total
Children and young people	58	2 ⁶ (3) ⁷	60 (61)
Parents ⁸	57	0 (1) ⁹	57 (58)
Professionals/Service Providers ¹⁰	121	41	162
Total	236	43 (45)	279 (281)

The majority of the responses came from Professionals/Service Providers (57.6%), followed by Children and Young People (21.7%) and Parents (20.6%) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Overall responses to consultation including survey responses (n=236) and written submissions (n=43) by main designation of respondent.

⁵ Survey respondents self-identified their designated categories and due to the anonymised nature of the survey, this information cannot be verified.

⁶ Two service providers undertook consultations with children and young people as the basis of their submission. One consultation involved 35 young people; it is not clear how many young people participated in the other consultation.

⁷ One submission from a service provider also included direct feedback from CYP as part of the response.

⁸ These respondents identified as Parents only.

⁹ One submission from a service provider also included direct feedback from a parent as part of the response.

¹⁰ Some professionals/service providers also identified as parents, however for the purpose of this profile they are counted once as professionals/service providers.

2.1.1 Response to Survey

Respondents to the online survey described themselves as one or more of the following:

- Professional working with Children and Young People n=78
- Parent n=76
- Child or young person n=56
- Responding on behalf of an organisation n=20
- Service provider n=16
- Academic n=15
- Other n=7

Most of the survey respondents were aged 24+ (n=160/68%). CYP represented a quarter (n=60/25%) of survey respondents, including two responses from children (aged 0-12).

- Age 0-12 n=2
- Age 13-18 n=53
- Age 18-24 n=5
- Age 24+ n=160
- Prefer not to say/missing n=16

2.1.2 Written Submissions

The majority of the 43 written submissions were from organisations, with only two submissions made by anonymised individuals (see Appendix 2 for list of submissions). While respondents were asked to consider the twelve questions above, not all the respondents used this structure. Responses were on average approximately 7 pages in length (294 pages in total). Some respondents also provided supporting documents, which consisted of 319 additional pages.

2.2 Analysis of Responses (Survey and Written Submissions)

The responses to the 12 open-ended questions from the 236 survey and 43 written submissions were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework¹¹.

¹¹ [Braun V and Clarke V \(2006\) Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101](#)

This six-step process was used to code responses into themes and subthemes. This thematic analysis process involved reading and re-reading the survey responses, written submissions and additional material in order to identify key messages (see Appendix 3 for further details about methodology). Some respondents included references and links to references that they had cited in their feedback. Some examples of these references are included in Appendix 4.

It is important to note that besides not being able to verify the source/designation of survey respondents, the issues, points and references cited by respondents have not been verified or fact checked by the researchers or by DCEDIY.

The researchers worked together to categorise messages into themes and subthemes, and to check coding of themes for consistency. Saturation of themes was obtained during the analysis of the survey, and although no new broad themes were identified in the subsequent analysis of the written submissions and supporting documents, the written submissions provided several new sub-themes and tended to have much more detail and depth in the responses.

There was significant overlap in the themes raised in response to some of the questions, and where appropriate these have been collated to reduce duplication for readers. The findings are presented in the following sections and include direct quotations from children and young people, parents and professionals/service providers:

- Current life in Ireland for CYP: what is going well and not so well for CYP in Ireland, and how children's and young people's lives have improved over the past 10 years.
- Future lives for CYP, outlining respondents' suggestions of actions that might improve CYP's lives with a focus on the 5 National Outcomes, together with their views on actions that might be taken to respond to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- An overview of respondents' suggestions on the priorities for the future policy. This section describes the key priorities of the different stakeholder groupings – children and young people, parents, and professionals/service providers.
- Policy implications evident in the responses in relation to the proposed new strategy, as well as cross-cutting or theme specific messages relating to service delivery and/or policy implementation.

Section 3: Children and Young People's Lives in Ireland Today

3.1 What is going well for children and young people in Ireland?

Question 1 and Question 9 explored respondents' opinions on what is going well for CYP in Ireland, and what has improved for them over the past 10 years.

Summary Box

Seven key themes were identified in relation to what is going well for children & young people:

1. Children's Voice and Rights
2. Reform of Early Years Education and Childcare
3. Access to Education
4. Access to Healthcare
5. Access to Social, Cultural and Recreational Activities
6. Better Protection of Children and Young People
7. A More Inclusive Society

The first question, on what is going well for children and young people was answered by 94% of the 236 survey respondents, however 1 in 10 (10.6% n=25) of the respondents stated '*nothing*' or that '*nothing comes to mind*', and 15 gave no response. Just less than half (44% 19/43) of the written submissions contained replies to this question, with 7 submissions providing detailed responses. With regard to the associated question (Q.9) of what has improved for CYP over the past decade, there was a 91% response rate to this question in the survey (n=216) and 16 responses within the written submissions.

The dominant themes were a greater emphasis on ***children's and young people's voice and rights, reform of early years education and childcare***, and improvement ***in education***.

Notably, there was an overlap in the responses within these three themes as several responses (particularly from young people) captured how most children and young people have their basic rights met (e.g., shelter, food, education etc.). A small number of answers referenced the absence of war and the relative safety of Ireland. However, several of the survey responses qualified their responses to say that not all CYP have these needs met.

Access to public education is free. Ireland is also a neutral country which ensures that children are brought up in a safe environment away from war. Child marriage is also illegal. (Young Person)

I feel that I'm protected by the community as a child. I have access to free mental health care and free education, as well as grants from the government. (Young Person)

The majority of children's rights in Ireland are being fulfilled- most children have access to education, are not forced into illegal marriages, are fed each day and have some level of access to healthcare. Ireland is a wealthy country and is therefore quite capable of catering to all of childrens needs, however there is still immense gaps that need to be accounted for. (Young Person)

3.1.1 Children's and Young People's Voice and Children's Rights

Within the **Children's and Young People's Voice and Children's Rights** theme, there were two main sub-themes, one captured how children's voices were being sought and listened to, and the second captured the available structures to support the voice of the child (e.g., agencies such as the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO), the Children's Rights Alliance, UNICEF). Again, many of the responses from young people referred to this increased youth participation.

Children are now growing up in an Irish society which is slowly but surely moving in the right direction progressively becoming more [a] open minded and safe space to speak your mind and have your opinions respected, even if you are a child. There's access to the basic human resources and protections in place to safeguard against the violation of their rights. There's access to education for all despite income, albeit the standard may vary but this is something we can work towards, with the aid of services such as Tusla and Unicef which monitor such things and promote the wellbeing of children putting this first and advocating for those who don't have a voice, children often don't have the knowledge, resources or platform to speak up for themselves so we are lucky to have such organisations representing us today. (Young Person)

We're well represented and well protected, among many other things. (Young Person)

Some of the submissions from professionals and organisations working with children and young people provided examples of how children and young people had been supported to have their voice and opinions heard.

Young people have more awareness of climate issues. From an advocacy piece young people's voices have been heard more, young people are leading issues around LGBTI+ (Organisation, Written Submission)

There is a greater emphasis on services consulting with children, e.g. the positive impact of the Hub na nÓg initiative within the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. (Organisation, Written Submission)

Children's rights are now being catered for more in early years services. (Professional/Service Provider)

Child's voice has become central in some practice because of adult advocates speaking out. (Professional/Service Provider)

3.1.2 Reform of Early Years Education and Childcare

The reform of **early years education and childcare** featured in several of the responses from professionals and practitioners, particularly the continuation of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme. Improvements in the quality of early years practitioners were also noted in responses.

Improved quality in early years services, First 5 initiative, importance of Play being recognised. (Professional/Service Provider)

AIM structure in preschool. 2 free years in ECCE. Small grants available for Early Years Services. Healthy meals available in preschools and in DEIS primary schools (Professional/Service Provider)

The provision of early years services and the continuation and extension of Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (early childhood education) is a very positive development, particularly for vulnerable and marginalised children. (Organisation, Written Submission)

Highly trained and professional early years educators (Professional/Service Provider)

3.1.3 Access to Education

Being able to access **Education**, described by several young people as free or low cost, also emerged as something that was going well for children and young people in today's Ireland.

Attitudes to school and teachers were broadly positive; one-third of children said they always liked school and 62% sometimes liked it, while two-thirds of

children always liked their teacher (Organisation, Written Submission referencing ESRI research)

Access to education in general (Parent)

School overall OK (Young Person)

Access to and participation in education for the majority of children and young people (Organisation, Written Submission)

There's more supports available for children who don't have the same access to education like DEIS schools (Young Person)

We have access to free education and Ireland follows the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Young Person)

3.1.4 Access to Healthcare

Access to **Healthcare** also featured in the responses, particularly access to free GP care for children under the age of 6 years and universal healthcare provision. The increased awareness of mental health and the importance of services for young people were also acknowledged, although these were also identified as requiring attention.

Universal health care free at the point of use (Parent)

Free Medical care for under 6's (Professional/Service Provider)

Adolescent mental health being taken a lot more seriously (Young person)

3.1.5 Access to Social, Cultural and Recreational Activities

CYP's access to **Social, Cultural and Recreational** activities were also viewed by some to be going well. Some professionals described improved access to play areas, particularly in early years settings.

Access to play outdoors in the early years (Professional/Service Provider)

In Clare there has been significant investment in play facilities and parks. (Organisation, Written Submission)

Significantly more opportunities for young people to get involved in such as social activities, group activities and sports, etc. (Organisation, Written Submission)

Related to social and recreational activities, one young person described the benefits associated with taking part in youth work. This message on the quality and benefits of youth

work was echoed by some professionals/service providers in the survey responses and the written submissions.

Youth groups are a huge asset to young people in Ireland, they encourage us to try new things, dream big and expand our horizons. Buzzwords aside, youth work has greatly increased my self confidence, my courage and my flexibility when dealing with problems. Informal education is a huge aspect of social learning, and it greatly benefits society. You should [give] youth groups more funding ;). (Young Person)

Youth services and organisations were praised in some of the survey and written submissions for the way in which they had supported CYP during the lockdown.

During the pandemic, youth services and organisations stayed open, especially when the schools closed, which meant young people had support (Organisation, Written Submission)

Related to accessing social, cultural and recreational activities, a handful of respondents referenced the lifting of the COVID-19 public health measures and the return to pre-pandemic freedoms to socialise.

Covid is nearly gone, football is back, we can go back to visit the cinema and see new films again. (Young Person)

3.1.6 Better Protection of Children and Young People

The protection of children and young people, and improved **Safeguarding** procedures and training was identified by young people and professionals as one of the positives of living in Ireland.

I think children are protected more against abuse in Ireland now. There is more awareness of bullying. (Young Person)

Better safeguarding and inspection processes. (Professional/Service Provider)

3.1.7 Improved Service Provision

Some respondents described improved **Service Provision** in their responses, with some mentioning child-centred services and improved interagency working (e.g. Meitheal, wraparound supports, Tusla, PPFs, CYPSC). Others talked about the community-based services, support for children who need them (e.g. DEIS), supports for parents (e.g. Family Support Networks), and targeted services for young people (e.g. UBU).

Programmes and strategies to improve the protection and welfare of children, for example, Meithal; the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS), and parenting programmes in local communities have been good supports for families (Organisation, Written Submission)

Increased targeted policy and service provision (Professional/Service Provider)

3.1.8 A More Inclusive Society

Some respondents described Ireland as a more **Inclusive Society** to live in. A small number of young people included references to reduced discrimination and more equality.

Over the past couple of years, Ireland has become a more inclusive environment for all children. Discrimination is reducing and equal opportunities are becoming more frequently offered. Education and health services are mostly free (Young Person)

Yes in terms of awareness and increase understanding of issues like education, Traveling community, LGBTI+, homelessness. We now need to match this awareness and understanding with services, actions and policy change. (Professional/Service Provider)

In the written submissions, one organisation identified Ireland's ratification of the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) and DCEDIY's identification of children with disabilities as a priority cohort for the development of inclusive methodologies as something that is going well. Another submission identified the Government's commitment to create new pathways for long-term undocumented people and their children, and the end to the Direct Provision system.

Other submissions acknowledged that the role of improved advocacy and structures for youth voice had resulted in more young people leading on issues around LGBTI+. The LGBTI+ youth strategy was identified by a number of respondents as playing an important role in increasing the awareness of the needs of LGBTI+ young people.

Some of the respondents referred to the positive impact of specific Government policies and actions such as the new Youth Justice Strategy (2021-2027), the Family and Child Relationship Act (2015) (which established that the best interest of the child is paramount in decisions relating to guardianship, custody and access cases), the Participation Framework, and the increased focus on prevention and early intervention.

There is more recognition of the importance of prevention and early intervention across all Government departments and statutory services. The establishment of the Department of Children has given important recognition to the rights and needs of children. It has led the way on the prevention and early intervention initiatives as well as increasing children and parents' voices in policy making." (Professional/Service Provider)

3.2 What is not going well for children and young people in Ireland?

It is notable that all survey respondents (100%) provided an answer to Question 2, *What's not going well for Children and Young People in Ireland* and 21 of the 43 written submissions contained replies to this question. In this section, the responses to Question 2 have been combined with the negative feedback to Question 9 which identified areas where there has been a lack of improvement for CYP over the past decade.

Summary Box

Eleven key themes were identified in relation to what is not going well for children & young people:

1. Poor Provision of Mental Health Services
2. Long Waiting-Lists and Poor Access to Health Services
3. Gaps in Accessing Disability Support and Services
4. Education
5. Impact of Poverty
6. Lack of Secure Housing and Increase in Homelessness
7. Social Inequalities
8. Technology / Internet
9. COVID-19 Deficit
10. Limitations and Lack of Children and Young People's Voices
11. Lack of Play, Leisure, Cultural & Youth Amenities for CYP

3.2.1 Mental Health Services

Poor provision of **Mental Health Services** featured as the dominant messages in responses to both Question 2 and Question 9. Respondents raised concerns about CYP's mental wellbeing, referring to increased anxiety levels, citing factors such as isolation, peer pressure, and lack of confidence. Poor access to Children's and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) was also identified with respondents describing a lack of appropriate

supports for CYP, and difficulties accessing available services. They described geographic variations in availability, with specific challenges for CYP with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and for CYP living in rural areas. High thresholds for services and long waiting lists for services were central messages.

Delays in accessing mental health services with limited options (e.g Jigsaw, CAMHS) (Professional/Service Provider)

CAMHS waiting lists remain high (170 children waiting over one year for an appointment 2,384 waiting for an appointment) (Professional/Service Provider)

Years-long waiting lists for mental health, medical, disability services, hospital surgeries. High levels of anxiety. (Young Person)

There are so many young people struggling with depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, self-harm and much more. I see it on a daily basis that young people are afraid to speak up because there is such a stigma around these topics. (Parent)

A practically non-existent mental health service. Our young people deserve better than what is available at the moment. (Parent)

Even when services are available and accessed, respondents described failures within the system. These included inappropriate referrals, not getting the support from the right professionals, specialist services not able to meet the need, children being referred to adult wards, poor access to (child friendly) counselling, and services not being responsive to young people's needs. Respondents also described poor access to crisis interventions for children and families where suicide and self-harm are an issue. One service provider highlighted the increased referrals to domestic violence support indicating a need for additional early intervention. Services were described as under-resourced and short staffed. Some called for increased funding and resources to address the negative effects of the lockdown. (See Section 4.1 for further suggestions from respondents of how to improve children and young people's mental health).

3.2.2 Health Services

The right of the child to optimal health was highlighted. Long waiting lists, poor access and underinvestment in health services for children featured in several responses. One written submission stated that there are "96,088 children on waiting lists for treatments, assessments and tests" (ntpf.ie was cited as the source of this data). The specific challenges

experienced by families with children who have a childhood illness or conditions that require stays in hospital were also identified, including the financial stress that this can cause to the family. Some respondents identified gaps in addiction services (drug, alcohol and substance misuse). The specific challenges experienced by children with disabilities were also described (e.g., difficulty accessing Occupational Therapy).

Services that they need to engage with like, OT, CAMHS, Speech and Language therapy the list goes on not enough staff and waiting lists far too long. (Parent)

3.2.3 Disability Support and Services

Gaps in accessing **Disability Support and Services** featured in a number of themes including education, health, and social inclusion. Respondents described a lack of services and supports for children with disabilities, with children falling through gaps and long waiting lists for assessments and services. They described a lack of coordination of services, delays in assessments, diagnoses, delayed access to early intervention services, poor support and respite for families (resulting in overburdened families), and educational needs not being met (e.g., lack of understanding or acceptance of invisible or neurodiverse conditions).

Lack of coordination of services, especially for children with additional needs. No early intervention, children leaving pre-school without receiving any input re S&L, psychology or AON (Professional/Service Provider)

Long waiting lists for high threshold services (such as disability and mental health services) (Professional/Service Provider)

3.2.4 Education

Problems were also identified within **Education**. Respondents described having limited choice of types of schools (e.g., some wanted non-denominational schools, some wanted single sex schools and others wanted mixed sex schools), high class sizes, lack of extra-curricular activities, poor condition of buildings/facilities, problems with staffing levels, and lack of resources available to the schools.

... the facilities in our school [are] pretty worn out. (Parent)

The lack of any funding for school libraries on a sustainable basis since 2008 means that fewer children have ready access to excellent, modern books that reflect the richness and diversity of modern Ireland. (Professional)

A number of respondents also identified that schooling in Ireland was not always 'free' due to having to pay for items such as books, uniforms, school meals and transport, school trips and pressure to pay voluntary contributions in some cases. These 'hidden costs' made education expensive for some families, and ultimately not equitable.

Respondents highlighted inequalities in the education system including lack of appropriate educational support for more vulnerable and/or disadvantaged children e.g., children living in poverty, Travellers, refugees, children with disabilities (visible and invisible), children with challenging behaviours, and children with English as second language. Within the secondary school system some respondents raised the support needs of students at risk of early school leaving (e.g. those on reduced timetables, with repeat suspensions, and school refusers). Some suggestions were made about how these issues could be addressed and these comments can be found in Section 4.2.

The formal education system is too rigid, it's too monocultural. There's only one path through formal education, and that's examination. (Young Person)

*The inadequate English language support to children who don't have English as a first language is a major issues and cause for concern in some areas North Inner City Dublin for example. This is also having a negative impact on the teachers ability to teach and the quality of the learning experience of other pupils in class. There exists a set of ad-hoc supports to minority ethnic students being provided by some schools, youth projects and community services. Most students do not have access to any of these supports.
(Professional/Service Provider)*

*[Children with disabilities] can have less positive experiences of education (are less positive about school, are expected to do less well in school, find education transitions more difficult and are increasingly likely to be educated outside a mainstream classroom and are more likely to be bullied
(Organisation, Written Submission)*

Reflecting concerns about the emotional and mental health wellbeing of CYP, some respondents referred to bullying in schools. A small number of respondents described some of the challenges to accessing third level education due to the increasing cost of accommodation and college fees. Suggestions about dealing with both of these topics can be found in Section 4.2.4.

Other areas of concern that were raised included: that the current education system does not suit all abilities and learning types; the high levels of exam stress caused by the current

exam system (in particular the Leaving Certificate cycle); and the need for high CAO points to access third level education. Limitations relating to the curriculum were also highlighted with particular mention about the limited range of subjects on offer, the lack of practical subjects, and problems with delivery of subjects such as Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Religion. A number of suggestions were made to address these concerns and these have been amalgamated into Section 4.2.

Intermediate and leaving cert system is a mess (Parent)

The leaving cert is really unfair (Young person)

Sex education is inconsistent and often poor which leaves children really vulnerable. (Parent)

School systems demonizing not getting good grades in exams, adding stress to teens lives. (Parent)

Lack of student accomplishments is weighing heavily on secondary schools students and parents (Professional/Service Provider)

Education system not preparing young people for modern challenges and employment (Professional/Service Provider)

3.2.5 Poverty

The ongoing impact of **Poverty** and inequalities was highlighted in many of the responses. One respondent suggested that increasing levels of child poverty may mitigate against children achieving their full potential. Families were described as being in cycles of poverty, and that the increasing cost of living was impacting on fuel and food poverty, as well as family stress. It was stated that young people, particularly young people with disabilities had higher levels of unemployment / or insecure work. Families with children with disabilities were also described as being of higher risk of experiencing additional economic and social disadvantages.

In some cases, they have improved, for the most resourced. However, the most disadvantaged are still disadvantaged; homelessness, food poverty, digital poverty, limited alternatives to mainstream education, exposure to drugs, crime, violence etc in disadvantaged communities. (Professional/Service Provider)

There is no access to good free childcare - children are often born into a cycle of poverty that their parents are unable to break. Due to the cost of child care is so high, much of the families money is spent on this with very little additional money being accrued for the family. Children are then stuck in

*accommodation that is not fit for purpose because their parents are just making ends meet and cannot afford a more appropriate living situation.
(Parent)*

[Children with disabilities] are more likely to live in families who have difficulties in “making ends meet” and to experience deprivation, their primary carers are less likely to be employed (when compared to a primary carer of a child without a disability) and the presence of a child with a disability in a household was strongly correlated with poorer socioeconomic outcomes. (Organisation, Written Submission)

3.2.6 Housing and Homelessness

Related to poverty and low incomes, messages on the **Housing and Homelessness** situation in Ireland featured in many of the responses. Some described the increasing numbers of children and families waiting for social housing, living in temporary accommodation and unsuitable accommodation (e.g., hotels, hubs) far from family networks and supports. Two respondents talked about the impact of the mica blocks problem on families in Donegal. The lack of secure housing was described as depriving children of the same opportunities as their peers and increasing inequalities in opportunities (for education, leisure, health etc). The increased risk of homelessness among young care leavers was also highlighted.

Young kids face homelessness (Young Person)

Homelessness and child poverty are major issues, which appear to be taking many years to be addressed (Professional/Service Provider)

Homelessness, families stuck in cycles of poverty. When children are born into families experience social and economic exclusion they are starting life from a number of steps behind other children and may never improve the quality of life for themselves or their future children. (Professional/Service Provider)

Emergency supports such as housing for homelessness, continues to be inadequate (Professional/Service Provider)

*MICA in Donegal has had a devastating effect across the county.....
(Professional/Service Provider)*

Kids in care do not have adequate after care supports and often end up homeless. (Professional/Service Provider)

3.2.7 Action to Address Inequality in Society

Although respondents described improvements to make Ireland a more inclusive society (particularly with regard to LGBTI+ inclusiveness), several responses described the need for more action to address inequality in society including the need to provide more supports for

disadvantaged children families and children and their families, to address discrimination and racism (e.g. CYP from marginalised communities – Travellers, migrants, ethnic minorities and others). For more details about addressing inequalities, see Section 4.5.

There are many flaws in the system, discrimination against people of colour, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, women, young people in general, people of certain ethnicities, religions, or communities can still be seen vividly today. Sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, racism, misogyny, ageism, the homelessness crisis, discrimination of minorities and much more are still prominent in Ireland today. (Young Person)

3.2.8 Technology and Access to Information

Whilst several respondents described the advances in **Technology and access to information** and its advantages in terms of CYP's access to information and online education, many respondents also highlighted the unequal access to technology (i.e. digital poverty) due to the lack of devices and poor internet access (including costs / availability). Respondents, particularly those who identified as parents, were concerned about inappropriate content available to CYP, and the impact this content and social media has on mental health/anxiety. The lack of regulation of social media, poor management of online safety, and the increased risk of cyberbullying and online grooming were also causes for concern.

Responses from professionals (in the survey and written submissions) also highlighted children and young people's growing dependency on screens and social media. One written submission mentioned research on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and the 'boring routines' that resulted in 'compulsive use of smart phones'. See Appendix 4 for details of research cited in the submissions¹².

Cyber bullying is also a big issue that has grown recently because the problems are now going back into your homes and a very hard to escape without support and can be very damaging (Parent)

¹² Appendix 4 lists some of the references provided in the submissions. It should be noted that no fact checking or verification of statements or citations were conducted by DCEDIY or the independent researchers.

3.2.9 COVID-19

The negative impact that **COVID-19** lockdowns had on children, young people and families were described as exacerbating problems that had already existed. These points are discussed in more detail in Section 4.7.

3.2.10 Children's and Young People's Voices

Whilst many respondents acknowledged the improvements made to seeking CYP's voices, a number of the responses highlighted the limitation of **Children's and Young People's Voices**. Some described this lack of voice 'in general', others described specific situations where their voices are not sought or not heard such as schools (e.g., not having a say in school uniform, religion in schools, curriculum and assessment matters) and in Family Courts and Justice situations (e.g., adversarial and not children's right focused).

Young people should have more right to decide and participate in different things, like climate change or new laws, which affect young people. (Parent)

No Voice in Criminal Justice System, no child friendly judicial process. (Practitioner)

Some respondents felt that there is still a lack of understanding and disrespect of CYP e.g. being blamed and criticised, being moved on when hanging outside shops because they have no alternatives and being denied their basic rights.

Blame and criticism from other generations, lack of understanding around young people's struggles and how they are being affected. Accused of being snowflakes etc (Practitioner)

3.2.11 Poor Access to Play, Leisure and Culture, and Youth Services

Whilst some respondents described improved facilities and youth services over the past decade, several respondents described poor access to **Play, Leisure and Culture** and **Youth Services**. These included the lack of facilities, particularly for teenagers, in local communities. Some identified the cost associated with leisure facilities and difficulties accessing a variety of sports and recreation. Suggestions given in response to this question, including the need for greater choice of activities and alternatives to competitive sports are discussed in more detail in Section 4.1.

Community based activities for teens are lacking, investment in targeted work yet nothing for teens "to do", e.g., lack of social spaces that are safe with

access to activity for general population and targeted young people to spend their time. (Professional/Service Provider)

There is not enough investment for universal youth work for young people. Targeted funding schemes are exclusive and result in a tiny percentage of the population benefiting from youth work (Young Person)

3.3 Have the lives of children and young people improved over the past decade, and if so, how?

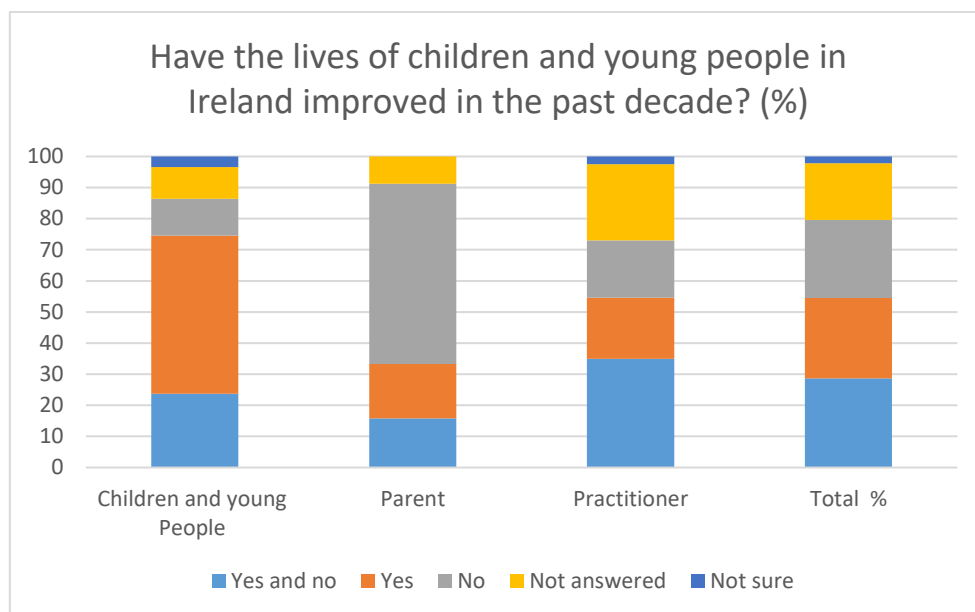
Nine out of ten (91.5%) of the survey respondents and 15 of the written submissions (35%) answered this question. In order to answer this question, an exercise was undertaken to establish how many respondents answered positively or negatively.

Summary Box

- Just over a quarter (26%) of all respondents said that the lives of children and young people had improved in the past ten years, a quarter (25%) said lives had not improved and 29% said they had in some ways or for some children but not for all.
- Children and young people were more likely to answer 'yes' (51%) compared to Parents (18%) and Professionals/Service Providers (20%).
- Key improvements identified included Children and Young People's Voices and Rights, a More Inclusive Society, Better Play and Leisure Facilities including Access to Youth Services, Improvements in Technology, Early Years Services and Quality Of Life.

Over a quarter of all respondents (26%) answered 'Yes' in response to this question while a further 29% gave a mixture of 'Yes and No'. The grouping that was the most positive in their response were children and young people with more than half (51%) saying 'yes' and almost a quarter (24%) providing a mixed response of 'Yes and No'. Almost 6 out of 10 (58%) of parents gave an outright 'No' in response to this question and approximately two out of ten (18%) Professionals / Service Providers said 'No'. Almost one in five respondents (19%) did not answer this question and this is taken into account in Figure 2 which provides an overview of responses by category of respondent.

Figure 2: Feedback from Children and Young People, Parents and Professionals/Service Providers on whether the lives of Children and Young People have improved in the past decade.



All the responses to this question were grouped into themes. In order to minimise duplication, the messages were grouped into *improvements* or *deteriorations*, and these are reported within the relevant sections i.e. improvements are reported in Section 3.1 on ‘What is going well for CYP in Ireland’, and any deteriorations have been integrated within Section 3.2 in response to the question on ‘What is not going well for CYP in Ireland’.

As might be expected, many of the positive responses to this question echoed the answers to Question 1. However, it is notable, when considering the improvements over the past decade, many respondents placed greater emphasis on ***Children and Young People’s Voices and Rights***, followed by examples of a ***More Inclusive Society***.

They feel confident enough to express their opinions unlike our parent's generation where children were seen and not heard. (Young Person)

Less child marriages, less homelessness, more education. (Young Person)

Respondents acknowledged improvements in ***Education*** but many also noted that education opportunities had improved for some but not all. Examples of improvements in education included improved access to third level education, and improved opportunities for alternative education and approaches to address early school leaving.

*“Education has grown to become something of importance in today’s society.
(Young Person)*

*Organisations such as YouthReach etc which offer an alternative or second
chance education. (Parent)*

A number of responses painted a picture of Ireland as a more **Inclusive Society** with a greater acceptance of difference.

*Greater visibility and more young people feeling comfortable being LGBTQ+.
(Professional)*

*I think it has as people have become more accepting of others and what they
are not used to through social media and school life. (Young Person)*

Other improvements included better facilities (playground/sports facilities etc.), and improved access to youth services.

*Increased attention and policy commitments in relation to the creative rights
and requirements of children and young people. Laureate na nÓg having been
implemented by the Arts Council in 2010 (Professional)*

Improvements in **Technology** over the past decade were acknowledged in several responses. Advances in technology, greater access to computers and mobile phones along with better access to the internet was described as making information more accessible to many more children and young people. It was also acknowledged that this access has helped to redress some of the previous inequalities in accessing information and knowledge (particularly during the lockdown).

*The young people have better access to information through education, youth
services and the internet thus allowing them greater opportunities and the
ability to make informed choices (Young Person)*

technology and Internet is here for most children (Young Person)

Parents and professionals referred to the improved **Early Years** services, and some respondents described an improved general **Quality of Life** for most (but not all). Some of the responses provided statistics from national and international reports, and others described how most needs were met.

Access to free ECCE Scheme. (Parent)

Relatively good AVERAGE quality of life compared to other countries, but still too much inequality of opportunity.(Other)

Good standard of living for most , access to education for most, safety and good employment prospects (Professional)

Ireland ranks 2nd of 41 wealthy nations in reducing education inequality between children, according to UNICEF's latest Report Card. Almost all 9-year-olds were reported to have a good general health 90% of students in [Ireland] achieve basic reading proficiency at age 15. (Young Person)

3.4 How has Better Outcomes Brighter Futures helped achieve these improvements?

A quarter (n=58 / 24.5%) of the survey respondents left this question blank, over 1 in 10 (n=38 / 16%) reported that they were unsure or did not know enough about it, and over a third (n=82 / 35%) felt BOBF had contributed to positive outcomes. Others (n=18 / 7.8%) had a mixed response to the question, describing some positive outcomes but also some deficits in the strategy or its implementation. Several survey respondents (n=35 / 15%) assessed BOBF as having no effect. Fifteen of the 43 written submissions (35%) provided a response to this question. Notably, in one response (from a professional working with young people), the respondent stated that they had some familiarity with BOBF because of their work but wondered how parents and young people would be expected to answer this question. It is evident that several CYP and parents were among those who did not provide a response or who stated that they did not know what BOBF was.

Summary Box

Positive attributes identified about Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures framework:

1. A focused and strategic approach
2. Youth voices - a more child-centred and inclusive approach
3. Defined outcomes (with the ability to record outcomes)
4. Direction and accountability
5. Clear goals and outcomes
6. Mandatory interagency and cross departmental working
7. More support for families

In terms of the positive impact of the policy, several respondents described BOBF as providing a framework or model for organisations working with CYP. BOBF had provided them with a focused and strategic approach providing clarity and direction, guiding organisational planning and highlighting the areas that needed to be focused on (e.g., family

support). BOBF was described as a “*helpful overarching document to guide practitioners and services*”.

Some respondents provided examples of approaches to delivering services that had been informed by the BOBF framework e.g., Family Resource Centres, Tusla Family Support and Meitheal.

With an underpinning of the UNCRC, the framework sought to ensure that CYP were at the centre of decision-making. Having a common language and shared set of outcomes, indicators, and progress makers was considered important with “*everyone singing from the same hymn sheet*”. A number of respondents also described the ability to define the outcomes as particularly important.

The philosophy is excellent and is a holistic approach to the wellbeing of children. (Professional/Service Provider)

It has aligned government commitments to children and young people against five national outcomes (Professional/Service Provider)

It has put a focus on children and young people’s voices and their importance in decision-making, and was an important precursor to the National Framework for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making. It required a whole of government approach and commitment, and a commitment to key performance indicators and progress markers. (Professional/Service Provider)

Provided key stakeholders with tools to be able to prioritise goals (Professional/Service Provider)

It laid the foundations for the development of a comprehensive whole-of-Government and whole-of society approach to improving outcomes from children in Ireland. We now need to revisit it, and build a fairer future for all children by ensuring that every child in Ireland is supported to be all that they can be, through the provision of timely, appropriate and integrated information, advice and services that are planned and delivered prioritising prevention and early intervention. (Professional/Service Provider)

Highlighted the need for regulation not only aspirational policy. (Academic)

Undoubtedly the focus that Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures brings, results in effects on the lives of children, what we focus on is what gets done. (Professional/Service Provider)

It is making the government more aware. (Young Person)

Allowed young people to have a voice. (Young Person)

As noted above, not all responses were positive. Some respondents acknowledged some progress made since the introduction of BOBF, but several highlighted the need for additional action.

Limitations of the BOBF strategy and its implementation included:

1. Not enough focus on prevention and early intervention
2. Insufficient joined up working / too much silo delivery / duplication of activity
3. Additional burden of paperwork
4. Low awareness of BOBF outside the youth services, with specific mention of lack of awareness in health & disability services

It is unclear if the joined-up thinking across government agencies is working in terms of implementation. (Organisation, Written Submission)

BOBF was a helpful overarching document to guide practitioners and services, however in reality, there was limited awareness of the specific goals and actions particularly within health and disability services. (Professional/Service Provider)

The positive work done by youth workers all over the country is undermined by the lack of joined up thinking and support for strategies across other sectors of government which have continued to drive poverty and inequality. (Professional/Service Provider)

not convinced everyone knows what they meant to be doing. (Professional/Service Provider)

Some respondents felt that BOBF had not made a difference to the lives of children and young people. Some simply stated 'no' in response to this question. A small number provided examples of how BOBF had a detrimental effect on how some services (e.g., Education, ASD) were delivered.

The provision of an ADHD pathway was established. While this is a positive, unfortunately, autism specific pathways were removed and services have now been merged with general services (primary care/CDNT)[and that] has had a hugely negative impact. (Professional/Service Provider)

It hasn't. It's lip service. Look at the FCI report on Young Carers, OCOC on Traveller Children, Disabled Children, Children in covid - they answer this question. (Professional/Service Provider)

The problems still remain I would say it has failed children we have too many families living in consistent poverty in Ireland. Early intervention is non existent we should be ashamed of our lack of investment and how we treat

our children and young people in 2022 and most especially children with additional needs. (Professional./Service Provider)

I don't see it, children are still homeless, living in poverty, uneducated or the education system is failing them. If it's failing for one group of children, it impacts the whole country. (Parent)

Section 4. The Future Lives of Children and Young People

4.1 What can be done to ensure children and young people are active and healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing?

This question was answered by almost everyone who completed the survey (234 out of 236 respondents). It was also answered in 25 of the 43 written submissions.

A wide range of suggestions were made in relation to individual and societal aspects of ensuring that CYP are active and healthy with positive and mental wellbeing. The main themes centred on shifts needed to ensure that CYP are healthy and physically active, with a positive sense of wellbeing.

Seven dominant themes were identified and each of the themes also had several subthemes:

Summary Box

1. Provide a Nurturing Environment for Children (6 subthemes)
2. More Focus on Food and Nutrition (5 subthemes)
3. Importance of Local Amenities and Facilities for CYP (3 subthemes)
4. Proactively Promote Positive Physical and Mental Wellbeing (3 subthemes)
5. Enable More Positive Physical and Mental Wellbeing Opportunities Through Education (3 subthemes)
6. Improve Other Services and Support That Could Enhance Health and Wellbeing of CYP (7 subthemes)
7. Listen to What CYP Have to Say About Physical and Mental Wellbeing (2 subthemes)

4.1.1 Provide a Nurturing Environment for Children

Offer support to parents from pregnancy onwards including perinatal mental health services; one respondent highlighted that Ireland is estimated to have the third highest rate of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in the world – so it is also important that preventative and early intervention messages are shared with young people to reduce FASD which impacts on health and wellbeing of many babies in Ireland.

Ensure that parents have **adequate maternity/paternity leave** etc. to care for their babies;

Address the backlog of **health screening of children** (which increased during the pandemic) and deal promptly with any issues arising from the screening;

Universal and non-stigmatising parenting support should be offered to all parents;

Ensure that **Preventative and Early Intervention Support** are available to families who are struggling;

For parents who need it, **affordable quality childcare** should be available.

Wrap around community supports provided by local people, who understand the culture, challenges and context families are coping [with] need to be delivered in a systematic way across the country (Service Provider)

4.1.2 Focus on Food and Nutrition

Suggestions included the need for **better regulation of marketing and availability of unhealthy foods** including a fat and sugar tax and improve food labelling. It was felt that unhealthy food in schools should be banned, and consideration should be given to closing junk food takeaways due to the negative impact they are having on health and wellbeing to CYP. There was a call for **healthy foods to be cheaper** and more accessible.

A number of respondents identified a need for **better regulation of online media platforms** to address the spread of misinformation about food and diets – concerns were expressed about the impact misinformation can have on CYP in relation to body image, eating disorders etc.

The need to **deliver more effective education about nutrition through schools** should be considered including fun healthy eating programmes, food science, food safety and cooking skills to all children from an early age.

Provision of nutritious meals in schools could be a critical support to many children who are vulnerable (for example children in Direct Provision, or children who are homeless or living in poverty) and this should be done in a way that does not stigmatise any children.

The spread of misinformation online can be extremely detrimental to young people, particularly girls, as it can result in a restrictive or negative mindset towards food. Protecting young people who use social media from ads for scam diet products that are the opposite of health by blocking that content within our region is of huge importance (Young Person)

4.1.3. Importance of Local Amenities, Sports and Community Facilities

Create more opportunities for CYP to get out and about by ensuring access to outdoor spaces, nature, open spaces, greenways, more cycle lanes including cycle paths to schools. Increase and encourage creative outdoor spaces for all ages for example amphitheatres, parks, skate parks, solar heated outdoor saltwater pools. Developers should provide better play areas in estates.

Ensure more equitable access to leisure and sports facilities to enable increased access to CYP including those from disadvantaged areas, CYP with additional needs, and CYP living in rural areas. Specific incentives and schemes to increase participation rates were suggested including free admission; Year-round low-cost facilities; Grants for gyms to lower cost for YP; Specific types of facilities mentioned were: swimming pools, sports clubs and gyms.

Support local communities to provide range of facilities and activities that can be enjoyed by CYP such as libraries, youth theatres, scouts, youth clubs, social groups and positive spaces. The role of volunteers in the provision of community facilities was also highlighted alongside a suggestion for more acknowledgement/reward to those who give their time and skills. However, comment was also made that the voluntary sector is expected to run initiatives and programmes and often does not have the capacity – highlighting the need for long-term planning and better resources.

The establishment of an annual €200 'Youth Recreational Activities' allowance that would allow young people to participate in an organised sport, music, art, dance and other activities would help offset teenage drinking. (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission).

4.1.4. Proactively Promote Positive Physical and Mental Wellbeing

Undertake multi-media campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of positive physical health and social, emotional and mental wellbeing;

Encourage children to participate in sports and physical activities from a young age; this should include the promotion of the benefits of physical activities especially to girls, perhaps make use of positive role models;

Encourage CYP to get off their screens and promote activities and programmes that will enhance wellbeing.

4.1.5. Enable More Positive Physical and Mental Wellbeing Opportunities Through Education

Promote Physical activity via early learning centres, schools and after-school clubs to encourage CYP to be more active by enabling them to be outdoors as much as possible and to consider initiatives such as Forest school time for all primary school children as well as offering more activity breaks for younger children. It was felt important by many to encourage CYP to engage in sports including group sports from a young age, and suggestions included that more schools could facilitate CYP to walk/run a mile a day, and that schools could offer a wider range of physical activities such as martial arts and gymnastics as well as the usual PE activities and to provide well trained/qualified and specialist coaches to help motivate CYP.

Forest school time for all primary kids. My 8 year old has done some camps off term with a local forest school and it has done wonders for my child's mental health, self-esteem and general wellbeing. (Parent)

Offer non-competitive physical health activities to CYP – especially to those who may not be interested in competitive sports. Alternatives such as play, wellbeing walks, gardening, Lego and tech classes, mindfulness, yoga and dance could be offered to encourage movement and interaction rather than having a focus solely on sports and PE. Other suggestions included the need to have more indoor/sheltered playgrounds/adequate outdoor space for play.

Make sure they can take breaks from learning that they can enjoy their time, as children or teenagers. Meeting friends, doing hobbies and being outside and these things should be assured (Young Person)

Promote mental wellbeing in schools - suggestions included the need for schools to be more welcoming and safe spaces with considerations such as: mindfulness programmes in all schools; mentorship opportunities for children who are struggling; and support for parents to ensure wellbeing of their children (e.g. by employing family support workers in schools to help hard to reach families). Some respondents suggested that schools should offer more comprehensive and consistent personal development education to help CYP to develop coping skills and manage stress. There were calls for all schools to offer appropriate education about keeping safe from harm, sexual health, consent and relationships, including LGBTIQ+ issues. Some respondents said the sexual health curriculum should not be influenced by religious bodies. A number of respondents thought that schools might be able to explore topics such as body positivity which may then make it easier for some CYP to get involved in activities to enhance their physical and mental wellbeing. Schools could also offer activities that could help CYP to relax and socialise such as ‘Hobby Clubs’ or ‘Youth Cafes’. Respondents felt that schools should be provided with the resources and tools/systems to support the mental health and wellbeing of students including access to effective mental health programmes, talk therapy that could be delivered within or outside of school environment, and access to a psychologist/counsellor/CAMHS professionals in all schools.

Leaving cert is one of the toughest and most stressful times in a child's life and so I feel that schools should have more programmes to help them cope with the stress and teach them how to live a balanced life while also achieving their goals (Young Person)

4.1.6. Improve Other Services and Supports for Children and Young People

As well as the calls for improvements in schools, many respondents called on the government to ensure positive physical and mental wellbeing of CYP through the following measures. There were 7 subthemes:

Improve Overall Living Standards – address social disadvantages including child poverty, homelessness, poor housing options, inadequate income (including zero hours contracts), transport costs and inequalities. Resource more programmes and activities for marginalised/disadvantaged groups particularly in services known to effectively improve outcomes for CYP (see Section 4.5 for more details).

Health Services – difficulties in accessing health services were identified as barriers to physical and mental wellbeing. Concerns were expressed about waiting lists, including for CYP with disabilities. The gaps in services for young trans and non-binary people was also highlighted.

Mental Health Services – there were calls for mental health issues to be dealt with in a timely manner and there were specific mentions of unacceptable waiting times for services (years) which occur even in urgent and distressing situations. The need for a more fit for purpose service for CYP with an appropriate range of effective interventions as well as a more CYP friendly inpatient service was highlighted. There is a need to ensure access for all CYP who need mental health services including children with additional needs and vulnerable children. Some respondents felt there was a need to review the current medical model including the way in which conditions are labelled, for example the need to replace the term autism with neurodiversity.

Access in a timely way to a continuum of mental health supports - MH specialist service unable to cope and needs to be changed - medical model needs to be looked at in terms of incorporating social models and streamline Mental Health for young people within dept for children and young people (Professional working with CYP)

Presently HSE telling parents not their issue to go to CAMHS. Then CAMHS tell them, go to HSE. Neither service functioning either. [CYP] on waiting lists for years. (Parent)

Addiction services – one of the written submissions referred to the fact that every year in Ireland, over 50,000 CYP start drinking, and an estimated 1 in 6 children are impacted by parental problem drinking. Another respondent identified the need for more understanding of “the extent and patterns of substance use in Ireland (including rural areas)”; there were references to the significant increase in opioid substitution treatment via GPs – and subsequent concerns about the reduction of GPs in rural areas; there were calls for more funding for community mental health services to include addiction counsellors, joint initiatives with youth services, and need to increase resources for drugs task forces.

Youth Services – there were calls to increase the role of youth services to hold more afterschool provision, outdoor activities and proactive engagement to help address the social, emotional and mental wellbeing of young people. This would involve widening the

access and remit of youth services by making them universal rather than targeted only; and having more youth facilities, youth workers and youth leaders in all communities.

There is no safe spaces for groups of teenagers to meet in winter, I would love if there was some kind of youth club programme linked to every school where your year group could meet to socialise (Young Person)

Look to the [Youth in Iceland Model¹³] which is evidence based and reduces harmful behaviours in young people by increasing funding in youth activities (Professional/Service Provider)

Improve co-ordination and collaborative working between government departments and agencies – the need for better integration between different services was highlighted such as: better coordination between mental health and educational services; information sharing and coordination across all health care providers and an integrated service delivery framework/planning to ensure transition within and between services (see Section 5 for more details).

Implement existing policies to improve services and outcomes - follow through on commitments to make changes in society including implementation of the proposal in both Sláintecare and First 5 to restructure Public Health; implement the Disability Act (2005); and implement Aistear correctly. There were also comments acknowledging that policies were in place in relation to physical and mental health, but there was a problem with local implementation (see Section 5 for more details).

4.1.7 Listen to What CYP Have to Say About Physical and Mental Wellbeing

Talk with CYP, and listen to what they have to say, and make changes to meet their needs including CYP who are particularly vulnerable or whose voices have been excluded

Involve CYP in service development for example a Citizens Assembly on drugs or a Citizens Assembly on youth development and education (see Section 4.6 for more details).

¹³ YiIM, also known as 'Planet Youth' is a community-based approach designed to delay young people's substance use through reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors.

4.2 What can be done to ensure children and young people are achieving their full potential in school and all areas of learning and development?

This question was answered by almost all who responded to the survey (232 out of 236 respondents) with only four non-responses. It was also answered in 26 of the 43 written submissions.

Seven themes were identified in the responses to this question and while educational ethos and reform along with resources for education were the most dominant themes, there was also recognition of the wider range of factors which influence ability to achieve potential including the role of parents and the circumstances in which CYP grow up.

Summary Box

1. Recognise parents as primary educators
2. Address basic needs particularly for CYP living with poverty, homelessness and inequality
3. More effort required to pick up and address developmental and educational needs before children start school
4. Need to rethink and reform the education system
5. Need to improve resources for education
6. Need for more collaborative and specialised support for children with disabilities
7. Need for full implementation of previously agreed policy and service delivery relating to CYP achieving their potential

To reduce duplication within this report, messages relating to Education that were given in response to Q6 (opportunity and economic security) and Q7 (free from poverty and disadvantage) have been amalgamated into these responses to Q4.

4.2.1 Recognise parents as primary educators

The value of the parents' role as the primary educators of their children, the connection between learning at home and learning at school, and the strong

association between family involvement and students' educational achievements needs to be recognized. (Other Respondent, 24+)

The need to recognise and value the role of parents as the primary educators of their children was acknowledged by a number of respondents as was the need to support parents if they need help or are struggling in any way. One practitioner described this as “*helping parents thrive so children can too*” and there were a number of calls for:

- more engagement with parents as ‘partners’ by service providers and schools to encourage and support positive parenting
- empowerment programmes to help parents support their children
- more supports for hard-to-reach families

4.2.2 Address basic needs – poverty, homelessness and inequality

The need for CYP to be in an environment that meets their basic needs in order for them to achieve their full potential and to avail of opportunities to learn was highlighted by a number of respondents who identified the need for the government to do more to get all children off to a good start by: addressing intergenerational poverty; ensuring that all CYP have appropriate accommodation, heat and food; tackling income inequality to help CYP of families on low wages and zero hours contracts. For further details see Section 4.5.

‘Children that are homeless in Ireland are experiencing exhaustion, hunger and increased susceptibility to illness because of poor living conditions and long journeys to and from school. Children require adequate rest, a nutritionally balanced diet and warm, clean clothing before they can fully participate in school life and learning’ (Direct quote from the Home Works Study on children experiencing homelessness)

4.2.3 Address needs before children start school

There were a number of calls for the health and wellbeing needs of children to be picked up and addressed well before children start school. The reduced access to screening services offered by the HSE and the Public Health Nurse service were perceived to be of concern, particularly in relation to waiting lists which appear to have increased further as a result the COVID-19 pandemic in the past two years. There were calls for specific services to support pre-school children including:

- More timely access to assessment and treatments of, for example, Psychology, Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy and other specific health support when needed
- Assess to support services to address emotional, neurological and learning needs
- More investment in prevention and early intervention to support parents who may be struggling with parenting or to help CYP living in challenging situations
- Free access to early years programmes and early learning and care systems

It is a sad, and completely unacceptable fact that children have been on waiting lists since 2016 and have not yet been seen. (Professional)

4.2.4 Need to Rethink and Reform the Education System

As of right now, we are trapped in an old system which we as a society and as a country in the wider world have outgrown and which was aimed specifically at passing a set of exams at a given time which would supposedly indicate a person's capability to progress in society and overall competency levels. This is inadequate because there is a diverse range of learning methods for different personality types which must be facilitated and considered, and the overall performance and aptitude of a given topic is what should be measured rather than a single written paper in such strenuous rigid circumstances. (Young Person)

The most dominant theme in response to this question was the need to rethink and reform education in order to ensure that it provides an enabling environment for CYP to achieve their full potential. There were a number of specific subthemes within this topic:

Educational Ethos or Approach – the current educational system was perceived by many as being ‘*outdated*’, and not meeting the needs of CYP. Respondents thought that there needed to have more options and alternatives to what is traditionally regarded as ‘*being in education*’ to enable CYP to ‘*be their best selves*’. There were calls for education to be more child focused and holistic and there was much feedback highlighting that there was ‘*too much focus on academic achievement*’ in the current system. There were suggestions to look at alternative educational models including the Scandinavian model in order to help more CYP in Ireland achieve their potential.

Alternative Learning Approaches – A key message in relation to education and having opportunity in life, was for a move away from the current model of education, a move away from the OECD and PISA models, to a more adaptable learning environment, that accommodates all learner styles. This will require adopting evidence based and effective

learning methods with less emphasis on memory / more on learning skills. One parent also highlighted that *“rote learning alienates 25% of neurodiverse children”*. There were suggestions to use more interactive learning techniques and that *“Universal Design Principles should be rolled out across all education provision”*.

There needs to be more consideration given in the curriculum for catering for different types of learners, with some more active learning and learning by doing, and space for them to experiment and make mistakes. (Parent)

Reform Exam Systems – a major call for change within the theme of education was to reform the points system for the Leaving Certificate. One practitioner said that there was a need to *“Stop the dominance of the CAO over the education system”*. Respondents called for a review of both the Junior and Leaving Certificate curriculum and exam system. A *level playing field* was cited as needed in relation to these examinations. There was much feedback to suggest that the current system is not working for many YP and that there needs to be more ongoing learning and continuous assessment, non-exam assessments, more creative assessment, and more opportunities for alternative outcomes such as apprenticeships.

The stress, worry and anxiety the leaving cert causes is nearly at a breaking point, the effect it is having on young people's mental is devastating and I predict that it will take a big news story of a 6th years' suicide for their to finally be change. Please don't let it reach this point, the students of Ireland are begging for change. (Young Person)

Alternative Education Pathways and Training Opportunities – There was a strong emphasis on the need to provide alternative education pathways and training opportunities to give all young people a *chance*, to give them the opportunity to achieve and succeed, and to *provide for themselves*. Those who replied in this vein advocated for *well-resourced schools that can provide individualised support*, and for schools that *prioritise every person's skill and ability*. There were calls for better connection between schools and colleges, and for more visible streams for young people to follow:

Leaving cert not being completed should not be a death sentence to opportunities, support needs to be given to alternative education, which will support access to employment. (Professional/Service Provider)

In terms of accreditation, it was proposed that all types of achievements should be rewarded, *not just academic* and that alternatives pathways including more apprenticeships and vocational training courses should be better promoted to young people as options. Some advocated a shift away from an education system that is largely exam focussed and academic driven, to one that has “*less emphasis on exams and greater focus on life skills and is designed to meet the needs of all*”.

Reform of Curriculum – this subtheme included suggestions for a more flexible curriculum to meet all needs. Many respondents said that schools need to be skills focused not just academic with equal value placed on “*sporting intelligence, artistic intelligence, music intelligence, craftsmanship*”; and a wider subject choice that will support “*creative, technology and ecological interests*”.

Give them the education that they deserve and not one that is curriculum based and reliant on state exams that satisfy the needs of departments of education but that fail so many of our young people (Professional/Service Provider)

In relation to enabling opportunities for all children, there were suggestions to encourage YP to take up new interests and take risks and to include more life skills in the curriculum including *money management, savings and budgeting, gardening, employability skills*, and to provide an education that fosters “*creativity, problem solving and entrepreneurial skills*”.

In terms of the academic curriculum, revisiting a numeracy and literacy strategy was suggested to ensure basic building blocks were in place, however most of the responses focused on the need for a more **inclusive and diverse** curriculum. Changes suggested included teaching STEM subjects in primary and post primary schools, making business and science subjects mandatory to Junior Certificate, and offering a wider suite of subject choices at Junior Cert to suit all interests. One young person suggested a *better TY programme with a diverse range of work experience options*.

Change the curriculum. The curriculum is very outdated and not preparing our young people for life ... I had a group of girls approach me last year requesting a 'What we didn't learn in School' programme. It is essentially a life skills programme which they designed themselves. They identified all the skills they needed to survive in the real world. We covered budgeting and finances with mabs, administration, bills, contracts, renting, personal safety, self defence, cooking and knowledge about storing food, cleaning and laundry and more. The group of girls were delighted with what they learned and feel

much better prepared for life outside of school. (Professional/Service Provider)

A more diverse language education was recommended including the need for changes in the way that Irish is taught and that consideration should be given to introducing *a third language* at primary school level. There were also calls to offer a wider range of subjects such as technology, science, maths, applied maths and engineering subjects to girls as well as boys in all schools.

There were calls for more comprehensive and youth friendly RSE to be offered in all schools. Some respondents also suggested the need to bring back CSPE to the junior curriculum; and to support effective transitions from primary to secondary school and for those leaving second level.

There were also suggestions to break the curriculum up into smaller chunks; have less/no homework; be outdoors more and have more time to play. It was noted that *“child centred IEP play based learning and SPHE programme are helping CYP” (Professional)*.

More career guidance was another of the key proposals mentioned in this category and a Professional/Service Provider also suggested *IPP for every child* in school. There was also a call for the education system to be modernised and aligned with the needs of the economy, with digital and soft skills named specifically.

Teaching methods – While there were references to the excellent work happening in many schools, there were also comments highlighting the need for less stress/pressure from teachers; teachers should use teaching approaches that encourage and do not frighten CYP; use of more effective teaching methods. There was a plea to *teach children with respect* and a reminder that *schools were not prison camps*.

Technology in education - A call was made for more online learning and apps and to integrate technology into learning apps such as MS teams; allow mobile phones to support learning; Use IT to promote learning through creativity and sustainability. Concern was also expressed that technology is being used as a baby-sitting tool by some schools, so consideration needs to be given to potential negative impacts of overuse of technology as a teaching tool.

Hybrid teaching / more online learning – lessons learnt from recent experiences of widespread use of technology for teaching/learning during the pandemic have increased potential for wider access to remote learning opportunities as well as providing preparation for any future similar scenarios; need for increased geographic coverage of the existing 4G network to address black spots; High-Speed broadband is upgrading the current mobile network to 5G nationwide; access to rural working hubs in each rural town and village to enable remote workers (and potentially students) to access social and technical facilities; Increased opportunities to access home tuition.

Flexible pathways to transition to adulthood – there were calls for more alternatives to mainstream education and training including practical skills, vocational training and apprenticeships that provide clear pathways to employment including options for CYP with additional needs and disabilities; A number of respondents identified that it was important to encourage Over 16's to stay in education and that there is an urgent need to address early school leaving which increased during the Covid lockdowns; CYP need to be made aware of alternative pathways which can include access to 3rd level (eg HEAR; DARE); there needs to be more structural efforts to addressing needs and finding alternative pathways for YP who leave school before they are 16 years old.

Non formal education – the gap between formal and informal education needs to be narrowed - Youth Services can deliver formal curriculum in a community setting to disadvantaged learners and those with previous poor experience in school; a need for “*more cool projects that will engage YP*”.

After-school services – There were calls for more funding, proper planning and integration of afterschool services for primary schoolchildren. It was suggested that there should be free access to afterschool resources/homework clubs particularly for vulnerable children and that such an afterschool infrastructure would also be supportive of additional learning opportunities for non-fluent English speakers; activities and places to go afterschool for older ages groups was also put forward with suggestions for youth clubs and youth cafes; a number of respondents thought that the holidays are too long particularly for CYP who may be struggling and that there was a need for free summer camps and summer time activities for CYP;

Secularise education - There were a number of calls including from practitioners for State schools to be free from religious influence and that there should be no religious teaching in schools. A number of respondents want to see more non-denominational options for CYP.

Integrate education - Specific recommendations were also made to use an integrated education model such as Educate Together rather than the current mainly segregated approach.

*Integrated services from preschool all the way up. Using an 80/20% model integrate children from different backgrounds no segregation. No state supported private schools use Educate Together model as a model for schools where children learn how to integrate (and more so parents).
(Professional/Service Provider)*

Options regarding choices of school types - A small number of respondents suggested that schools should be gender neutral or mixed gender spaces and that the current practice of predominantly single sex schools should be challenged. However, an alternative view was also put forward by a parent that single sex schools should remain an option specifically for girls who are “losing access to single sex spaces and the safeguarding it provides”.

Equal and accessible education - A key message was the need for equal access to a good quality education for all CYP. A repeated call was made for equal access to education as a right. Education was identified for its own worth as one way to ensure young people have opportunity in life and economic security irrespective of postcode, and that equal opportunity in education should be available to all CYP including those living in rural areas, from new community families and CYP with disabilities, with sight loss, with autism and special needs. There were also calls for educational support and opportunities for those who cannot attend school, and for help for young people from disadvantaged areas, and for equality around access to technology:

*Students from disadvantaged areas or that feel less comfortable in a social environment such as school should have help provided to them so that they aren't missing out on education or opportunities based on the fact that they might think they are not able or equipped to partake with the rest of society.
(Young Person)*

Make schools as inclusive as possible – All young people should be treated equally, have equal access and opportunities. It is important to recognise the specific needs of vulnerable

or excluded individuals and to identify any barriers (social economical, family situations etc.) that may be impacting on their education. Respondents made a number of suggestions including:

- The need for meaningful individualised support and educational plans
- Equal access to educational support
- Address reduced timetables in schools
- Targeted support for vulnerable CYP (including asylum seekers, Roma, Travellers, homeless)
- Targeted support for CYP who experience challenges in attending school, at risk of early leaving, etc)
- Need for a more responsive effective EWO service
- The need for appropriate support for ‘gifted children’
- Supports for young people who are struggling after the impact of COVID-19
- Supports for CYP who are neurodiverse and struggling in the current education system
- Schools need to be far better equipped to deal with Racism; there is a need for more education on *racism and black history*; teach and encourage respect for all identities including the Traveller Community; Roma Community; Transient Travellers and all groups including migrants and refugees; celebrate diversity of cultures rather than integration;
- Teach and encourage respect for diverse gender identities and address homophobia in schools.

Access to 3rd level education – There were a number of calls for equal access to 3rd level education, and for the end to 3rd level fees. It was also suggested by some that college education and apprenticeships should be free or incentivised, and that extra support be given to young people from working class areas to access education, and that SUSI grants should be extended to part-time learners “*who may need to work, parent or have additional demands*” (Professional/Service User). There was also a call for “*more employment and training opportunities in DEIS areas and for greater promotion of 3rd level education in these areas*”.

Address need for Emotional Support - There was also a call for more counselling, mentoring, and emotional support for CYP within schools. It was suggested that schools can be “*nurturing environments for troubled children*”; that they are places where CYP are

“encouraged to be unique and confident in themselves”, and that children who are not doing well should be “encouraged rather than punished”. One submission proposed the inclusion of an interactive prevention programme, to address the impact of harmful alcohol consumption, and the negative association it has with poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion. This specific, interactive programme also invites parents to participate as their children learn new skills, possibly breaking old patterns of behaviour. Another respondent suggested the need to include lessons and resources on the impact of imprisonment on families and children, and that teachers should receive specific training to respond to the needs of these children.

More effective approaches to education on mental health and emotional wellbeing -

Reform approaches to the ways in which mental health and wellbeing is supported in schools: by funding mental health programmes within school settings; employ or collaborate with other agencies to deliver appropriate information and services including counsellors and youth workers; ensure integrated psychological, educational and social supports in all schools; develop the NEPS service. There was also a suggestion that family support services should be funded to work in schools at a therapeutic level:

Family support services are expanded and funded to work in schools to provide psychoeducational and therapeutic supports. (Professional/Service Provider)

Schools need to take bullying more seriously - A stronger more consistent approach is needed across all schools to challenge bullying and discrimination. Including education on the impact of bullying was also mentioned as an important part of the curriculum. Suggestions included teaching CYP about *boundaries* and *consent*, as well as education on equality and diversity from a young age and to hire professionals including youth workers to teach CYP about discrimination and bullying. One organisation highlighted that children with disabilities are two to three times more likely to experience bullying compared to their peers.

4.2.5 Educational Resources

Funded and free education

There was a general call for the cost of Education to be reduced or eliminated, from early years upwards, with the long-term value and benefits of such an investment highlighted, as it was, for example, by this respondent about the benefit of *free early years* education:

Revamp the welfare model to ensure all children receive high quality early years education and access to high quality care when that care cannot be provided by their parents. Highly trained empathetic professionals available to the young people throughout their lives instead of having to jump through hoops and forever live on the fringes of privilege. (Professional/Service Provider)

Respondents called for *cheaper uniforms, generic uniforms*, remove uniforms or provide clothing allowances for working families. *Free school meals* and *free school books* were mentioned, as was *free school transport* and grants including SUSI grants.

Education is supposedly free but it is not fully free. School books, materials, transport to schools, school lunches and uniforms are all added costs that many families cannot afford, I believe these need to all be subsidised. (Young Person)

A set of responses focussed specifically on the need for greater investment in DEIS schools and the expansion of the DEIS programme. As well as the call to *add* to the DEIS schools, there was also a recommendation to extend the benefits of DEIS schools to other areas.

There is also now a need for an addition to the DEIS programme as there are now a very small number of DEIS schools nationwide who are now catering for the most marginalised families. The current DEIS structure is inadequate to deal with the needs presenting in these schools. Such schools need on site speech and language therapists and OTs. They also need access to assessments and follow up recommendations. (Professional/Service Provider)

*Roll out of school meals programmes beyond DEIS schools.
(Professional/Service Provider)*

One respondent recommended more integration between communities and schools rather than setting communities apart:

Mix up the socioeconomic groups rather than isolate by having 1 large county council estate or Deis school. (Parent)

Need for schools to be better equipped and resourced to support CYP reach their potential.

The following points were made in relation to resources and funding:

- Consistent provision of resources and supports across all schools
- Funding for required staffing to ensure good staff pupil ratios
- Funding for SNA, SCP, DEIS, FRC, Youthreach
- Staff Training including on Trauma and Childhood Adverse Experiences
- Better safeguarding and support systems to ensure safety of CYP
- Smaller class sizes
- More outdoor spaces and school play areas
- Appropriate environments for children with additional needs
- Provision of free school meals/ breakfast clubs

4.2.6 Specialised support for Children with Disabilities

A lot of comments were made specifically in relation to children with additional needs.

While there was some acknowledgement of improvements in this area, many respondents felt that CYP with disabilities are still *'falling between the cracks'*. Of particular concern was the research cited by one organisation (in a written submission) which indicates that CYP with disabilities are 2 to 3 times more likely to experience bullying, and 6 times more likely to experience violence and abuse compared to other children. The following suggestions were made:

- Ensure that CYP have a better resourced, fully functioning and accessible disability service
- More collaboration required between disability and education services
- Additional and sufficient places and support at primary school and post primary
- More resources in youth services for children with additional needs
- More accessible environments including sensory rooms, wheelchair access etc.,
- Additional staff training to work with CYP with specific disabilities
- Improve access to appropriate assessments to identify the assistive technology needs of CYP coupled with appropriate training for the child, their family and school community
- Clear pathways of progression for CYP with disabilities or additional needs
- Address the issue of bullying and abuse of CYP with disabilities

Accessible environments: while universal design guidelines have been provided to ensure the environment can be accessed, there is no statutory requirements underpinning for this, meaning there is a considerable ordeal

for parents and providers to go through in the admission process of the child, even with new builds (Professional/Service Provider)

Providing them with actual disability services. Currently none are actually being provided unlike what the government claims. Update the curriculum with skills they'll actually need in the workforce. Provide continuing education to those with disability beyond 18 (Parent)

4.2.7 Implementation of Service Delivery and Policy

The subthemes raised in relation to implementation matters included the need for collaboration; better monitoring and information; implementation of existing policies/guidelines; and the need to include the voices of CYP in decision making are discussed in detail in Section 6.

4.3 What can be done to ensure children and young people are safe and protected?

Almost all (96%) of the 236 survey respondents answered this question. 25 of the 43 written submissions contained replies to this question. Most respondents interpreted this question of keeping CYP safe and protected in relation to a threat of some form of child abuse. It is of note that a small number of respondents identified climate change as being a threat to the safety of CYP.

Four distinct themes were identified in the responses:

Summary Box

1. Need to Do More to Prevent Harm to Children (3 subthemes)
2. Children at Risk and Children in Care (3 subthemes)
3. Need for Better Child Protection Services (4 subthemes)
4. Need to Take Climate Change Seriously (2 subthemes)

Within the theme of Preventing Harm to Children, 3 subthemes were identified: *support parents from the outset* to prevent harm; *ensure accessible additional support for families* who are struggling; and increase awareness about keeping *children safe from harm*.

The theme of Children at Risk and Children in Care contained 4 subthemes: the need to look out for children who are *particularly vulnerable*; Need to improve systems for *reporting Abuse and how reporting of Abuse is Handled*; and specific concerns about *Children in Care*.

The 4 subthemes in the overarching theme of the Need for Better Child Protection Services focused on: the need to *Implement existing policies with more focus on prevention and early intervention*; *Ensure more collaboration between agencies* and co-ordination of services; Concerns about *capacity of agencies responsible for keeping CYP safe*; *Listen to CYP* to help stop abuse and to help create better services.

In relation to Climate Change, – although this topic was only raised by a small number of respondents (nearly all of them CYP), the subthemes that were identified included *the real*

threat of climate change; and to give CYP a platform to raise their concerns so that action can be taken now.

4.3.1 Do More to Prevent Harm to Children

Support all parents from the outset (prevention)

Key messages within this subtheme included the need for quality perinatal maternal supports, regular home visiting and an appropriately resourced PHN service to ensure that all families feel supported to care for their new born, have regular access to screening, developmental assessments and a protective service. Respondents considered that non-judgemental guidance and non-stigmatising parenting programmes should be easily available and that parents should also be informed of where to obtain support if they are not coping - no matter what the issue is.

Every child should have someone who regularly checks in on them like the public health nurse for babies. They should have the privacy and opportunity to tell someone if they are experiencing anything wrong at home, in school, anywhere (Parent)

The importance of supporting parents to provide a safe and secure, stable and caring home environment for their children from pre-birth cannot be underestimated and needs to be included as a key commitment in the next BOBF strategy. (Professional/Service Provider)

There were a number of suggestions for community amenities that would help all families including: more green spaces/play areas/secure places/supervised/ safe places for teens to meet and have fun/ keep children safe & happy. Affordable good quality childcare and early years services were also identified as being supportive to families.

Additional support for families who are struggling (early intervention)

Many respondents highlighted the need to provide early intervention before problems escalate, and that support should be easily accessible to families who are struggling.

Ensure parenting support that can help with topics such as parenting, listening skills, isolation, addictions, children's disabilities, boundaries, respect, relationships, domestic violence, trauma and mental health (Responding on behalf of an Organisation)

Increase awareness about keeping CYP safe (safeguarding)

In relation to increasing public awareness about CYP's right to be safe from harm, suggestions included a nationwide rollout of education on child protection to teach all CYP (even very young children) about their rights and keeping themselves safe. Some respondents felt that schools are well placed to deliver or arrange for programmes from appropriate sources that would include keeping safe; bullying (including cyber-bullying), domestic, sexual and gender-based violence as well as relationships and consent. CYP in particular were concerned about the extent of cyber-bullying. There were calls for teaching on self-defence and there were also calls for ensuring that the environment is made safer for YP including better street lighting, increased CCTV and Gardai presence. Many parents were concerned about access to violent and sexual online content and the sexualisation of CYP in society. Some respondents felt that more needs to be done to regulate social media platforms where violence and sexual content is uploaded and shared. Some respondents were keen to ensure that parents are made aware of dangers such as grooming and peer-on-peer sexual abuse.

One of the biggest challenges to safety is access to pornography, and social-contagion sites. Govt level safeguards & limits on "big tech" are urgently needed. We do not need our 11year olds sexuality being distorted by PornHub, boys believing that violence is part of typical [sexual] relations nor our girls thinking that sexual pleasure=choking. It is easy to dismiss concerns on this topic as a moral panic, or a throwback, but this is the reality for our 10- 18year olds (Professional/Service Provider)

It was deemed important by many respondents that parents and the wider public need to be educated about keeping CYP safe, and to know what to do about any concerns. There were also calls for appropriate and regular safeguarding training for everyone who works with children and young people such as schools, youth services and agencies, to ensure that all staff can identify children at risk and respond to any concerns in an appropriate manner. Some respondents suggested that more use could be made of social media to raise awareness about keeping safe, with free access to helplines more widely advertised.

4.3.2 Children at Risk of Harm and Children in Care

CYP who may be particularly vulnerable to abuse

Specific groups of CYP were identified as being particularly vulnerable to harm due to their circumstances, such as children and young people living in households where there is domestic abuse, alcohol or substance addiction or where parents have serious mental health conditions. Children with disabilities were also identified as a group who may be at increased risk of harm.

I was very scared when they let daddy stay after the guards were called, I found it hard to breathe I was so scared (Child, Part of Written Submission)

I am worried that they will never stop fighting and that dad will hit me because he gets so angry with mum (Young Person, Part of Written Submission)

Domestic violence is mentally damaging; they need to realise the amount of hurt, the amount of pain it causes. (Young Person, Part of Written Submission)

1 in 6 CYP are impacted by parental problem alcohol use. Alcohol and drug abuse is one of the main reasons for a significant proportion of Children in Care (Professional/Service Provider)

We have lived this way for so long, that it does over time just become the norm – while we are not happy about it and we often know it is wrong what really is our alternative? (Young Person, Part of Written Submission)

According to the UN, “children with disabilities are six times as likely as other children to experience violence and abuse” (Organisation, Written Submission)

Concerns were expressed by children and young people with direct experience of the Family Court system, and by professionals and organisations, that decisions made by the Courts to grant access to parents who are violent or abusive, are compromising the safety of children and young people.

Should get rid of the bad person and let us live with the good person (Child, Part of Written Submission)

Dad wants me to stay over so I get used to it, and then he will tell the judge I want to live with him, this is not true (Child, Part of Written Submission)

Family Law Courts granting access in situations that compromise children’s safety (Organisation)

Family Courts need to further acknowledge risk to child where there has been Domestic Violence towards partners (Professional)

Other groups identified as being vulnerable to harm were CYP who were homeless / living in emergency accommodation or Direct Provision. This type of accommodation was described as 'dreadful' causing trauma, threatening safety and security of CYP. A concern was also expressed by a professional that children who were homeless or living in precarious accommodation arrangements did not appear to be regarded as a child protection issue by authorities. A key message from many respondents was that all CYP should be protected from harm, and that more resources are required to support CYP where safety and wellbeing is a concern.

Reception centres/ migrant – pre reception, quarantine, reception and long-term accommodation trauma (Other Respondent)

children into temporary or emergency accommodation. This threatens their safety, security, opportunity and development ... The country also needs to safeguard children within direct provision centres and it is great to see that this practice will come to an end soon, but it is imperative that the alternative is better (Professional)

There are about 1800 children living in direct provision in our country who are living in dreadful conditions (Young Person 13 -18 years)

homelessness is not deemed to be a child protection issue but seriously how can a homeless child be safe and protected? (Professional)

Improve systems for reporting child abuse and how concerns are handled

Concerns were expressed about the current systems for reporting child protection issues, including delays in reporting by some professionals. It was suggested that there should be clearer pathways to reporting abuse including anonymous reporting, and clearer procedures in place for when a child reaches out for help. A number of respondents including professionals working with CYP felt that the referral thresholds for reporting concerns were too high, and that many cases of neglect and emotional abuse are not addressed as they do not reach current threshold levels. There were calls for more Social Work staffing, to enable thresholds to be lowered, reduce caseloads, deal with emergencies, visit children at risk regularly and have time to support families.

Continued support for all those working with children and young people to have appropriate knowledge and training to recognize when a child or young person is not safe and how to act on this (Other Respondent).

The length of time to get a response can be frustrating. Sometimes we try to flag issues before they become urgent or too serious but unless they are serious it is hard to get the appropriate support (Professional/Academic)

Thresholds in certain Tusla Social work department areas are way too high to ensure proper safety for children (Professional)

Prevention of further harm or abuse of CYP in Care

Concerns were expressed about CYP in relative care, foster care, and residential care placements. A number of professionals identified issues such as some children being placed in relative care without adequate supports for the carers; that the care system currently has a lack of foster carers - it was stated that there are approximately 60 young children under 12 years old living in residential care. One respondent responding on behalf of an organisation stated that some placements - particularly some inappropriate emergency placements - may be causing risk of harm to children and young people. Another professional felt that a structural review of residential care services was needed.

A few respondents highlighted that statutory residential care was not equipped to deal with the needs of some CYP with disabilities and one professional made reference to the Ombudsman for Children report which highlighted that responsibility for disabled children in care was *'fragmented and dispersed'* between Tusla and the HSE. Some practitioners thought that there should be *'enhanced support for looked after children and young people'*, including properly supervised dedicated SWs for CYP at risk or in care. The need for increased after care support for YP following residential care was also highlighted.

There is a crisis in the care system with a lack of foster carers. There are also difficulties in recruiting and retaining social workers. The increase in the number of privately operated residential centres has increased too rapidly with the number now nearing 150 to Tusla own number of less than 40. This is leading to an inequality of service and supports for those children and young people. All of these issues need to be addressed immediately.(Professional)

4.3.3 Need for Better Child Protection Services

Implementation of existing policies

There were calls for the full implementation of existing policies to ensure more effective structures and interventions to protect CYP. The following are examples of policies that need to be fully implemented with regard to the protection of CYP (more details on the implementation of these policies can be found in Section 6):

- the National Model for Parenting Support Services and the European Child Guarantee
- the Children First Guidelines
- the National DSGBV (Domestic, Sexual & Gender Based Violence) Strategy
- the Children’s Protection Policy

Having mandates and legislation that clearly outline what a child's rights are, who is responsible for them and what the consequences are if they are not met is also very important. There must be clarity on what exactly this entails among the public sphere, and particularly [understood by] young people and children themselves. (Young Person 13 -18 years)

More focus on prevention and early intervention

There were calls for improved funding of preventative and early intervention services that protect CYP, and that there should be less reliance on volunteers and the voluntary sector to deliver state responsibilities in this regard.

Ensure Tusla gives at least equal priority to preventing harm as to responding to harm when it has occurred. This requires: The publication of national quality standards for prevention and early intervention across all Tusla services and the ringfencing of minimum budgets for prevention and early intervention in each Tusla service area, with the aim of a phased increase in investment (Responding on behalf of an organisation)

More collaboration and co-ordination of services

There were several comments about the need for a wider culture of cooperation amongst agencies and improved communication between all working with CYP such as social workers, psychologists, teachers, youth workers as well as more involvement of youth services and trained professional youth workers to work in this arena due to them being very well embedded and accessible in their communities (more details in Section 5).

Concerns about the capacity of specific agencies with regard to keeping CYP safe and protected

Children have not been protected for a long time...the court/judicial system and TUSLA are failing them (Academic)

Overhaul Tusla. Rebrand, relaunch. More investment, more staff, better training. No child should suffer if the right supports are there, are functioning and are funded (Parent)

Tusla - There were several calls for a review or reform of Tusla which was described by one professional as having a ‘problematic organisational culture’. Two professionals called for Tusla to be disbanded. Reasons given included the need for better standards for enforcing safety and ensuring the welfare of CYP; more resources to meet the demand for child protection services; the need to lower the threshold levels to enable more CYP to access help including those experiencing neglect and emotional abuse and the need to increase provision of specialist services including for child safety in domestic abuse cases. In relation to concerns expressed about placements of CYP in care, there was a call for regular inspections of residential care. A number of suggestions were also made about the need for more effective publicity about how to access the service including 24/7 Helpline numbers and information on social media.

Mental health services - In relation to keeping CYP safe from harm there were calls for better preventative and early intervention strategies for mental health. Practitioners identified the need for better collaboration between education and mental health services in order to provide more accessible services for CYP such as via well trained school counsellors. The need for proper sign posting and referrals to crisis intervention in relation to suicide and self-harm of CYP was also highlighted. The need for improvements in mental health services for CYP is outlined in more detail in Section 5.2.

Schools - In relation to domestic abuse, a number of CYP whose views were included as part of a written submission, called for teachers and schools to be more aware and proactive in helping CYP who are living with domestic abuse.

Teachers should be trained in areas of domestic violence as a lot of school staff are not able to support children in these situations (Young Person, Part of Written Submission)

*I would like to have been noticed more in school by teachers, when upset
(Young Person, Part of Written Submission)*

One organisation also suggested that schools should use a system such as ‘Operation Encompass’ which could help ensure that if there was a reported domestic abuse incident, Gardaí would liaise with the school to ensure that staff were aware before the start of the next school day, and staff could offer specific support to CYP if needed.

There were a number of calls from CYP, parents and professionals for a more comprehensive, consistent sex education curriculum in schools including information on consent, relationships and sexuality education programmes as well as Sexual Violence workshops. One parent highlighted the need for more supervision at special schools where children with disabilities may be more vulnerable. There were a number of mentions of schools needing to be supported more by the HSE, Tusla, the Gardaí and youth services in relation to keeping CYP safe.

Gardaí - The need for an improved Gardaí presence in the community was raised by a number of respondents, as was the way in which Gardaí interact with CYP. More community Gardaí liaison officers were recommended to improve communication between CYP and the Gardaí – including learning from Youth Services and getting more involved in schools, youth services etc. some respondents felt more resources were required to tackle safety on the streets, drug intimidation, drug gangs, grooming of young people etc. There were a number of comments about the Gardaí vetting process, ranging from concerns about this being a ‘tick box exercise’ without actual legitimacy, to the need to speed up the process to help ensure safeguarding of children.

Justice System and Family Courts - As well as concerns expressed by CYP and professionals that Family Court decisions were placing children at risk of harm by granting access to the abusive parent (see Section 4.3.2), there were also several comments about the Family Justice system being adversarial towards CYP and that it needed to take more of a child rights approach in decision making. There were calls for specialised training on child abuse and child protection for Family Court Judges. One professional highlighted the need for the appropriate provision of access centres with supervised access, so that children and young people are not put at unnecessary risk of harm by parents who are violent or abusive. There was also a recommendation to examine the CAFCASS system in the UK:

need to create a world class, child centred family law and court system including statutory provision for assessments to court regarding child welfare; ensuring voice of the child is also placed on a statutory level and heard at all points of the system; create a child friendly family law system to include physical spaces and infrastructure, staff skills etc; wrap around specialist family support services including therapeutic and parenting services; provision of mediation and alternative dispute resolution services; a national system of child contact centres; specialised supports for families who experience domestic abuse (Organisation, Written Submission).

There were also several calls for more severe penalties for people who harm/abuse children.

Listen to CYP to help them exercise their right to be safe

Many respondents identified the need to listen to what CYP have to say in relation to keeping safe including:

- (a) Encourage CYP to speak out if they feel unsafe or are being harmed
- (b) Consult with CYP in general about what needs to be done to help them feel safe and protected – what do they need/want from adults and organisations?
- (c) Ensure the views of CYP are taken into account for example “in decisions about their lives such as in custody and access situations, family justice, in child protection and welfare cases.”

Children have ‘no voice in Court’ – children of all ages have rights (Young Person)

Ensure that those working with children are trained in hearing the voices of children (Other Respondent).

Children’s voices are still not being sufficiently heard in family law cases while services are not always available to support them when their parents are separating (Organisation, Written Submission).

4.3.4 Need to Take Climate Change More Seriously

The real threat of Climate Change

Several respondents – mainly young people and professionals - acknowledged the threat and impending impact of climate change.

The young people’s vocal calls for climate action have been left short time and time again as priorities continue to be placed on the more short term issues without the foresight to fully realise the devastation which we are accelerating towards if this continues ... the consequences will only worsen and as time goes by, every child’s safety will be put at risk by climate change as the situation deteriorates ... For young people of today, they face a crisis

more terrifying than any before, especially because they feel alone to carry the burden (Young Person)

Give CYP a platform to raise their concerns so that action can be taken now

A number of professionals commented on the increased level of awareness among young people about climate change and some respondents felt that the government are beginning to listen to CYP about climate change

The rights of the child have improved over the past decade that we're beginning to see more of an acceptance for a diverse society and children are being listened to on issues that affect them like climate change more than in the past (Young Person)

The youth movements towards climate change for example illustrates to me their passion and zest for life and improving the world (Professional)

Young people have much more of a voice on issues that concern them and have become activists around Climate Justice (Service Provider)

However, most of the respondents who commented on this issue felt that more concrete action needs to be taken by government and that CYP need to be more involved in decision making around this issue.

Young people should have more right to decide and participate in different things, like climate change or new laws, which affect young people (Young Person)

The voting age should be decreased to 16- children of this age are knowledgeable of issues that effect them like climate change but unfortunately find it very difficult to take action or express concerns when they don't have a say on who's in charge of the government policies that implement action. More youth parliaments should be created for children to express their concerns and demands for the government to be taken seriously until the voting age is changed (Young Person)

4.4 What can be done to ensure children and young people have opportunity in life and economic security?

Two hundred and twenty two of the 236 (94%) who took part in the survey responded to this question, 14 did not respond. Twenty-two (51%) of the written submissions contained responses to this question.

Summary Box

The responses to this question were compiled into five main themes:

1. Education (3 subthemes)
2. Supporting Families (2 subthemes)
3. Training and Employment (4 subthemes)
4. Youth Voices and Autonomy
5. Government – Addressing Broader Needs

At a distilled level, those who responded to this question, thought that *education, support for families*, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable, as well as *good jobs and training opportunities*, would help ensure CYP have opportunity in life and economic security. Specific action from *Government* at a structural level underpinned these recommendations. Youth Voice and Autonomy was also considered to be an important aspect of opportunity. The fifth key theme identified, addressing broader policy areas, will be discussed in conjunction with similar themed responses in Question 7. There was a significant overlap in the answers to Q6 and Q7.

4.4.1 Education

Education is the key liberator, and not just education in the traditional sense, but in tandem with academic qualifications be it QQI or post primary exams, a focus on life skills, coping strategies and wholistic health. An appropriate response by educators to trauma and the individual educational needs of the learner. The learner needs to be able to identify their strengths and opportunities, construct achievable goals and practice these in a safe environment while being scaffolded until they can travel their own enlightened path. (Professional/Service Provider)

The first theme *Education*, highlights respondents' concern for an *equal and accessible education* that can meet the individual needs of CYP and is accessible in terms of cost, suitability and availability. Recommendations were made regarding reform to both the *curriculum* and the *delivery or approach* of the education system. Due to overlap in the responses to this question, and to Question 4 which asked about achieving full potential in school, these messages have been amalgamated into the main themes raised about Education in Section 4.2.

4.4.2 Supporting Parents and Families

The second overarching theme, *Supporting Families*, summarises respondents' views on the necessity of providing support to families, particularly families who are disadvantaged and to children with special needs or disabilities. The importance of early intervention is highlighted in this regard. The need to invest in and support parents and families directly, particularly those from disadvantaged areas or particular backgrounds, was the focus of many responses to question 6. These responses have been coded in (sometimes overlapping) categories and highlight the type of support and interventions regarded as necessary to ensure CYP have opportunity in life and economic security.

Targeted Support

The main types of support mentioned focused on social welfare support, mitigating the cost of living, and enabling young people and parents from disadvantaged areas to access the labour market. The barriers to education and training for lone parents, for example, was highlighted, and increased allowance and free childcare were proposed to address these barriers. More support for families to return to/access training and education in general was identified, as was the need for multi-agency support for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), and to support the youth work sector to work with young people furthest from the labour market. The importance of supporting one parent families into quality jobs and the impact of role modelling was highlighted in a written submission. There was a call for skill-based employment programmes, for Youth Reach allowance, and more investment in youth services to support '*disadvantaged / alienated / marginalised*' young people. One suggestion made in a Written Submission was for Youth Reach or other youth work settings to '*provide food, laundry, and shower facilities*' to improve basic outcomes for young people.

Tax credits and increased funding, housing subsidies and support for low-income families, easier access to welfare services and grants for the working poor, (rather than penalties on secondary benefits if working hours increased) and more support for the unemployed and disadvantaged were all included in responses within this category. A call was made in one written submission for a more effective communication and information campaign to increase awareness of the income supports that are available to those in need. One young person said, *'there should be extra financial supports in place for more vulnerable families whose income was affected by the pandemic'*. Another specific suggestion made was in relation to a fund that each child could have ownership of and make choices on its use:

Have a national financial investment briefcase where every Irish child have an assigned initial share in it and providing information to all stakeholders in that. (Professional/Service Provider)

Addressing the education deficit through the provision of individualised tutoring for children falling behind, providing reading programmes, free books, and devices especially to the 'seldom heard' were all suggestions made to support disadvantaged and vulnerable CYP. Free meals, breakfast, lunch and afterschool clubs were strongly recommended.

A system should be put in place to ensure that children have a nutritious meal every day, irrespective of whether or not they are in school. (Organisation, Written Submission)

Specific communities were mentioned as needing extra support, particularly around education, namely Irish Traveller and Roma families, refugees, asylum seekers and new communities. The last three were listed in relation to language support and childcare facilities. The significantly poorer outcomes and employment opportunities for young people from Traveller and Roma communities were outlined in a written submission and there was a call for this to be addressed:

Greater awareness and a trauma informed approach to the individual educational needs of the learner (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

Supporting young people and families in their own local communities was another repeated message, with recommendations made that all communities, including smaller towns and rural communities have equal access to support, services, transport, leisure, cultural

activities. Providing more visible and mobile youth work support in rural and remote areas was advocated in one written submission.

There were also recommendations made in relation to children with disabilities and special educational needs, with a call for more SNAs; for more support and resources, and that this be available beyond 18; for accessible education for CYP with sight loss, for alternative education and training opportunities, for proper education for autistic children; and therapy for ASD children. There was also a call for children attending Special Schools to have access to career guidance counsellors. This point was supported by research quoted suggesting that:

...young people with disabilities who take part in work experience during their school years, and in particular, paid work, have a significantly higher employment rate. NDA (2019) 'Assessment of CES 2019 actions' (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

The need to tackle inequalities for CYP in the care of the state was also raised. In a written submission, there was a call to extend the age of leaving care beyond 18 and:

[To align] financial supports to ensure young people in care have the same opportunities as other young people to pursue a gap year or to change third-level course. (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

There was a call for greater awareness of the challenges facing young carers. Research findings were presented within the written submissions of the poorer outcomes in relation to poverty of young carers compared to other young people:

For many families, taking on caring responsibilities results in long-term financial hardship, with the loss of income from employment exacerbated by higher household costs. (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

Specific calls to Government around policy implementation were made in responses to this question also. (See Section 6).

Early Intervention

A repeated call was made by respondents for more early years education and supports, that are inclusive, available in rural areas, and are well resourced. A recommendation was made that the CE support programme is expanded and that AIM posts are better paid to attract more staff. The need was identified for additional 'safety net family supports,' expanded to

schools and for *parenting classes*. School should be a safe space, and according to a young person, should be a place where children can learn about helplines (from primary school upwards) and a place where *children [can] express their needs and problems*.

Early intervention was regarded as a means to foster positive relationships and provide role models for parents and children, as well as offering support, information and opportunities. Early childhood Home Visiting and family engagement was promoted as a way to tackle poverty:

Early Childhood Home Visiting and family engagement needs to be incorporated into the Government's commitment to a multidimensional approach to tackling child poverty. It is one of the most effective strategies in addressing child poverty, underpinned by practices that focus on prevention and improving the wellbeing of all children, while giving targeted support to children with additional needs. (Professional/ Service Provider)

One suggestion, made by a Professional/Service Provider, is to train, accredit, and employ local parents as home visitors raising educational and social capital at various levels.

There was also a call for more focus on early intervention and early diagnosis:

More work needs to be done in terms of early diagnosis and early intervention for children with disabilities or mental health issues to ensure they reach their full potential. (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

4.4.3 Supporting Training and Employment

This theme has four subthemes: more jobs; apprenticeship and training; facilitating work uptake; and supporting work at Government level.

More jobs

The call for more employment opportunities and jobs for young people was made across the board of respondents, with specific mention of young people who are NEET, and a need to increase the numbers from this group progressing to employment. One young person called for *more jobs to hire young people*. Some addressed the need for greater access to local community employment and skill development.

Training and apprenticeships

Echoing the call for alternative education pathways, is the call for more alternative pathways into work through, for example, funded apprenticeships, (including the expansion of apprenticeship programmes such as that piloted by TU Dublin alternative training opportunities, (which are available up to age 24), and accredited courses such as sport leadership. There was a call for practical skill development opportunities and a recommendation to support employers financially to employ young people, or offer them traineeships/internships.

Facilitating work

Various suggestions were made to better prepare and equip young people for the labour market and work environment, including, early school leaver preparation courses, mentoring programmes, and community information hubs offering careers advice and resources. One suggestion made in a Written Submission was for the provision of key worker support for early school leavers to enable them to return or gain access to education or training.

So that employment is a viable and sustainable option it was also suggested that there should be access to low-cost rental homes close to where the jobs are, better paid childcare, better working environments, and more work flexibility to achieve better work-life balance.

Making jobs more available especially for young people who have grown up in difficult situations and have little to no qualifications/ higher education. Teaching children more about careers choices in school and leaving cert and college alternatives. I think a big issue is how expensive accommodation is and I think young people looking to go to college should be given more information on that in school and helped to find a solution. (Young Person)

Supporting Work (Government)

Issues to do with initiatives and interventions that fall specifically within the remit of local or national Government, in relation to work and employment, were also raised. There was a significant focus on wages, with a repeated recommendation for *better pay conditions, to increase or legislate on the minimum wage*. In relation to young people's pay, a number also called for age-based increments to be removed and for equitable rates for young people.

This recommendation was made in both the survey responses and in the written

recommendations. There was also a call to address zero hour and temporary contracts, to end exploitation, and to ensure young people's working rights are protected, while taking account of their diverse backgrounds.

Employees in receipt of the minimum wage are more at risk of poverty than minimum wage workers. Minimum wage must be increased to a level that ensures young people are not at risk of poverty. Some young people are reliant on social welfare payments for economic security. Having reduced payments for young people means that many have the same cost of living as their older counterparts but do not have the same level of income, leaving them vulnerable to poverty and exclusion. (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

Other recommendations included building on the Youth Employment Initiative, nurturing more 'pop-up' businesses and making use of empty premises, having a targeted response to youth unemployment, providing local area statistics on youth unemployment, and renewing the labour market post Covid 19. The need for specific funding streams was identified:

Investing €200 million to deliver additional education, training and apprenticeship opportunities and other employment measures and allocating €64.8 million to restore the full rate of Jobseeker's Allowance to young people under 25 years (Professional/Service Provider).

4.4.4 Youth Voice and Autonomy

In answer to this question, some respondents, including young people and professionals/service providers, said that young people should be given autonomy to *follow their passion and utilise their skills* (professional) to *learn what they want to learn*, to have meaningful participation at a community and civic level, as well as structures such as student councils, and be involved in decision making processes that affect them. There is more detail about this theme in Section 4.6.

4.5 What can be done to ensure that children and young people in Ireland are free from poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion?

Question 7 sought respondents views on what can be done to ensure that CYP in Ireland are free from poverty, disadvantage, and social exclusion. It was answered by 226 out of 236 respondents who completed the survey (95.8%) with 10 non-responses. It was also answered in 26 of the written submissions.

Summary Box

The responses to the question were grouped into five main themes:

1. Government to Meet Broader Needs (8 subthemes)
2. Supporting Families
3. Education (3 subthemes)
4. Access to Social and Cultural Spaces
5. Inclusion and Respect

As noted in Section 4.4, there is some overlap with similar themes identified in Question 6 (which focused on opportunity in life and economic security) and this Question 7, as well as fusion between themes.

4.5.1 Government to Meet Broader Needs (responses from Q6 and Q7)

Responses to the first theme - Government to meet broader needs - are reported here together with responses which were coded under the same thematic description from Question 6. Responses within this theme indicate the areas of need highlighted by respondents for government intervention or attention.

The most frequently mentioned area of concern in need of addressing, so that young people are free from poverty, disadvantage, and social exclusion, was housing. Across responses in both Q6 and Q7 there was an imperative expressed that Government address the housing crisis, address homelessness, reduce or freeze rents, provide affordable housing, and provide accessible accommodation for students. In Question 7 there was a call for more

social housing and that councils be bound to provide appropriate accommodation for Irish Travellers; that families with children go to the top of the housing list; and that Direct Provision is ended.

Homelessness featured very little in the last policy. We need to prevent young people from becoming homeless in the first place. The Government must give tenants greater security so young people can plan for their future. If young people become homeless the services and emergency accommodation, they receive must be designed to meet their specific needs. (Professional/Service Provider)

A number of the written submissions, from organisations working with CYP in a range of capacities, reiterated these recommendations. They emphasised the need to provide safe and secure housing as fundamental to ensuring opportunities and economic security, with greater focus on integrated multi-agency planning for housing development. In addition, they called for quality social housing plans, and for social housing plans that are ‘*sensitive and responsive to the needs of children living with a disability and their families*’, and that a Youth Homelessness Strategy is created to align with the National Youth Strategy and the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy.

There needs to be a return to Government and Local Government building homes for people to live in. This is of critical importance. A basic but essential need to be prioritised. The over development of the greater Dublin area is creating issues of overcrowding, poverty and pollution while rural areas are being left with no resources, limited job opportunities, lack of access and no public transport. The Spatial Development Strategies need to prioritise investment outside of the Capital for the benefit of all. (Practitioner, Written Submission)

Health

The second most frequently mentioned area was health. Common across the answers to both Q6 and Q7 were comments on the availability of mental health services. In Q7 respondents identified specific need for psychological support for parents; addiction support for parents; adequate inpatient mental health services; a review of CAMHS with a proposal to introduce a more holistic model of care; and the promotion of good mental health from an early age *as key in any young person’s future*. A wider consultation on health and wellbeing was advocated:

Citizens assembly on our collective understanding of health & wellbeing indicators and use these cross sectorally. (Professional working with CYP)

Respondents also called for free healthcare, a broader range of healthcare services for CYP, including the option of online health and social care appointments, out of school hours appointments, and better PHN services for children. The need to address waiting lists, healthcare costs, the lack of GPs and access to the medical card when moving home were all mentioned. The need for greater emphasis on preventative services was also noted. More details about this theme area available in Section 4.1.

Work and training

Responses relating to work and training appeared in both Q6 and Q7. One of the dominant issues mentioned related to wages and pay: a call for the minimum wage to be equalised for young people, and the minimum wage/living wage be raised for all and that pay and benefits match the cost of living. The differential in job seekers allowances or social welfare according to age was regarded as discriminatory and was requested to be phased out. There was a call to pilot a universal basic income.

Specifically in relation to work, respondents called for more jobs; more apprenticeships; job schemes with higher pay; good working opportunities; and one young person called to *“lower the working age to 15 to make it easier for young people to get jobs”*.

A number of responses related to taxation: a *fairer tax system* was proposed with suggestions that those who earn more should pay more; that wealth should be redistributed more fairly; that working parents should benefit from tax reductions; while capital tax, inheritance tax and corporate tax should be increased. It was also suggested that the threshold for earning before taxation should be raised. One respondent proposed consulting the Nordic Social Democratic model of taxation.

Poverty

Eradicating poverty at a systemic level was advocated and suggestions included introducing a National Child and Young People Poverty Action Plan and Government Task Force; to use a

Logic models¹⁴ approach rather than a capabilities approach¹⁵ to introduce cross-departmental policies to address poverty; to *poverty proof* all policies in relation to children; to review social welfare payments as a pathway out of poverty; to employ a multi-agency approach to address youth unemployment and poverty and to address the issues of the hidden poor. The need to address the cost-of-living crisis was also made.

Equal opportunities

Responses coded under a sub theme equal opportunities-levelling up were all about the need for equal opportunities to study, to work, to access training, health and education, to engage in community activities and to have equitable and accessible services for all.

Equal access to health and education supports – private vs public must be abolished for there to be any equality. (Professional/Service Provider)

Another strand of recommendations within this theme related to CYP in care, with the following recommendations made: that children’s rights supersede birth parent rights; that children have the option to remain in care until 21 if needed; that children in long term care have the chance to be adopted; and that *young people leaving the care system have financial support to at least 23 and full support until 26.*

Youth Services

Further recommendations were made for youth services particularly in terms of funding and access, specifically:

- Better funding for youth services
- Generic youth funding stream
- Youth services capacity increased to support older young people up to 24.

¹⁴ **Logic models** show relationships between: Resources (what you have), Activities (what you do), Outputs (what you produce) and Outcomes (the results). Creating a logic model helps all involved think about what they’re doing, what they hope to achieve and what they need to do to get all the important stuff done. Logic models can also include: a statement of the problem (why the service or programme is needed), the goal (the overall aim), and assumptions about the model including external factors outside the control of the programme/service.

¹⁵ **The Capabilities Approach** (Sen 1992 and Nussbaum 2012) is a means of developing a common framework of goals to address inequality and disadvantage, and to determine what should be the indicators of ‘a good life.’ The approach sets out a series of goals and indicators in areas such as health, education, relationships and participation. The enablers and barriers to achieving goals can then be analysed at personal, social and structural levels, to identify the kinds of resources required.

The difficulty for some young people in rural areas to access to youth services, in terms of transport, was spotlighted by one professional who called for:

*Social transport for youth services to bring young people to and from smaller villages outside the hubs. This to coincide with youth service programme times to be finished, and not last service leaving at 6.30pm.
(Professional/Service Provider)*

Another called for financial support for the young people to take part in youth and community groups.

As mentioned elsewhere, the potential for greater linkage between the youth service and schools was highlighted. There was a call for youth workers to deliver life skills programmes in schools for example, and to support young people at risk of leaving school early. It was also suggested that youth centres are funded to open breakfast clubs and become a centre for young people to collect food.

Connectivity

Connectivity describes the responses in Q6 and Q7 which highlighted the importance of being connected; of having accessible transport, good internet connection and intergenerational engagement, all as part of ensuring CYP are free from poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion. The specific issues highlighted included:

- Increased provision of Rural 44kw/50kw charging points
- ISIF low-cost car insurance for low risk YP
- Free travel for under 25s
- Funding for local link services
- Investment to return and upgrade bus stops along rural routes, including investment in modernisation and bus tracking for user interface (accessibility)
Better transport provision
- Better internet access especially in rural areas
- More intergenerational engagement.

Other

Other proposals or suggestions for Government mentioned across the sample included measures to address drug use, climate change, surrogacy rights, and criminal responsibility. There was a call for more interdepartmental working, and greater collaboration between

statutory agencies, the community and voluntary sector, children, young people and families. It was suggested that all government departments have a policy to boost social inclusion. Proposals made included:

- Climate change solutions/sustainable energy policies
- Zero tolerance for parents of children who drop out of education or whose children engage in criminal activity
- Revisit scholarships, Special Grants
- Strengthen collaboration and integration between Government departments/statutory agencies/ C&V & CYP & families
- Invest in national organisations core posts via Pobal’s SSNO
- Invest in systemic change
- Stronger community infrastructure
- Surrogacy children rights to have both parents on birth certificate
- Draft and implement National Strategy for Arts and Social Inclusion in Education
- Citizens assembly on drug decriminalisation and education.

4.5.2 Supporting Families

The need to address poverty, social disadvantage and inequality was a recurring theme within the responses to this question. There was a call for more financial support through HAPP payments, social protection payments, social welfare payments, better family income supplement, increased child subsidies, children’s allowance, child benefit, *grants for struggling families*, and support for single parents and for low income working families (including childcare costs), who are making *“stark choices between food and electricity/heating and as a result children are going without essentials on a regular basis”*. There was also a call for child benefit to be a universal payment and not subject to HRC.

Increase financial help. We have children in our first world country which are hungry, cold let alone those who cannot take part in school extras through lack of funding. Imagine how 'separate' that would make any child feel, especially on a continuous level. (Parent)

Providing CYP with meals was a focussed intervention frequently proposed by respondents. The Hot Meals Pilot Programme and Schools Meals Programme were specifically mentioned as beneficial. One parent proposed that breakfast clubs, free school meals and homework clubs become the norm for all, so that *‘children who are with parents who can't meet their*

basic needs would have these needs met and not feel stigmatised'. Breakfast club funding for Youth Services was suggested, and free lunches, or low cost, lunches for all children was proposed.

While a universal approach was proposed by some in relation to the provision of school meals, there was also a call for effective targeted interventions to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged and those most in need. There was a call for early intervention, and that all aspects of childhood adversity are addressed through a collaborative approach:

Develop national and local (under CYPSCs) adequately resourced plans to tackle all aspects of childhood adversity, giving each child the best possible start in life. Strengthen collaboration and integration between Government Departments, statutory agencies, the community and voluntary sectors and children and families themselves. (Professional/Service Provider).

Holiday support grant for disadvantaged families to have a break, and the provision of mentoring and counselling support for those living in disadvantaged areas were also suggested.

Various ways to support parents were suggested, from providing ante natal and early years support; and within safeguarding for *'social work departments to coordinate and take a whole-of-life'* approach and to work in *partnership with parents*. Prevention and early intervention were recommended. There were calls to support parents to have a second chance education, to receive support to return to work, and to provide parents with budgeting advice and education, to provide more parenting class initiatives and more support for male/father involvement in children's lives.

To improve the wellbeing and development of children more streamlined and easily accessible access to TUSLA support for families and children in need was recommended.

4.5.3 Education

Education featured strongly in the answers to this question, and the three subthemes identified are the same as those used to summarise the responses to Question 6; Equality and access; Reform (delivery/approach); and Reform (curriculum). There was similarity in the content of responses given in Q6, with significant focus on the need to offer an inclusive and accessible education, to meet the needs of all learner types and all abilities and to offer alternative pathways within the education system. Addressing the cost of education for

families was a more dominant message in the responses to this question. Due to overlap in themes raised, these responses have been amalgamated into the findings presented in Section 4.2.

4.5.4 Access to Social, Cultural and Recreational Spaces

The messages within this theme call out for more inclusive community spaces and amenities to build communities, and to provide greater opportunities to engage in social, cultural and recreational activities. The importance of having accessible public amenities, access to greenways, parks and playgrounds, for CYP with disabilities and those who are vision impaired was highlighted. There was a suggestion made to use Sports Capital Grants for CYP with disabilities, to enable their access to culture, clubs and drama and arts programmes.

*Funding should be available to make public amenities such as greenways and public parks, playgrounds, sporting and cultural facilities accessible for children and young people with a vision impairment. This should be specific to the location but also coupled with the requirement for paths that are clear and navigable for all, with large signage and audio assistance in place.
(Professional/Service Provider)*

As well as the focus on increasing access to availability of groups, clubs, youth, community and resource centres and widening the programme of activities available to suit all abilities and interests, there was also a thread of responses that focussed on the natural environment and amenities, and the importance of providing access to green spaces, and communal spaces:

An emphasis on beauty as well as utility in planning with an obligation to provide shared communal and green spaces. A right to roam. Sea sanctuaries, bogs as carbon capture, delivery of bare root native tree seedlings to every primary school in the country annually. (Professional/Service Provider)

Funding needs to be returned to specialised organisations within the communities. A broad spectrum of support encouraging play, ability to have safe recreational places, access to facilities and amenities, mental and physical health. (Professional/Service Provider)

4.5.5 Inclusion and Respect

Responses within this fifth theme focussed on the need for greater *respect, acceptance, tolerance* and *kindness* to be shown to all and for all, that differences are embraced and people are encouraged to be more accepting; one submission called for more *'discussion and education on unconscious bias and how prejudice is built into our systems, structures*

and attitudes'. A few mentioned how people from disadvantaged areas are stigmatised and labelled and that the *'labelling and shaming'* of CYP from these areas needed to stop.

Facilitate more discussion and education on unconscious bias and how prejudice including sexism, racism, homophobia is built into our systems, structures and attitudes. e.g., schools, health services. (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

To protect young people from social exclusion and discrimination, we have to teach tolerance and empathy. (Young Person)

Raise the profile of inclusion and diversity with more understanding of bias, prejudice among the general public. (Young Person)

The delivery of social inclusion projects, from pre-school up was recommended, to achieve a *"fairer more inclusive world/more open-minded society"*, and a recommendation that the *National Network of Partnership and Leader Companies* are tasked to target programmes for the most disadvantaged and marginalised. Within the written submissions there was a call for increased access to multi-lingual and translation services for children, that information is provided in a range of languages and formats, and that *"all children have equal opportunities to access appropriate services to meet their needs"*. There was also a call for laws against racial and sexual discrimination to be enforced and for *"greater respect for the Children's Ombudsman's directives"*. There was also a call for more targeted advertising and recruitment to improve representation of minority communities in services.

More education. Ireland is very behind in terms of being open to and accepting that what is seen as other. We are seeing an increase in marginalized groups and bullying in school based on homophobia, ethnicity etc. In return, the young people marginalized are kicking back and we have seen cases where they are getting more outspoken and aggressive to defend themselves. (Professional/Service Provider)

It was recommended in a written submission that young people with additional challenges be supported *"within the Youth Community rather than separate from their peers"*. The recommendation was made on the strength of experience which suggests that young people from different backgrounds learn from each other:

...young people who come from poverty learn a great deal from having friends from more advantaged backgrounds. They have so much in common they begin to see opportunities for themselves rather than barriers. Similarly young people from more advantaged background learn that life is not always

equal or fair and consequently value their advantages. (Professional/Service Provider)

The risk of 'play deprivation' experienced by children with disabilities, children living in direct provision, children in poverty, and children from the Traveller community was highlighted in one Written Submission. It was suggested that their needs are not represented in legislation and policy, and they do not have access to safe and accessible play spaces or play opportunities.

4.6 What can be done to ensure children and young people are respected and able to contribute to their world?

Question 8 asked respondents to consider what can be done to ensure CYP are respected and are able to contribute to their world.

Two hundred and nineteen of the 236 (93%) who took part in the survey responded to this question, 17 did not respond. Twenty-six (60.5%) of the written submissions answered this question.

Summary Box

The responses to this question fell into three dominant themes:

1. Voice and Participation (3 subthemes)
2. Empowerment (3 subthemes)
3. Respecting CYP – Not Leaving Anyone Behind (3 subthemes)

The subthemes of Voice and Participation, give detail on the spaces and forums where it is felt young people's voice can and should be heard; the ways in which they could be facilitated to participate; and the importance of having their views and contributions listened to and acted on.

Empowerment, the second main theme, focuses on how young people can be supported and equipped through education and confidence building, and have a greater awareness of the world they live in, and the social and political issues that impact on them.

The third overarching theme, Respecting CYP, suggests that the young people's ability to participate and be respected in their world is linked to how well they are included, accepted and supported by society; how well informed/aware and accountable those who engage with them are; and the attitude or respect they are shown by adults.

4.6.1 Voice and Participation

Give young people the opportunity to express their views, especially those who are not normally asked and then listen to them and take their suggestions into account in decisions to be made (Professional/Service Provider)

Space, Place and Audiences

The importance of having various forums, with different audiences, where young people can participate, and represent their views, was central to many of the responses given.

Respondents listed a wide range of organisations and bodies that CYP could/should be represented on at local and national level. These included student councils, community groups and clubs, Comhairle na nÓg, Hub na nÓg, Youth Advisory Groups for state agencies, National Youth Assembly, various boards, government organisations and departments and the media. There was a call for a revision of the *‘purpose and powers of Comhairle na nÓg along with Hub na nÓg’*, and to bring these bodies under the Office of An Taoiseach, in order to bring greater alignment with the Council with the OHCHR. Advocacy on behalf of CYP at government level was suggested in one written submission, with a recommendation for:

a collective of youth work practitioners and educators to advocate on behalf of children and young people with regular meetings with the Oireachtas Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission).

It was proposed that consultation with children is necessary at a government level through for example a *National Children’s Forum*, and that young people should be encouraged to participate in Young Voices EU Youth Dialogue, which was recommended as *“a successful model of youth democratic engagement within the Irish context”* (Written Submission). One organisation asked that an objective of the new CYP policy be to *“request a referendum on the right for young people to vote”*.

In addition to joining already existent bodies and structures, there was also recommendations that children and youth people should form new forums, councils, and parliaments to influence political decisions that affect them. Some also called for more representation of specific groups of CYP on these bodies, and one respondent called for a

“National panel of youth, to include seldom heard young voices, to inform the implementation of new BOBF2”.

The need to audit the structures and bodies that already exist was highlighted in a written submission, the intention being to facilitate greater coordination and collaboration at *national, regional and local levels*, and to identify areas for development. There was also a call to strengthen:

data sharing among state agencies to support evidence-informed approaches to the development, delivery and monitoring of policies, programmes and services concerning children and their rights. (Professional/Service Provider Written Submission)

As well as noting a range of different forums where young people’s voice should be heard, some highlighted the importance of making these spaces ‘youth friendly’ or ‘comfortable’.

Listening to the voices of children, by developing mechanisms to ensure children’s voices are part of the decision-making processes that affect them. While it is heartening to see the progress that has been made with DCYA activities, the children’s voice needs to become part of the whole of a child’s (and young person’s) life in particular at school and home. (Professional/Service Provider)

Facilitating Participation

So that CYP’s voice can be facilitated and heard respondents recommended more opportunities to do so through school and education, through regular surveys and as part of the school governance, and also through various youth organisations and groups. It was recommended that these processes begin at a young age (that the voice of children under 10 is heard) and include seldom heard and hard to reach voices. Youth organisations and bodies, such as Comhairle na nÓg and Hub na nÓg, it was suggested, be enabled and resourced to include the voices of seldom heard and hard to reach young people, and to engage young people in a creative, child centred, and accessible way. Providing information and advice that is child friendly and accessible was also recommended.

Open up community youth projects to all young people, run more Youth Participation groups, so that they feel they can make a difference. The young people I work with (high risk, early school leavers) will not in engage in the likes of Comhairle na N’óg, as they come from generations of not feeling heard or unable to make change. If they were included in this process from

*earlier age they wouldn't feel like their opinions do not matter.
(Professional/Service Provider)*

It is particularly important to ensure that all children, from all backgrounds, are provided equal opportunity to engage in policy development. Too often, groups of children facing the greatest levels of disadvantage are excluded, directly or indirectly. (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

Facilitating and encouraging CYP to participate in their local community, through volunteering for example, and recognising their contribution (through community awards, such as the Gaisce President's award), was another aspect of this theme.

Being Heard, listened to and acted on

While having the opportunity to be represented on a range of forums, was noted as key for CYP to contribute to their world, having their voice and contributions heard, listened to, valued and acted on was highlighted as an essential part of this representation process. There was acknowledgement that consultation with young people has improved in the last decade, though a recognition also from some who submitted written submissions that there is still room for improvement.

Many of the respondents advocated CYP are listened to, that their views are included and respected in the decisions and policies that affect them, that they are essentially "*part of the planning, decision making and delivery process*", to feel a sense of ownership and belonging. Moreover, it was suggested that they need to *know* that their views are acted on, that they make a difference, and that their expectations are managed. The need for consultations to be accountable to young people and the process was emphasised in the written submissions, with the need to give young people *concrete feedback* and the **opportunity for evaluation**. The importance of engaging with CYP from marginalised groups was noted, and while the progress made, as a result of the then-Department of Children and Youth Affairs publication of a National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015–2020, was welcomed, it was highlighted that the goal was not fully realised for all groups:

The need for dedicated youth participation spaces that progress policy issues for minority ethnic groups is key. (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

this aspiration contrasts with the experience of many young carers who feel unrecognised and ignored in the shaping of policies that could ultimately affect them. (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

Young people need to be listened to and they need the experience of seeing their voice having an impact. I think a lot of apathy is creeping in for this generation. Excluding the voice of young people in the decision regarding the leaving cert is a perfect example of how young people are asked but the adult voices are the only ones taken on board. Consultation and involvement is a box ticking exercise in Ireland children here have no voice. (Parent)

One submission highlighted the need-:

to hear from CYP living with problematic alcohol use in the home () to hear the voices of seldom heard children including those living with mental health issues, parental addiction and strained family situations (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

In relation to children's views on parental imprisonment, it was advocated:

that any future policy framework relating to children and young people in Ireland should highlight the need for a formal process whereby a child's voice can be heard in all judicial decisions that may affect the child, including where the child's primary caregiver may be sent to prison as well as the need for judicial training on the rights of the child in all decision-making where the child is affected. (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

And for children whose parents are separating there was a call in a Written Submission for their voice to be heard in family law cases, and for the provision of appropriate services for them.

4.6.2 Empowerment

Knowledge and Education

Workshops on practical, personal, mental and social subjects as well as academic emphasis. These are some suggestions on how to gradually gain a better level of involvement for the young people going forward.(Young Person)

Underpinning some of the responses in this question is the focus on education and how it can empower CYP to engage with issues that affect them and their world. It was recommended that education should include more youth focussed issues, and shine a light on world issues, politics and the law; that it develops critical thinking skills, develop leadership capacity within minority communities, and foster greater social and political awareness and involvement.

Rights, Respect and Inclusion

Addressing discrimination, racism, sexism, misogyny, inequality, exclusion, bullying, principally through a rights-based education approach and dialogue was the core message within this subtheme. Acceptance, tolerance, and inclusion were highlighted as aspirational values and necessary for the attitude of respect – namely being respected and respecting others. Specific programmes mentioned were the Mother Tongue programme, and:

The anti biased approach by Louise Derman Sparks assists in ensuring children are respected culturally. (Professional/Service Provider)

There was also a recommendation from a service provider for the ‘introduction of school-based awareness programmes to support children and young people to learn about disabilities’ creating a respectful school environment.

It was recognised in one written submission that progress has made in relation to the rights of the child, and children’s awareness of their rights. There was concern, however, that the challenges facing CYP who are carers, as a “*particularly vulnerable group*”, mean this group of CYP do not get to enjoy their rights.

There was also a call from a professional to “*address gaps in the State’s independent, statutory complaints-handling framework concerning children*” and for the delivery of an awareness programme on children’s rights for civil and public servants. The same submission called for “*the strengthening the State’s capacity to address the needs and uphold the rights of children in the context of crises (e.g., health, environmental/climate, economic/financial and/or conflict-related crises)*”.

Confidence and Skills

Build self-esteem, show them their value, place in the world, give them a sense of pride in themselves, their work and their country. Listen to them and respond by doing what they need done. (Parent)

Responses within this subtheme advocated empowerment, resilience, confidence building, so that CYP can become *stakeholders, active citizens, and leaders* in their communities and world. Making this happen for girls in particular, was the focus of a young person’s written submission:

*I think to protect girls we should try to make them feel powerful enough to speak up for themselves because most of them would be too scared too.
(Young Person, Written Submission)*

We should try to empower them so that they themselves feel good enough and not as if they don't have a voice to speak when might be getting pushed down by other people who have different opinion on the topic and they should be able to believe that they can make a difference in a lot of people's lives and that they're not a nobody. (Young Person Written Submission)

Volunteering, youth development programmes, participating in summer camps were identified as ways to grow these soft skills, and develop a sense of pride, competence and belonging. Mentoring in schools and having role models to encourage participation and contribution was also mentioned.

Reviewing the findings from the National SUSI grant review was suggested within a Written Submission in the context of promoting self-determination and autonomy including financial autonomy.

4.6.3 Respecting Children and Young People – Not Leaving Anyone Behind

Inclusion and Acceptance

The thread running through this sub theme is a call for all young people to be more included in society; that none are discriminated against or marginalised because of their race, colour, sex, gender, religion, age, stage or ability. Equality of access and opportunity are advocated; with a focus on reaching out to those who in a minority group, those who are marginalised, who have a disability, who are vulnerable, or disadvantaged, and “*the extreme groups and the guys in the middle*”.

Progress and develop upon meaningful youth participation initiatives at government and policy level, drawing on examples such as youth engagement in the development of the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy. Create in-person and online spaces where children and young people can engage in advocacy and campaigning in a safe manner. (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

Listening to and understanding the voice of the child when *assessing and responding to the needs of families who are homeless* was a call made as part of one written submission.

Training and accountability

Enabling CYP to contribute to their world and to be respected can be, according to the responses in this subtheme, linked to how aware and how well-trained adults working with CYP are. Responses called for cultural/awareness training for professionals to inform their work with young people, to allow them to engage and to hear the voice of the child, and to respond appropriately. There was a call for teachers to engage in training for special needs and anger management, and for frontline staff in the statutory and voluntary sectors to undertake training in youth participation. It was recommended that Youth Services are ideally placed to deliver such training.

Work is needed to build staff and service capacity to ensure children with additional needs have meaningful opportunities to influence the care and support they receive. (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission)

Ensure those working with children are trained in hearing the voice of children (Other respondent, 24+)

In relation to young people's engagement with the justice system, it was recommended in a Written Submission that information on ethnicity is recorded by the Garda Síochána "to ensure that policing is proportionate, fair and in compliance with human rights obligations". (Professional/Service Provider, Written Submission).

Showing Respect for Children and Young People

Some responses highlighted how young people are not, or do not feel respected by adults. They feel their opinions are not listened to, taken seriously or valued that they are patronised, minimised, they are considered immature, and are viewed as intimidating. There is a call in these responses for more empathy and tolerance from adults, for more trust, and more respect.

Make adults aware that children should be seen and heard and taken seriously. (Young Person)

4.7 What could be done to respond to the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people?

Approximately one in ten (91%) of the 236 survey respondents answered this question, and 26 of the 43 written submissions contained replies to this question. Respondents also referred to COVID-19 in their replies to some of the other questions in the consultation, and these responses were also taken into account in this section.

Summary Box

Four dominant themes were identified in the responses:

1. The COVID-19 Pandemic Exacerbated Situations That Were Already Challenging for Some CYP (3 subthemes)
2. There is a Need to Assess and Address Damage Done by COVID-19 (5 subthemes)
3. Explore Positive Adaptations to the Pandemic and Lockdowns (2 subthemes)
4. Lessons for Any Future Lockdowns (2 subthemes)

Each of the four main themes contained subthemes:

Within the theme of COVID-19 exacerbating situations that were already challenging for some CYP, 3 subthemes were identified: Children living in precarious situations including child abuse, domestic abuse and poverty; increase in anxiety and mental health issues; potential widening of the educational gap.

The theme of Need to Assess and Address Impacts of COVID-19 contained 4 subthemes: the need to deal with urgent issues; the need to deal with the impact on services that support CYP; the need to focus on children and young people having fun again; the importance of asking CYP themselves about their experiences and insights.

The theme of some positive aspects of impact of the pandemic included 2 sub-themes of: the increased online interaction resulted in reduction in barriers for some CYP and Increase in awareness of the importance of outdoor spaces and local amenities.

The fourth main theme of Lessons for aAny Future Lockdowns contained 2 subthemes: learning about the impact of COVID-19 on CYP, and rethink delivery of essential services and support to CYP.

4.7.1 COVID-19 Exacerbated Situations That Were Already Challenging for Some CYP

It was felt that many CYP were seriously impacted by COVID-19, and that many difficulties that existed before COVID-19 were exacerbated during the pandemic.

Children living in precarious or vulnerable situations

The pandemic both amplified and exacerbated existing inequalities experienced by particular groups of children in Ireland. (Organisation, Written Submission)

Covid was a nightmare for vulnerable children. Many were forced to live in overcrowded spaces, with no proper access to technology, educational support, or social support. School is often an escape for some people (Service Provider)

Respondents identified that the lives of specific groups of CYP living in vulnerable circumstances may have become worse during the pandemic. It was acknowledged that many vulnerable children would not have been able to access many of the usual potential sources of help while being ‘locked down’ in the family home. The main groups of concern were those CYP experiencing child abuse or neglect, domestic abuse including coercive control and those living with adults struggling with addiction or mental health issues. Children living in poverty and/or in unsuitable housing were also identified as specific cohorts who fared worse during the pandemic. There may also have been hidden groups of CYP who have experienced additional difficulties due to restrictions imposed by the pandemic such as CYP of prisoners who were not able to have regular contact with parents during this time.

Increase in anxiety and mental health issues

The impact of the pandemic on the mental health of children – and of their parents – has been traumatic. This needs to be addressed over the lifetime of the next strategy (Professional).

Reliance on TV, computers and phones during the pandemic was perceived to have negative consequences on children’s wellbeing. COVID-19 restrictions were described to have

impacted on young people’s mental health due to increased isolation from not being able to socialise and having reduced access to clubs and activities. It was noted by many respondents that the lockdowns and subsequent isolation caused a lot of anxiety in CYP, including those who were already experiencing mental health challenges. National and international studies were cited which confirmed that loneliness experienced during the pandemic has contributed to depression, anxiety and stress.^{16 17}

Some children, including those with disabilities or additional needs who may have been very dependent on their routines of going to school, meeting friends and having specialised support to meet their needs, may have found the lockdowns particularly stressful and frustrating. Some respondents commented on the impact of this frustration and challenging behaviour on their families who could not access respite of any kind.

There was also acknowledgement of the significant increase in low mental wellbeing in the general population during the pandemic – for example in contrast to the ‘normal’ proportion of the population who suffer with low mental-wellbeing at any given time (10%), during the pandemic, low mental wellbeing increased from 11% in 2018 to 37% in 2020 and 35% in 2021.¹⁸ Specific challenges experienced by parents included increased levels of stress and mental health difficulties, isolation and lack of social support, financial concerns, tension in the home and substance use.¹⁹

Widening of the educational gap

Concerns were expressed that the pandemic had widened the educational gap for many CYP. While it was acknowledged that many provisions had been put in place by schools to try to mitigate the disruption caused by COVID-19, it was felt that there has been a negative impact on many children’s educational experiences, particularly children who may already have been struggling with education and/or other issues. Some respondents said that many CYP with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities experienced regression in their learning

¹⁶https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_sub_committee_on_mental_health/reports/2021/2021-07-28_interim-report-on-covid-19-and-its-effect-on-mental-health-services-in-the-community_en.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/Life-in-Lockdown.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://drinkaware.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Families-Alcohol-COVID-19.-Barometer-2020-Research-Paper-Series.pdf>

¹⁹ Connolly, S. (2022, February 3). Parenting in a crisis – how COVID-19 has impacted on parents, children and families. [Conference presentation].

and social skills, as well as distress about not being able to access their usual social environment.

4.7.2 Need to Address Damage Done by COVID-19

Deal with Urgent Issues

Need to intensify supports for those children and families who fared worst during the pandemic (Professional).

There were calls to make particular provisions for vulnerable children in order to reduce suffering and long-term damage.

Concern was expressed about the lack of information about how child protection was dealt with during the pandemic. There were calls for action to speed up responses to child protection concerns as well as providing Keyworkers for vulnerable CYP; it was considered by many that services in general need to be more integrated, preventative, community based and accessible for CYP and their families.

There were many comments about a backlog of CYP waiting for assessments and appointments for health services and supports including the screening of babies and young children resulting in a potential increase in relation to undetected issues such as developmental delay. It was also felt that there has not been enough support including therapeutic services to help remedy the harm experienced by vulnerable CYP during lockdown. One respondent suggested the idea of a helpline to deal with queries post pandemic.

Deal with the Impact on Services That Support CYP

Díriú ar na seirbhísí a úsáideann daoine óga agus tacaíocht dóibh a láidriú - Focus on strengthening the services used by and supporting young people (Responding on behalf of an organisation)

waiting lists for primary, secondary and specialist services are now under huge pressure as the backlog of almost two years of limited access begins to impact (Service Provider, Written Submission).

There was acknowledgment of the work done by many sectors to address some of the negative impacts of COVID-19, and the need for further investment in services for CYP. One respondent highlighted that the Taoiseach had committed to “A New Deal for Young

People” post COVID-19 and hoped that this could now be developed and implemented. A number of suggestions were made including:

Education – there were calls for more funding for schools, more teachers, more SNA to support CYP who have fallen behind in their studies. Concerns were expressed that the poor access to pre-school and early years during this period may contribute to underdeveloped social and emotional skills and poor language development among this group of children. There were also concerns about long waiting lists for additional educational supports such as education psychology services, Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy and more home liaison support.

There were calls for more focus on wellbeing in schools including suggestions such as someone to check in on each pupil on a regular basis, as well as more access to counsellors and mental health youth workers. The negative impact of COVID-19 on education was described to be higher in areas with high disadvantage, resulting in higher levels of early school leaving. Several respondents highlighted the need to do more to re-engage with young people who left school during the pandemic. There were also suggestions for the need to deliver “catch up programmes” to targeted groups of vulnerable children such as summer camps and after school clubs in addition to school-based programmes.

Allow more blended learning in schools, remodel the leaving cert to allow a more hybrid model, exams should be a test of what they know and not a test of rote learning, abolish the junior cert, schools should consider 4 days per week learning days and one day per week life learning and wellness which could include extra curricular activities and personal development programmes. (Professional working with children or young people)

Mental Health - More funding and resources are needed to support young people with mental health issues, however reform of the system is required in order to improve the range of services available and increase access for CYP who are struggling.

Youth Services – make all youth services generic and ensure that there are more safe youth spaces and venues that are accessible to all YP. It was suggested that more use should be made of the unique position of youth services to be able to engage CYP including the delivery of listening ear services and promotion of positive health and wellbeing.

Focus on Having Fun Again

As socialising resumes, it was acknowledged that some CYP may need help with social skills following the pandemic and that there is a need to create more socialising opportunities for children who lost out on this type of interaction. The pandemic was described as a very ‘serious’ time for everyone, and the need for more fun activities for children and opportunities to socialise was highlighted by many respondents including more play time at home, in school and in the community, including risky play in the natural environment.

Ask CYP Themselves About Their Experiences and Solutions

Respondents reflected that during the pandemic, many CYP made a lot of sacrifices to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to protect those at higher risk of catching this virus. However, CYP were publicly labelled as ‘super spreaders’ and were still restricted in society at a time when adults had reduced restrictions. Some respondents were concerned about the impact of masks on children. One parent expressed upset about the way in which CYP had to handle disorganisation and lack of clarity about ventilation etc., on the initial return to school after lockdown. A number of respondents said that it was important to consult with CYP themselves about the impact that COVID-19 had on them, and that it was important to reach out to seldom heard children including CYP living in emergency accommodation, or CYP with a family member in prison. It was also highlighted that CYP shared great ideas on a wide range of issues including recovery from the pandemic following an open call issued by Young Social Innovators to teenagers during the pandemic.

4.7.3 Some Positive Aspects of The Impact of the Pandemic

While the main impacts of COVID-19 were identified as negative, some positive aspects were flagged up by respondents.

Increase in online interaction resulted in reduction in barriers for some CYP

The impacts (of Covid-19) are likely to be different within and between groups of children with disabilities / special education need (depending on age, family circumstances, extent / quality of remote teaching etc.). (Organisation, Written Submission)

Some respondents stated that the move to being online for education and employment purposes was actually a positive for some CYP with additional needs, as it reduced

barriers.²⁰ There were also comments about some health services being more accessible through the provision of remote assessments and services online that would previously have been difficult for CYP with disabilities to attend in person. One organisation shared information that the NCSE has commissioned a team from UCD to examine the impact of the COVID-related school closures on students with Special Education Needs stating that this research may provide more evidence about the impacts of the COVID-related school closures for children with disabilities (due to be published late 2022).

Importance of Outdoor Spaces and Local Amenities

An unintended positive aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have been the growing appreciation of outdoor spaces and facilities that helped to mitigate feelings of being trapped indoors during the lockdowns. Many respondents highlighted the benefits of the natural environment and the need to rethink outdoor activities and spaces as opportunities to reconnect and be creative. The importance of local amenities that provide opportunities for socialising including intergenerational activities, creative arts, as well as physical activities were highlighted as features that should be developed and available for all to enjoy.

4.7.4 Lessons for Any Future Lockdowns

There were calls to gain a better understanding of what worked and what did not work during COVID-19 in order to plan and prepare for any future similar adverse events.

As we emerge from the pandemic, this is a perfect opportunity to take a deeper look to see what is working well and not working (Service Provider, Written Submission)

Review Studies About Impact That COVID-19 Had on CYP

It was acknowledged that a number of agencies have already undertaken research into the impact of COVID-19 and some have engaged with CYP about their experiences and insights. There were calls to learn from this research, and to understand the mitigating factors that may help CYP in the future. Specific mention was made of reports such as the Impact of

²⁰ National Disability Authority (2021) Lockdowns Unlock Innovations Report. <https://nda.ie/publications/others/research-publications/lockdowns-unlock-innovations-report.html>

COVID-19 on Education^{21 22} and a study involving YP as Researchers, which was described as the single biggest study on the impact of the pandemic on young people which included insights on wellbeing, education and learning, use of technology, human rights and youth-led action and civic engagement.²³

Rethink the content and delivery of essential services to CYP

A number of comments were made about the benefits of the increased use of technology during the pandemic. The transition to the online environment for schooling went relatively well for some CYP, however it did not work for everyone. There were calls to make more use of hybrid service provision particularly where a Universal Design approach has been adopted to increase accessibility to CYP people (including those with additional needs).

Consideration also needs to be given to digital poverty among some cohorts of CYP. There were a number of positive stories of devices and facilities made available through funding such as the DFHERIS/SOLAS Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund and the DCEDIY COVID response grants.

With today's technology, school could become way more accessible for children and young people. There is a huge variety of ways we learn eg. visual learners, auditory learners etc. and not all of them are fulfilled. (Young Person)

21 <https://www.oecd.org/education/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-insights-education-at-a-glance-2020.pdf>

22 <https://www.oecd.org/education/lessons-for-education-from-covid-19-0a530888-en.htm>

23 <https://www.unesco.org/en/covid-19/youth-yar>

Section 5. Priorities to focus on in the new Policy Framework

Respondents were asked to identify 5 priorities for the new Policy Framework to focus on. In order to ascertain variations in the priorities, the responses to this question were coded for comparison across the 3 groups of Children and Young People, Parents and Professionals/Service Providers. In total over nine out of ten respondents (94%) answered this question, with replies given in 220 of the 236 survey responses and in 42 of the 43 written submissions.

Summary Box

- Respondents submitted their top 5 priorities, and when these were analysed, 21 key themes were identified
- Some of these themes were further combined into 14 broad themes and these were rated in relation to number of mentions in total and across the 3 groups of Children and Young People; Parents; and Professionals/Service Providers
- The five most frequently occurring themes that were identified as priorities for the new framework were Education; Mental Health; Social Exclusion; Implementation Messages; Family Support and Children at Risk/in Care.
- The other nine themes that were identified as priorities by respondents were: Health; Play, Leisure and Culture; Rights and Voice of the Child; Technology; Youth Services; Childcare and Early Years; Disability; Climate/Environment and COVID-19.

The baseline data which provided details of how many in each group responded to Question 12 was important in determining the percentage who identified specific priorities, and this data was then used to rank the themes which were most popular. The following Table 2 provides details of the proportion of respondents, as well as the individual groupings of CYP, parents and professionals / service providers who identified specific priorities.

Table 2: Most frequently occurring themes raised by respondents - presented in descending order of total mentions (some of these themes have also been combined with similar themes to create broad themes).

Priorities grouped into Themes	CYP	Parents	Practitioners	Total
	n=56	n=54	n=154	n=264
	Percentages			
Rethink, Reform & Resource Education (combined)	73.2	72.2	56.5	63.3
Educational Approach	57.1	59.3	48.7	52.7
Improve Wellbeing & Mental Health Services (combined)	50.0	37.0	50.6	47.7
Address Social Exclusion (combined)	33.9	38.9	49.4	43.9
Implement Policy & Service Delivery (combined)	8.9	14.8	40.3	28.4
Mental Health Services	25.0	20.4	31.2	27.7
Social, Emotional & Mental Well-being	28.6	22.2	27.3	26.5
Improve Services to Help Nurture & Protect CYP (combined)	7.1	16.7	36.4	26.1
Parent Support, Prevention & Early Intervention	7.1	14.8	35.7	25.4
Educational Reform	39.3	33.3	17.5	25.4
Health-Related Issues	14.3	33.3	26.0	25.0
Housing/Address Homeless Crisis	16.1	16.7	29.2	23.9
Service Implementation Messages	7.1	9.3	33.8	23.1
Poverty	14.3	14.8	27.9	22.3
Improve Access to Play, Leisure and Culture	19.6	20.4	23.4	22.0
Social Inclusion	19.6	16.7	18.8	18.6
Encourage Voice of CYP/ Ensure Rights	16.1	3.7	20.1	15.9
Other	8.9	24.1	13.0	14.4
Better Utilisation & Regulation of Technology	17.9	16.7	12.3	14.4
Policy Implementation Messages	1.8	5.6	18.2	12.1
Children at Risk/CIC	3.6	5.6	16.2	11.4
Improve Access & Range of Youth Services	5.4	1.9	13.6	9.5
Improve Access to Childcare and Early Years	1.8	7.4	11.7	8.7
Improve Disability Support & Services	1.8	5.6	10.4	7.6
Address Climate/Environment Concerns	12.5	1.9	6.5	6.8
Deal with COVID-19 Deficit	7.1	0.0	8.4	6.4

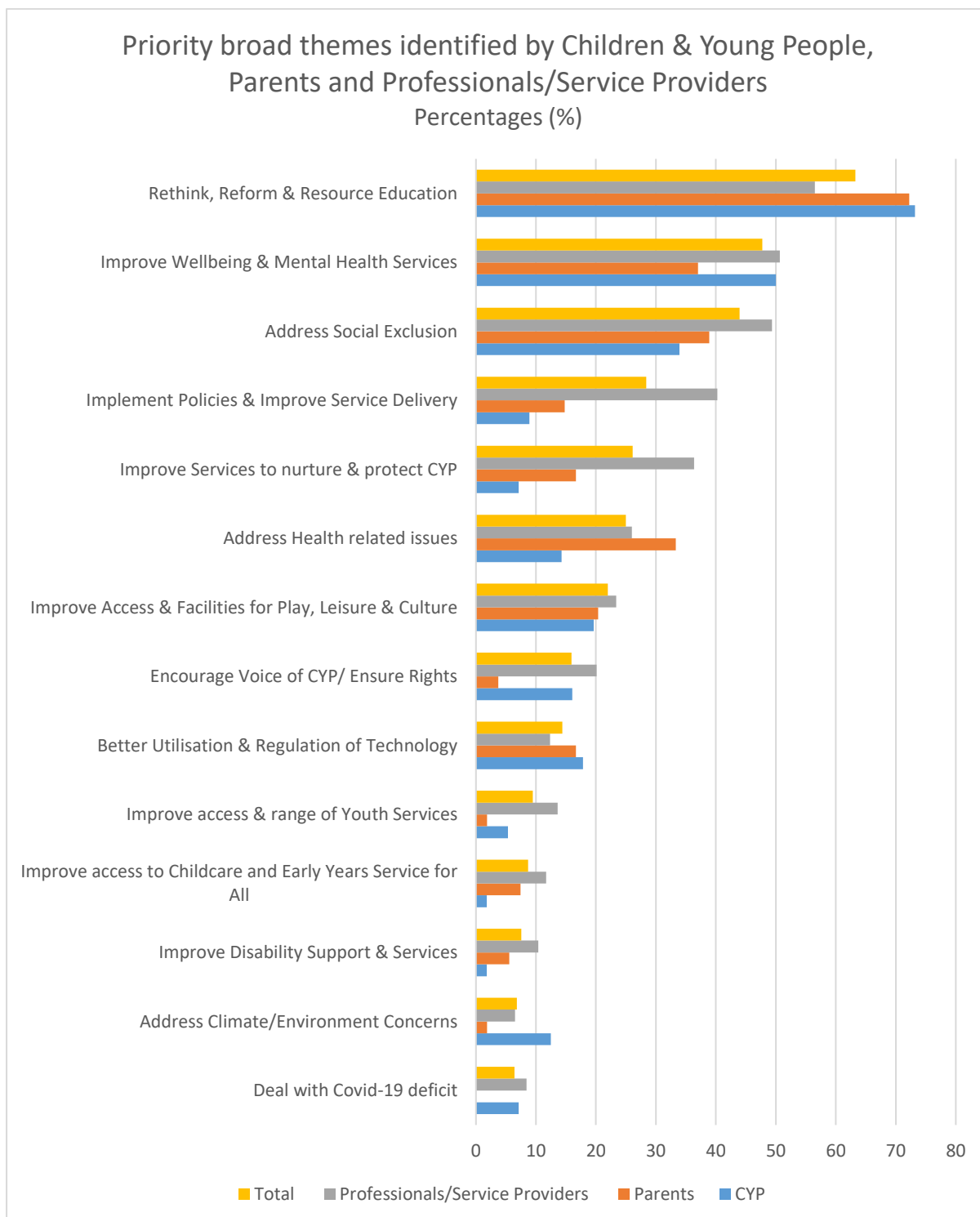
Notes:

- a) Percentages were calculated based on the numbers in each group who responded to the question.
- b) Other (n=38 /14% of respondents) included mentions of Waiting Lists (generic), Transport, Positive Media Representation, Choice, Masks and other single-issue comments.

The following Figure 3 provides an overview of the hierarchy of the most frequently occurring broad themes identified by all respondents as well as enabling comparisons

between the individual groupings of children and young people, parents and professionals/service providers.

Figure 3: Priority broad themes identified by Children and Young People, Parents and Professionals/Services providers after some themes were combined.



Note: For clarity, themes that have been combined, are not presented separately in this graph.

The hierarchy of broad priorities ranged from the need to Rethink, Reform and Resource Education which was mentioned by 63% of all respondents, to the need to deal with the COVID-19 deficit which was mentioned by 6% of respondents. The five most frequently occurring broad themes raised in the responses are presented in the Table 3 below which also presents variations in the priorities identified by the 3 individual groupings.

Table 3: An overview of the five most frequently occurring broad themes identified for the new policy framework by group

Priorities for the new policy framework	Children and Young People	Parents	Professionals / Service Providers	Total
First most frequently occurring theme	Rethink, Reform and Resource Education (73.2%)	Rethink, Reform and Resource Education (72.2%)	Rethink, Reform and Resource Education (56.5%)	Rethink, Reform and Resource Education (63.3%)
Second most frequently occurring theme	Improve Wellbeing & Mental Health Services (50%)	Address Social Exclusion (38.9%)	Improve Wellbeing & Mental Health Services (50.6%)	Improve Wellbeing & Mental Health Services (47.7%)
Third most frequently occurring theme	Address Social Exclusion (33.9%)	Improve Wellbeing & Mental Health Services (37%)	Address Social Exclusion (49.4%)	Address Social Exclusion (43.9%)
Fourth most frequently occurring theme	Improve Access to Play, Leisure and Culture (19.6%)	Health related issues (33.3%)	Implement Policies & Improve Service Delivery (40.3%)	Implement Policies & Improve Service Delivery (28.4%)
Fifth most frequently occurring theme	Utilise & Regulate Technology (17.9%)	Improve Access to Play, Leisure and Culture (20.4%)	Improve Services to Help Nurture & Protect CYP (36.4%)	Improve Services to Help Nurture & Protect CYP (26.1%)

Overview

It is notable that the top three most frequently mentioned broad priority themes are similar across all three groupings of CYP, Parents and Practitioners, namely Rethink, Reform and Resource Education which was mentioned by 6 out of 10 respondents (63%); **Improve Wellbeing & Mental Health Services**, mentioned by almost 5 out of 10 respondents (48%); and **Address Social Exclusion**, mentioned by just over 4 out of 10 respondents (44%).

Implement Policies & Improve Service Delivery was the fourth most frequently occurring theme mentioned by 28% of all respondents and by 40% of Practitioners but mentioned by

only 15% of Parents and 9% of CYP. The fifth most frequently occurring broad theme was the combined **Improve Services to help nurture & protect CYP** which was mentioned by just over a quarter (26%) of all respondents.

Among the top five priorities identified by CYP, the fourth most frequently occurring theme was **Improve Access to Play, Leisure and Culture** (20%), followed by **Better Utilisation & Regulation of Technology** (mentioned by 18% of CYP). Parents had identified **Health related issues** (33%) as well as **Improve Access to Play, Leisure and Culture** (20%) among their five most frequently occurring themes.

5.1 First most frequently occurring theme – Rethink, Reform and Resource Education

The top priority issue for all groups centred on the need to Rethink, Reform and Resource Education. This overall broad theme was identified as a priority by 63% of all respondents and specifically by 73% of CYP; 72% of parents; and 56.5% of practitioners. This theme consisted of considerations about Rethinking Approaches to education and the need to reform the education system. There were some overlaps in these sub-themes, and many of the suggestions also included mentions about resources. More detail on suggestions for improving the lives of children and young people through education can be found in Section 4.2.

5.1.1 Rethinking Education

The Irish educational system is too reliant on number productions and human capital investment to truly deliver a sociology of education which delivers to childhood the skills and tools for mental, emotional, social, communicative and physical development (Practitioner)

Over half of respondents (53%) raised priorities specifically related to educational approaches, and this included 59% of Parents; 57% CYP; and 49% of Practitioners. The sub-themes raised included the need for:

- Incorporate more evidence-based approaches to education including later school starting age (over 5 years); reduced class sizes; cultivate a less stressful school environment for all children; less homework; review school opening hours
- Tailored/Alternative ways of learning to meet individual needs/cater for all types of learners
- Improve Extra-/Co-curricular activities for social and personal development; enable more time to play; afterschool clubs and homework clubs

- Consider a more inclusive model of education - engage all stakeholders in the process of developing an inclusive model to include families, educators, therapists, pupils, etc
- Training for teachers should include an inclusive education component
- Promote healthy lifestyles and nutrition; offer breakfast clubs and free school meals
- Review over-reliance on technology in schools
- A more consistent and effective approach to Bullying across all schools

5.1.2 Reforming Education

Teachers need to calm down when speaking about the Junior Cert, I understand the Leaving Cert, but it's a very stressful experience, personally the stress for the JC was on from first year. (Young Person, aged 13-18)

The need to reform education was raised by a quarter (25%) of the respondents, and this theme was mentioned more by CYP (39%) and parents (33%) than by professionals/service providers (17.5%). The sub-themes that were raised within this theme included the need to:

- Secularise Education – remove church control and consider non-denominational schooling
- Increase choice of type of school to attend – single sex schools; co-educational; educate together
- Reform exam system relating to both the Junior Cert and the Leaving Cert
- Incorporate alternative education routes and alternative accreditation
- Revise the Curriculum – have more focus on life skills (including welfare skills/money management/healthy living/drugs and alcohol/ social and emotional wellbeing); diversity and respect (include human/child rights, education on racism, black history, gender-based violence, consent, boundaries, homophobia, LGBTQ+); review the sex education programme; more focus on artistic expression, creative arts, dance, and drama; more access to science and technology; incorporating online safety education; more opportunities for physical activities; introduce mindfulness to the curriculum; career guidance and counselling in all schools
- Attendance in school - could be better supported with more resources but also more understanding of the reasons why so many are lost to the school system; establish a multi-agency working group to establish a process for assessing school placement breakdown; some calls for stricter enforcement of penalties against parents of non-attenders

5.1.3 Resourcing Education

Invest in school nurse teams in every single secondary school in Ireland (to deal with range of issues from) minor injuries, to offering psychological support to students with emotional / anxiety / stress problems (as well as) child protection concerns (Practitioner)

A number of comments relating to rethinking and reforming education also included specific mention of resources or funding:

- Better educational resources -in general
- More funding for assessment, treatments and learning support including classroom assistants
- Equal access to supports / address inequality in education / review costs of education
- Additional educational support for vulnerable children and children who are struggling
- Provide wrap-around support for young people who have a breakdown in their education
- Schools must be supported by fully resourced mental health and disability teams

5.2 Second most frequently occurring theme – Improve Wellbeing and Mental Health Services

This combined theme represents the proportion of respondents who identified that mental health services and/or social, emotional and mental wellbeing was a priority. In total 48% of respondents identified this as a priority area and this was specifically mentioned by 51% of practitioners; 50% of CYP and 37% of parents.

5.2.1 Mental Health Services

Greater investment in mental health services (Ireland spends only 5% of health budget on Mental Health rather than the WHO recommended 12%.(Organisation, Written Submission)

Almost 3 out of ten respondents (28%) identified mental health services as a priority with some slight variations between the three groups with 31% of practitioners, 25% of CYP and 20% of parents identifying this theme as a priority. The range of issues raised in relation to mental health services included the need to:

- Make mental health services for CYP easier to access
- Reduce waiting lists
- Improve the range of specialist support services for CYP (including non-medical evidence-based interventions such as Systemic Psychotherapy, non-violent resistance, DBT, CBT and Family based treatments)
- Improve quality of available services
- Provide more appropriate responses to self-harm and suicide
- Reform and resource CAMHS
- Improve specialised mental health services for CYP with disabilities.
- End the practice of placing CYP in adult residential facilities

5.2.2 Social, Emotional & Mental Wellbeing

More help and attention [needs to be] given to mental health - harsh and not very understanding school and home environments can make life difficult for young people (Young Person)

Support raising resilient children by coordinating and championing a robust child-centred mental wellbeing ecosystem, digitally and in-person delivered, with prevention and early intervention at the heart while showcasing the benefits of a universal active listening service to underpin this (Service Provider. Written Submission)

This theme was identified as a priority by 26.5% of all respondents, and specifically by 29% of CYP, 27% of practitioners and 22% of parents. The range of issues mentioned in relation to Social, Emotional & Mental Wellbeing included the need for:

- a ‘robust child centred mental wellbeing ecosystem’
- evidence-based parenting programmes that support parents of children with anxiety and other mental health challenges
- More effective online and in-person mental health supports and programmes for CYP
- A strategy to prevent or reduce levels of ACEs at a population level
- Effective promotion of the importance of mental well-being and awareness that mental health is an integral part of living an active and healthy lifestyle
- collaboration between schools and fully resourced mental health teams to improve mental wellbeing

5.3 Third most frequently occurring theme – Address Social Exclusion

This broad theme combines three inter-related themes of Housing/Homelessness; Poverty and Wealth; and Social Inclusion matters. Approximately 44% of respondents identified one or more of these themes relating to Social Inclusion with 49% of practitioners, 39% of parents and 34% of CYP identifying this as a priority for the next CYP Strategy.

5.3.1 Housing/Homelessness

This was identified as a priority by almost a quarter of the respondents (24%) consisting of 29% of practitioners; 17% of parents and 16% of CYP. The specific priorities listed under this theme included:

- Need to end homelessness – no child or family should be homeless
- Provide appropriate emergency accommodation for children and their families
- Need to ensure quality social housing
- Increase housing to meet needs
- Housing developments should include mandatory green spaces.
- Develop a Family Homelessness Strategy that will eliminate child homelessness in lifetime of the framework
- The need to retrofit/insulate homes across the country – in relation to the upcoming Government Energy Saving scheme

Homelessness - according to the Children's Rights Alliance (CRA), in December 2021 there were 2,451 homeless children and almost one in four of homeless Dublin children had been living in emergency accommodation for more than two years. (Professional/Service Provider)

5.3.2 Poverty and Wealth

Priorities relating to poverty and wealth were identified by over one fifth of all respondents (22%) and specifically raised by practitioners (28%); parents (15%) and by CYP (14%). The main subthemes raised were the need to:

- Acknowledge the devastating impact of poverty on CYP
- Put tackling child poverty at the heart of the next CYP Strategy
- Draw up an action plan to eradicate child poverty with clear actionable targets
- Provide more support and resources for CYP living in poverty
- Address low pay - increase minimum wage or create a citizen/living wage
- Address cost of living issues.

5.3.3 Address Social Exclusion

This theme was identified as a priority by 19% of all respondents, and specifically by 20% of CYP, 19% of practitioners and 17% of parents. The priorities mentioned in relation to the need to address social exclusion included:

- Equality and equal opportunities for everyone
- Equal access to services, resources and facilities for everyone who needs them particularly vulnerable children (see Appendix 4)
- Promote tolerance, respect and awareness
- More inclusion and integration
- Gender equality
- LGBTI+ rights, recognition and supports (one respondent suggested need to reduce information on LGBTI+ but teach acceptance)
- Tackle social isolation
- Reduce the digital divide for CYP

5.4 Fourth most frequently occurring theme – Implementation Messages

This combined theme represents the proportion of respondents who identified aspects of service delivery and/or policy implementation as a priority. In total 28% of respondents identified this as a priority area and this was specifically mentioned by 40% of practitioners; 15% of parents and 9% of CYP. (For details of Implementation Messages, see Section 5).

5.5 Fifth most frequently occurring theme – Improve Services to help nurture and protect CYP

This broad theme combines the two inter-related themes of Parental Support, Prevention and Early Intervention alongside CYP at Risk/In Care. Over a quarter (26.1%) of respondents identified one or more of these themes relating to Family Support with 36% of practitioners; 18% of parents and 7% of CYP identifying this as a priority.

5.5.1 Parental Support, Prevention and Early Intervention

Simplify a fractured delivery framework (community, voluntary services with multiple short term funding streams, which ultimately try to plug the gaps the state services are unable to fill) – towards an integrated streamline at national, regional and local level – promote integration alignment between

national and regional strategic plans based on need; funded via national channels, and administered via state services; longer term funding for services coupled with simplified reporting mechanisms (Practitioner, Responding on behalf of an Organisation)

A quarter (25%) of respondents identified that Parental Support, Prevention & Early intervention was a priority – and this was specifically raised by 36% of practitioners; 15% of parents and 7% of CYP. Suggestions were grouped into the following subthemes:

- **Parenting and Family Support** – provide Universal Parenting Support; Support parents on a consistent, national basis under First 5, the National Model of Parenting Support Services and the European Child Guarantee; provide accessible parenting programmes and family supports; encourage/enable localised support and facilities for all families.
- **Prevention & Early Intervention** – Additional Home Visiting and Parent Engagement Programmes for parents who may be struggling; holistic approach to family intervention; Address Parental alienation and provide support to all including separated parents; consider volunteer parenting mentoring scheme; accessible youth services for all CYP.
- **Investment** - front-loading of funding in prevention and early intervention services; further investment in training, assessment and therapies; properly resource children and family services; financial support for children in difficulties in non-DEIS areas
- **Targeted supports** for more vulnerable or disadvantaged CYP and families such as CYP from Traveller and Roma communities, CYP who are refugees/asylum seekers/living in Direct Provision; young carers – (See Appendix 4 for complete listing of children and young people considered to be vulnerable by respondents).
- **Specific support for vulnerable families and CYP** – need for wraparound / interagency / holistic family support; provide housing and healthcare for vulnerable families; support for single parent families; support for separated parents / access centres for contact; support systems for parents including those struggling with poverty and/or addiction
- **Safety** – ensure that CYP are safe and protected from harm particular focus on children who are vulnerable; address concerns expressed by girls about not feeling safe in their communities; enable safe spaces to for CYP to voice concerns; role of public health to check for safeguarding throughout childhood; safeguarding training for staff, parents and CYP; ensure children are growing up safer by endorsing a national child abuse/maltreatment surveillance system and providing a 24-hour social work service.

5.5.2 Children and Young People at Risk or In Care

Priorities relating to CYP at Risk or in Care were put forward by 11% of respondents and were specifically raised by 16% of practitioners; 6% of parents and by 4% of CYP. The main subthemes included:

- **Children at Risk – CYP Living With Domestic Abuse** or experiencing the impact of DSGBV –: provide additional supports; address concerns expressed by CYP about contact with parent who was known abuser; need for more therapeutic services for children living with DA; address domestic violence in young relationships; more support needed from schools, GPs, Gardaí, and housing.
- **Children at Risk – Child Abuse** - need for a cross-sectoral approach to deal with child protection issues; need to provide safe and accessible services through schools; address emerging issues including sexual abuse (including peer-on-peer sexual abuse), sexual violence/exploitation, grooming from criminal gangs; need for more support for trauma-informed work; more needs to be done to prevent/reduce Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's).
- **Children in Care and Placements** – more support for CYP in care; no child should be placed outside the state; need to provide suitable care placements; increase foster care capacity
- **Children Leaving Care and Aftercare** – need for more aftercare supports; provide care until age 21 or 26; support and seek redress for child victims.

5.6 Health-Related Issues

A quarter (25%) of all respondents identified issues relating to health in their priorities, and this theme featured in the top five priorities of parents who responded to this question, with a third of all parents identifying health as a priority (33%). The main concerns raised about health included the need to:

- Improve quality of healthcare services for CYP
- Improve access to healthcare including the need to reduce waiting lists
- Expand access to medical card scheme to all children
- Expand child health services including screening for all health care needs
- Have more advanced and specialist roles to meet the health needs of all CYP
- Promote physical health behaviours and active lifestyle
- Improve diet and knowledge of nutrition of CYP – healthy diet; grow your own; increase price of junk food; reduce consumption of processed foods

- Address gender-related health service gaps
- Support more YP to reduce drug/alcohol intake

5.7 Play, Leisure and Cultural Amenities

“Article 31 of the UNCRC values children’s play independently of its social and developmental imperatives; therefore, equally important is the need to value play as important for its own sake in the successor national policy framework.” (Organisation, Written Submission)

“Better facilities in communities for play (tennis court, basketball court and football pitch should be in every village in Ireland) ... Do not let another housing estate be built without some onus on developers to at least put in a flat green area where children can kick a ball.” (Parent)

This topic was identified by 22% of all respondents. It was the fourth most frequently occurring theme mentioned by CYP (20%) and the fifth most frequently occurring theme mentioned by parents (20%). The specific priorities mentioned were:

- More outdoor amenities – more green spaces including in new housing estates; child-friendly spaces; outdoor activities; play spaces; skate parks; hiking or walking trails etc.
- Make more use of natural resources such as rivers / sea / mountains
- More creative, cultural and community spaces for teenagers including Youth Cafes
- More sports and leisure facilities – pitches, swimming pools
- The need for more group activities that are not sports
- Equal access to facilities
- Safety / safe spaces
- Sustainable communities – active transport including cycle lanes
- Introduce the leisure card as per Planet Youth recommendations

5.8 Better Utilisation and Regulation of Technology

This topic was mentioned by 14% of respondents and featured as the fifth most frequently occurring theme mentioned by CYP (18%).

There was some acknowledgment of the benefits of technology including access during the pandemic, and recommendations were made about the need to harness and build upon

CYP's positive experiences of using technology for education, youth work, training opportunities etc.

However concerns were also expressed, including:

- Need for regulation, monitoring and accountability - ensure the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill works for CYP; need to protect data; address internet safety concerns – there should be no tolerance of online bullying and abuse; children need to be protected from easy access to inappropriate content
- Need for more education and awareness for parents as well as children about online safety issues, including the impact of social media on body image and potential negative impact of some influencers

Other priorities were identified by the following proportions of respondents: CYP Voices / Child Rights (prioritised by 16% of all respondents); Youth Services (prioritised by 9.5%); Childcare and Early Years (prioritised by 9%); Disability (prioritised by 8%); Climate/Environment (prioritised by 7%); and the COVID-19 deficit (prioritised by 6%). These priorities are described in more detail in Section 6.

Section 6: Implications for Service Delivery and Policy

In responding to the various questions throughout the consultation, respondents raised a number of specific points relating to service delivery and policy matters. This section brings together some of the key messages that respondents made about the proposed strategy for children and young people, along with several cross-cutting messages, and finally some examples of theme specific messages regarding Service Delivery and Policy Implementation.

Summary Box

- Ten key messages for the new framework to consider
- Five cross-cutting messages about service delivery and policy implications
- Specific messages relating to the main themes and priorities raised in this consultation

6.1 Specific Messages for the New Strategy

Ten key messages were identified in relation to the proposed new framework: widen the age range; take a rights-based approach; incorporate CYP Participation into the framework; focus on eradicating child poverty; have more emphasis on prevention and early intervention including raising awareness of Adverse Childhood Experiences and developing services that are trauma-informed; prioritise vulnerable CYP; agree new strategy to be led by DCEDIY, but incorporate responsibility across all Departments; align the new strategy with DCEDIY's expanded remit; embed a cross departmental approach within the new strategy based on relevant intersecting policies and strategies; and incorporate priorities contained in recent relevant EU strategies.

Need to Widen Age Range

Some respondents felt that BOBF was very focused on specific needs of younger children and that the new framework should have more focus on the wider range of needs of all CYP up to 24.

Take a Rights-Based Approach

There were a number of calls for the new framework to be guided in full by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and these rights should be ratified into Irish law.

Incorporate CYP Participation into the Strategy

It was suggested that the new policy framework should commit to hearing and valuing what CYP people have to say about issues that affect them and that a New National Strategy on CYP's Participation could be established to mirror the life span of the next framework. There was a suggestion to enhance capacity of current structures such as the CYPSC.

Need to Focus on Eradicating Child Poverty

The next framework should include a broad action plan on child poverty, consider setting up a national council child poverty sub-committee, and incorporate the Child Guarantee National Action Plan and EU Child Guarantee as part of the Framework.

More focus on Prevention and Early Intervention and Promoting Resilience

In order to reduce the number of CYP who end up in crisis situations, some respondents highlighted the need to include the concept of 'Progressive Universalism' in relation to the availability and access to services for all families, and specific accessible support and targeted services for families who are struggling. A number of practitioners thought the new strategy should aim to increase awareness of Adverse Childhood Experiences and to develop services that are trauma-informed.

Prioritise Vulnerable CYP

This was a message raised by many respondents throughout the consultation, including a plea from one organisation that children who require services from both TUSLA and the HSE should be a specific priority within the category of vulnerable CYP.

Cross Departmental Strategy

A number of professionals and organisations proposed that the new strategy should be led by DCEDIY, but that responsibility should be shared across all relevant Departments. It was also suggested that this proposed arrangement requires clear targets, resources, accountability and leadership.

Align new Strategy with new DCEDIY remit

One agency advised that the new framework could be “strategically aligned with DCEDIY’s expanded remit” concerning equality, disability and integration with a focus on achieving tangible improvements for children experiencing inequality and disadvantage.

Mapping of relevant Cross-Departmental Policies and Strategies

One organisation advised that prior to the writing of the strategy, there should be “a mapping of relevant intersecting policies and strategies across Departments and agencies” and offered examples of strategies that have potential implications for interdepartmental and interagency actions such as the Child Protection and Welfare Strategy 2017 – 2022 (TUSLA), the Youth Justice Strategy 2021 – 2027 (Department of Justice) and Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (HSE).

Link with EU Strategies

Another suggestion was for the new national framework to incorporate the priorities set out in the EU’s Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2021-2024 and the Council of Europe’s Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022-2027.

6.2 Cross Cutting Messages Regarding Service Delivery and Policy Implementation

There were 5 main cross-cutting messages about services for CYP which included the need for collaboration to ensure better services for CYP; need for full implementation of specific existing policies; need to review some existing policies; address key barriers to delivery of services and supports for CYP; and the need for appropriate data and research to inform progress of the strategy.

6.2.1 Need for Collaboration

There were many calls for a wider culture of cooperation, co-ordination and collaboration across departments and agencies in order to improve the lives of all children. The need for better integration between specific services was highlighted for example between mental health and education in order to improve mental wellbeing of CYP; and between education, health and youth services in order to deliver age-appropriate programmes more effectively (e.g. social skills; sex education; transitions, school refusal etc.). Many respondents felt that there should be better communication and information-sharing between practitioners working with CYP, such as social workers, psychologists, teachers, youth workers etc.

6.2.2 Implementation of Existing Policies, Strategies and Recommendations to Improve Services and Outcomes for CYP

There were many calls for relevant existing national policies and strategies to be more fully implemented. However, one organisation cautioned against the new framework just becoming *“an overarching repository for the many and wide-ranging commitments and initiatives concerning children and young people set out under existing or pending national policies and strategies”*.

The following existing policies and commitments (listed in alphabetical order) were identified by respondents as needing to be more fully implemented and resourced (some of these policies are referred to in relation to specific themes in Section 6.3):

- Accessible environments for CYP with disabilities
- Aistear - early childhood curriculum framework for all children from birth to 6 years in Ireland
- Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures
- Children First Guidelines - Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017
- Children’s Protection (Safeguarding) Policy
- Children’s Rights Alliance 2022 report card – need to implement all recommendations including education, special education & early years
- Cost of Disability in Ireland Report 2021 – address through a cross-departmental approach; opportunity to work on this under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy with a focus on anti-poverty initiatives for CYP with disabilities
- Draft National Standards for Children’s Social Services and /overarching National Standards for care and support of children
- Disability Act (2005)
- European Child Guarantee -initiative to address child poverty and social exclusion
- Family and Child Relationship Act (2015)
- First 5 A Whole-of-Government-Strategy for Babies Young Children and Families 2019-28
- Free schoolbook scheme in Ireland – need to develop this scheme further
- ‘Home Works’: A Study on the Educational Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness and Living in Emergency Accommodation - implement recommendations
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment report – need for progress

- National Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy and DSGBV Implementation Plan
- National Model for Parenting Support Services
- National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision Making 2015 - 2020
- Review of Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) Operating System in Ireland (2022)- expand access to free and subsidised ELC
- Review of Out-of-School Education Provision 2022
- National Model of Care for Paediatric Healthcare Services in Ireland
- Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC), 2022-2028
- Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare
- Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People
- Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 (PHAA)
- Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery (2017-2025)
- Safe Nurse Staffing and Skill Mix extended to all areas of health service including ID sector
- Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone
- Sláintecare Implementation Strategy & Action Plan 2021 — 2023
- Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) – needs adequate resourcing to ensure guidelines are implemented
- Warmth and Wellbeing Warmer Homes Scheme
- Youth Justice Strategy 2021 - 2027

6.2.3 Review of Existing Policies or Services

There was acknowledgement of new and upcoming legislation designed to positively impact children in the areas of family justice, online safety, and mental health. It was also identified that a review of the National Action Plan on Bullying is taking place.

There were a number of calls *to review (rather than implement) existing legislation and policy* in relation to the following: the Childcare Act; the Children’s Act - including provisions in relation to the consequences of criminal activity and requests to raise the age of Criminal Activity; and the EPSEN Act.

There were also some calls *to review and reform systems and services* including Child Protection Services; Early Years (including need to develop a DEIS type model for ELC settings); Education; the Family Court system; and Mental Health Services including CAMHS.

6.2.4 Need to Address Systemic Issues Across All Services for CYP

A number of respondents highlighted limitations and difficulties in the provision and delivery of services and supports for CYP including: the need *to improve access* to relevant facilities and services for all CYP aged 0-24, and to have *more regulation of services* to ensure quality, consistency and streamlined approach. Review mechanisms for accountability and best governance underpinning service provision. *Difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers* who work with CYP was highlighted as was the *need for training* to help staff to deliver specific programmes with CYP. Some professionals thought it was necessary to provide training for policy and decision makers who may be out of touch about the needs of CYP. Some respondents thought that it would be beneficial for all staff working with CYP to receive training on trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences. One organisation suggested having a nationally recognised training programme for all staff who work with CYP. A number of respondents also highlighted the need to improve funding cycles (e.g., 3-5 years) and to have more sustainable funding models for services that are designed for CYP.

6.2.5 Data and Research about CYP

the collection, storage and publication of reliable, detailed data is key for Ireland to comply with its international obligations but also for the Authority and other national bodies to be able to carry their functions of oversight, monitoring and good governance (Organisation, Written Submission)

Several organisations acknowledged that research on the lives and experiences of CYP such as the Growing Up in Ireland longitudinal study, has provided valuable data and enabled a more evidence informed approach to addressing CYP needs. However, a number of respondents identified some *gaps in base line data about CYP* such as the number of child carers and the views and experiences of children about Play. It was noted that the recent feedback from The Committee on the Rights of the Child highlighted the need for the Irish State Party to provide specific data to show how efforts were being made to address discrimination and disparities in the realisation of rights of CYP in Ireland. It may be useful

for the new strategy to consider the types of quantitative and qualitative data required to monitor progress in improving lives of CYP, including direct feedback from CYP themselves and particularly from CYP who are seldom heard.

6.3 Service Delivery and Policy Implementation Messages by Themes

There were a number of key messages regarding service delivery and policy associated with the main themes and priorities identified in this consultation. The main messages and some examples of suggestions made are provided in the tables below in relation to Education; Mental Health; Social Exclusion including Homelessness, Poverty and Need for greater Social Inclusion; Parenting Support, Prevention & Early Intervention; Vulnerable Children; Community Safety; Children at Risk/Children in Care; Justice System and Family Courts; Health; Alcohol and Drugs; Play, Leisure and Culture Matters; CYP Voice/Participation; Rights; Technology; Youth Services; Childcare and early years; Disability; Climate/Environment Matters and the COVID-19 deficit.

Education

Education was the key theme which emerged in this consultation. A number of priorities were identified in relation to the need to rethink and reform the ethos, content and delivery of education. In relation to specific policies, there was a call for a review of the SPHE curriculum, to deliver a broader and more comprehensive programme across both primary and secondary schools, and to include within the curriculum information on consent, sexual violence and LGBTQI+ identities and experiences. The need to make education and training courses more accessible was raised. The need to address bullying was another key message, as was the need to provide school children with a nutritious daily meal. A request was made for more support from HSE and Tusla with regard to keeping children safe in schools and across youth services, and to provide particular attention to vulnerable children including those in special schools and those who identify as LGBTQI+. The table outlines some of the policy messages made in relation to these points.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Reform the Education System	Rethink Educational Approach Reform Curriculum & Assessment Properly Resource Education	See Section 4.2 and Section 5.1
A Review of the SPHE curriculum is needed to provide a more comprehensive and consistent programme.	Deliver a more comprehensive, consistent sex education and relationship programme, across primary and second level school.	The recommendation from the 2019 Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills report on Relationships and Sexuality

	Include information on consent; sexual violence; LGBTIQ+ identities and experiences.	Education should be fully implemented.
Bullying - [A] recent meta-analysis of all bullying studies on the island of Ireland found that 22.4% of students in primary schools and 11.8% in post-primary were victims of bullying	Deliver a National Anti-bullying and Education campaign. Take a preventive approach, with appropriate wraparound services as needed. There is a need to provide a more inclusive environment in schools, including bathrooms.	The National Action Plan on Bullying (2013) must be reviewed and updated, as committed to under the 2020 Programme for Government and the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy.
Safeguarding	HSE and Tusla support is required for schools and youth services in relation to keeping CYP safe. Include initiatives designed to safeguard LGBTI+ children and young people Increased supervision of more vulnerable children in special schools.	See Section 4.3
Ensuring all children have a nutritious meal daily	Expand the free school meals programme – provide hot meals to more children	Widen focus of current policies to offer the school meals programme to more CYP
All CYP have access to education or training	Widen the access to education and training for CYP	The findings and actions from (DFHERIS) consultation process for the new National Access Plan 2022 – 2026 should be considered as part of the next Youth Strategy. Implement the Apprenticeship Action Plan, in particular actions relating to access for underrepresented groups.

Mental Health

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to Mental Health focused on the need to give parity of esteem to children and young people’s mental wellbeing as much as their physical wellbeing. The importance of providing effective early intervention strategies and services that best meet the needs of children and young people was highlighted, as was the need for a responsive crisis intervention service. There was a call to end the practice of young people under 18 being admitted to adult psychiatric wards. A suggestion was made for greater collaboration between mental health/counselling services and schools to best support CYP, and that available support services are widely promoted and signposted to.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Focus on CYP mental health and well being	Give parity of esteem to both CYP physical and mental health	Implement the <i>Sharing the Vision</i> strategy to improve mental health services for children and young people.
Early intervention and timely access	Establish better early intervention strategies Identify services and resources for early intervention.	See Section 4.1
Interagency work and collaboration	Work with education to provide professional counselling services.	Follow through on the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Ed Committee Report Mental Health and School Bullying (Aug 2021) to provide emotional counselling and therapeutic supports in all primary and secondary schools as an urgent priority. Same recommendation is made by the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science report on The Impact of COVID-19 on Primary and Secondary Education (January, 2021).
Information and Awareness, especially around Crisis Intervention	Signpost when appropriate and make appropriate referrals to crisis intervention services when needed. Take a preventative approach to CYP mental health and wellbeing.	
Service Delivery Issues	Introduce specific pathways for certain vulnerable groups of children such as children in care.	
YP on adult psychiatric wards	Provide additional support for CYP who do not reach the CAMHS threshold. Increase the number of mental health teams for CYP with Intellectual Disability.	Legislate to end the inappropriate practice of children being admitted to adult psychiatric units. Implement the recommendations outlined in <i>A Vision for Change</i> in relation to support for CYP with intellectual disabilities, increase the number of mental health teams to 29 for adults and 15 for children.

Social Exclusion - Housing/Homelessness

Housing and homelessness emerged as key issues in the consultation and as issues in urgent need of effective government attention and intervention. Specific groups were identified as needing priority or specific attention, including families with children; Irish Travellers; families living in Direct Provision; and children with disabilities.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Housing Crisis/ Homelessness	Reduce or freeze rents Provide affordable housing Provide accessible accommodation for students	Enshrine the Right to Housing into the constitution. Create a new Youth Homeless Strategy that aligns with the National Youth Strategy and the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy Consider the findings of the DFHERIS National Access Plan 2022-2026 as part of new Youth Strategy
Families living in Direct Provision	End Direct Provision	
Families with children	Go to the top of the housing list	
Irish Travellers	Councils obligated to provide appropriate accommodation for Irish Travellers	
Children living with a disability and their families	Provide social housing plans that are sensitive and responsive to the needs of children living with a disability	

Poverty

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to Poverty focused on the need to eliminate child poverty, to address income disparity and to address the needs of the most disadvantaged CYP, including those in precarious family situations, children from migrant or ethnic minority backgrounds and children with a disability. The need to address the health and welfare implications of poverty on CYP, such as the impact on nutrition, health, education, was highlighted.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Child Poverty	Eliminate child poverty	Set up Child Poverty Action Plan and Government Task Force Use Logic models approach rather than capabilities approach Introduce Cross Departmental policies to address poverty; Poverty proof all policies in relation to children Employ a multi-agency approach to address youth unemployment and poverty Address the issues of the hidden poor.
Health and welfare impact of poverty	Guarantee effective and free access to: - early childhood education and care -school- based activities - at least one healthy meal every day for children - healthy nutrition	The national policy framework should address these gaps to ensure that children and young people have access to services in their communities via targeted funding. Expand the School Meals Programme

	- adequate housing - healthcare	EU Child Guarantee Implement Integrate Ireland's commitments under the ECG and inclusion of child poverty as a key priority in new national framework
Income	Review what constitutes adequate income Increase awareness of available income supports through national campaign Offer better pay conditions	Legislate on the minimum wage – increase it Pilot a universal basic income Equalise the minimum wage for YP/ and job seekers and social welfare payment Match pay and benefits to cost of living Review social welfare payments as a pathway out of poverty
Children Experiencing specific disadvantage – children in precarious family situations; from migrant or ethnic minority background; children with a disability	Increase funding and staffing ratios	Deliver on Roadmap to Social inclusion. Make the Child Guarantee National Action Plan an integral part of the Policy Framework.

Need for Better Social Inclusion

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to Social Inclusion focused on the need to improve outcomes on equality issues, and to improve services and supports for children and young people. Some mentioned the need to improve services for CYP in rural areas; for those who are vulnerable; and for children and young people who are on waiting lists for assessments and treatment.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Equality	Progress the actions and outcome of key equality strategies	Progress the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy National Youth Strategy, National Strategy for Women and Girls, National Strategy on Children. Enacting the Criminal Justice (Hate Crime) Bill, with an accompanying national strategy on equality and anti-discrimination. Enacting a legislative ban on conversion therapy, covering both a person's sexual orientation and gender identity
In general, many of the services and supports for children and young people are inaccessible, poor quality – across a wide range of services	Improve facilities and services for all CYP 0-24; with particular focus on CYP who are vulnerable; need for more relevant and accessible services, better services in rural areas.	Implement evidence-based programmes

	Address waiting lists for screening, assessments and services. Address funding including improve funding cycles	
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Parenting Support / Prevention / Early Intervention

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to Parenting Support, Prevention and Early Intervention focused on the need to provide parenting support and to deliver prevention and early intervention services. Raising awareness of and responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences was also identified as a priority issue, which, it was suggested, be tackled through a whole government approach.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Parenting Support	Set ambitious targets and investment to provide support to parents and families.	Implement First 5 strategy in full.
Prevention/Early Intervention		First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 It is vital that next Framework restates the commitment to implement this strategy in full.
Address ACEs	Conduct a national ACE study Awareness training for policy makers, service managers and staff about ACEs and Trauma	Deliver a whole of government approach to the management of ACEs

Vulnerable Children

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to Vulnerable Children focused on the need to focus on and support the most vulnerable groups of children and young people living in Ireland. There was a call to provide more support to CYP living with or experiencing Domestic Abuse and to address the impact of alcohol harm in childhood in a systematic way. Young Carers were identified as a marginalised and vulnerable group with particular needs that should be recognised and addressed.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
The most vulnerable groups of children	Identify and prioritise children and young people who are particularly vulnerable	See Section 4.3 and Section 4.5
CYP living with Domestic Abuse or experiencing the impact of DSGBV	Provide additional supports; Address concerns expressed by CYP about contact with Parents who are known abusers; Need for	National Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy and DSGBV Implementation Plan

	more therapeutic services for children living with DA; Address Domestic violence in young relationships; more support from schools for CYP living with DA	
Ensure childhood is free from alcohol harm	Increased recognition of problematic role of alcohol in the home (can place children at risk of being involved with child protection and welfare services) Provide better awareness strategies and addiction support services	Implement First 5 strategy in full. Implement the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 (PHAA)
Marginalised Young Carers	Mitigate the risks associated with the role of young carer. Recognise the marginalised role of Young Carers and realise the rights of young Carers	Commit to mitigating the risks associated with being a Young Carer within DCEDIY Statement of Strategy (2021-2023) Committing to mitigate associated risks would formally document Ireland's commitment to realising the rights of those impacted Enact legislation that realises the rights of young carers and achieves 2008 Council of Europe Youth Policy Agenda 2020

Safety in the Community

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to Safety in the Community focused on the need for interagency cooperation between the Gardaí and health and social services; and the need to improve relations between Gardaí and CYP through work in schools, community and youth services.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Policing	Interagency cooperation in the delivery of community safety – involve health, social work etc.	Follow through on the 'Report of the Commission on the Future of Policing' through interagency collaboration
Relations between CYP and Gardaí	Improved Gardaí community presence, working through school, youth services and community liaison work.	More resources to tackle drugs, drug gangs, grooming of young people etc.
A number of reports recommending changes in the delivery of policing services to children were cited		McNicholas, Fiona and Rooney, Louise (2021) 'The Garda Síochána and Child Mental Health: An investigation of pathways to crisis mental health care'; Shannon, Geoffrey (2017) Audit of the exercise by An Garda Síochána of the provisions of Section 12 of the Child Care Act 1991; Irish Penal Reform Trust (2019) Care and Justice: Children

		and Young People in Care and Contact with the Criminal Justice System; 9 Garda Inspectorate (2017) 'Responding to Child Sexual Abuse: A Follow up Review from the Garda Inspectorate'
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Child Protection/Children in Care

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to Child Protection/Children in Care focused on the need for better enforcement of safety and welfare measures for CYP, the need to provide specialist services to meet the needs of CYP in domestic abuse cases, for example, and the need for greater understanding of childhood abuse so as help to identify risk to inform protective strategies. Empowering children and young people to seek help and protect themselves from abuse was another key priority identified. Ways to support the needs and rights of CYP in care were identified including their rights around staying in care, being adopted, being financially supported, and their rights in relation to their birth parents. Ensuring help and support is widely available to CYP, through accessible helplines for example, was also listed as important.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
CYP safety and welfare	Needs better standards for enforcing safety and welfare of CYP Increase specialist services for child safety in domestic abuse cases	Tusla to disband or undergo an Independent Review Strengthen state capacity to respond to CP referrals
Available Social Work service – Crisis support	Provide a 24-hour Social Work service, which is available nationally for CYP, families and practitioners.	
Children lacking awareness or language to protect selves against abuse	Educate children on their safety – what is appropriate or not, give them the language to describe and report. Support children to speak out.	Include this within the Revised Relationship and Sexuality Education programme.
Childhood abuse There is a dearth in child abuse/maltreatment causality data to inform robust prevention and early intervention strategies and polices.	Champion services that can rollout Theraplay and Play Therapy – focus on building relationships, developing prosocial skills, regulating emotions, and demonstrating safe touch. We need better understanding about why child abuse/maltreatment happens, identify risk and protective	Publish a National Strategy for Child Sexual Abuse, Child Sexual Exploitation and Online Risks to Child Safety as recommended by the Garda Inspectorate. In Ireland, the commitment to undertake surveillance was given through the office of the Chief Medical Officer under the Department of Health providing

	factors, and build a national prevention strategy around these. Any surveillance system ought to be inclusive of all sectors supporting children who are abused/maltreated and not just statutory child protection and welfare (CPW) services.	the potential for a broader scope than the current CPW framework.
Awareness of Helplines and resources	Advertise these widely. Offer 24/7 availability	
CYP living in Residential care		Carry out regular inspections of residential care
Rights of CYP in care	Give CYP option to remain in care until 21 if needed. Give CYP in long term care the chance to be adopted Give YP leaving care financial support to at least 23 and full support to 26. Supersede children's rights over birth parent rights.	

Justice System and Family Courts

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation Justice System and Family Courts on the need for Family Court Judges to undertake training in the area of childhood abuse and child protection. There was a call for greater penalties for those who harm or abuse children. A call was also made for the age of criminal responsibility to be increased. The need for more child friendly access centres for parents to meet their children in a supervised location was highlighted.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Awareness of Family court Judges	Deliver specialist training for Family Court Judges on abuse and protection of CYP Family courts need to acknowledge the risk to CYP where there is Domestic Abuse	
Access centres	Provide appropriate access centres for supervised access.	
Penalties for those who abuse	More severe penalties for those convicted of harm or abuse of children.	Introduce stronger penalties and repercussions for grooming, paedophiles and rapists.
	Critical evaluation needed of Children's Act Provisions on consequences of criminal activity	Complete review of Childcare Act

Health

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to Health focussed on the need for timely and accessible health care; for an improved health and social care service, with better PHN services for children and families; and more flexible appointment options. There was a call for nursing teams to include a range of skills, experiences and competence to best meet the needs of CYP. A number of key actions for Government are listed below in relation to these priority issues.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Access to health services Improved health and social care	Offer a broader range of healthcare services for children and young people Facilitate Online health and social care appointments Facilitate Out of school hour appointments.	Address waiting lists Address Healthcare costs Address the shortage of GPs Deliver free health care Enable Medical Card when moving home. Implement recommendations in Sláintecare – provide funding to establish infrastructure.
Nursing Care	Provide better PHN services for children Ensure each nursing team includes nurses with a range of knowledge, experience, and competence to provide the services necessary for persons who require support from the services.	Align any service changes in Nursing with the National Children's Nursing Strategy and developments associated with Children's Health Ireland

Alcohol and Drugs

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to Alcohol focussed on the need to roll out a comprehensive alcohol education programme to Junior Cycle, and to focus on prevention rather than the need for intervention.²⁴ There was also a recommendation made to introduce an Informed Drugs Policy.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
CYP Alcohol Use – first drink age in Ireland 14-15 years – critical age for effective alcohol education	Roll out a comprehensive nation-wide alcohol education programme for Junior cycle students Make primary prevention the key goal (rather than intervention)	Implement the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 PHAA in full Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery - a health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017 – 2025

²⁴ According to UNESCO (2017), the earlier substance use begins, the more likely that negative immediate consequences and long-term impact will occur (UNESCO 2017, Good Policy and Practice in Health Education Booklet 10, "Education sector responses to use of alcohol")

		Introduce an informed Drugs Policy
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Play, Leisure and Culture

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to play, leisure and culture focussed on the need to address children’s play rights and to address the risks associated with play deprivation by making play accessible to the most vulnerable CYP. A call was made to conduct research to further understand play in children’s lives.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Enabling children to enjoy their Play Rights	Address children’s play rights for children of Ireland to better improve the lives of children, given the known benefits of play. Collect qualitative data to further supplement the quantitative data on children’s play.	Update the 2004 National Play Policy – Ready, Steady, Play and include updated information on play available in a hospital setting
Risk of play deprivation for children	Provide adequate green spaces, parks, and community spaces for young people to comply with the public sector duty on human rights and equality including Article 31. Provide access to safe and accessible play spaces or play opportunities for children with disabilities, children living in direct provision, children in poverty, children from the Traveller community and children who are in hospital.	Include children’s Play Rights in the national policy framework

CYP Voice / Participation

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to participation focussed on the need for CYP to be represented in decision making forums, in the decisions that affect them. The need for effective and meaningful youth participation was emphasised, as was the need to include seldom heard voices.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
CYP representation and influence in decision making bodies	Establish a National Youth Assembly. Strengthen provision for seldom heard children to exercise their right to be heard in decisions affecting them.	Develop and implement a new national strategy on children and young people’s participation.

	Further support and facilitate meaningful youth participation in the development and evaluation of labour market policies.	Develop and Implement the Youth Guarantee.
Seldom heard voices	Form new youth forums, councils, and parliaments to influence political decisions that affect CYP – with broader representation of specific groups of children and young people on these bodies.	Form a national panel of youth, to include seldom heard young voices, to inform the implementation of new BOBF2.

Rights

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to rights focussed on Children’s rights as enshrined in UNCRC, the representation of children’s voice in the judicial decisions and the need to provide training for the judiciary in areas where children’s rights are impacted.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Realising the full spectrum of rights children are entitled to (as enshrined in UNCRC)	Support mainstreaming children’s rights and implementing a child rights-based approach across the system and in respect of decisions affecting children (e.g., legislative, policy and budgetary measures)	Develop the new framework so it includes an appropriate focus on the UN CRC in respect of children and young people under 18 and has regard to the State’s obligations to both children and adults under other core human rights instruments.
Representation of children’s voice in judicial decisions affecting them.	Listen to the voice of the child or young person.	Follow through on the commitment within the Criminal Justice Sectoral Strategy 2022-2024 explore and develop options to provide for the recording and monitoring of ethnicity across the criminal justice system.
Training for judiciary	Establish a formal process whereby a child’s voice can be heard in all judicial decisions that may affect the child, including in the case where the child’s primary caregiver may be sent to prison.	
Need to take children’s right to non-discrimination into account.	Provide judicial training on the rights of the child in all decision-making where the child is affected.	Include, in the new policy framework, the development of better indicators on the impact of discrimination and/or disparities on children and young people in terms of their life experiences (including but not limited to their experiences of the criminal justice system) in order to benchmark accurately progress on key policy areas in the framework.

Technology

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to technology focussed on online safety, and the need for this to be part of education from pre-school. Need for regulation and legislation to protect CYP online was also called for.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Online safety	Embed online safety education from pre-school	Include online safety within the school curriculum Improve regulation of online providers. Strengthen legislation to protect CYP

Youth Services

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to youth services focused on the provision of services at both universal and targeted level, and the need to support and further invest in these services. The central role these services have in the lives of many CYP was highlighted.

Priority Issue	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Youth Service provision	Strengthen the provision of both universal and targeted youth services. Develop a Youth Work Development Plan, recognising the vital role that youth work services played in the lives of many young people, especially in marginalised communities during the pandemic and the role of youth work in contributing to all five outcomes in the previous BOBF Strategy.	National Policy Framework should recognise the role of youth work and non-formal education in CYP's personal, social and emotional development. Develop a new Youth Strategy with a limited number of targeted actions, with a clear implementation pathway and a focus on delivery.

Childcare and Early Years

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to childcare and early years matters focused on the significant influence early learning and care has on childhood outcomes, and the need to further invest in this sector. A recommendation was made for the regulation of the childminding sector.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Early childhood experiences and outcomes	'OECD/EU is clear that the ELC workforce is the single most influential factor in the quality of	Implement Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding

<p>Socioeconomic disadvantage</p> <p>A safe Childminding sector</p>	<p>children’s experiences in settings and their outcomes from participation. Investing in the quality of the workforce is one of the smartest, most effective, investments Governments can make in early childhood.’</p> <p>Ensure the implementation of universal and targeted measures in the Plan are robust, transparent and evidence based so as to win broad societal support.</p>	<p>Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare. Invest in Early Learning and Care (ELC) workforce as per the Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC), 2022-2028.</p> <p>Regulate childminding sector</p>
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Disability

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to disability matters focused on the timely assessment of need and provision of support for those with a disability. There was also a call for the provision of a more inclusive educational environment, and to ensure that all materials and communication are accessible to all children no matter what their ability.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
<p>Children with additional needs are two to three times more likely to experience bullying compared to their peers. According to the UN, “children with disabilities are six times as likely as other children to experience violence and abuse”</p> <p>Most children with complex disabilities continue to be excluded from ordinary life including education, sport, community events, social relationships and spaces,</p> <p>Disability assessment</p> <p>The main pieces of the EPSEN Act that benefit disabled children have yet to be commenced.</p> <p>A small number of Children who require Irish Sign Language</p>	<p>Address negative attitudes towards children with disabilities.</p> <p>Work towards a fairer society where all children are given the opportunity to learn and flourish in the same environment as per the UNCRPD and UNCRC.</p> <p>Ensure assessments of need and individual education plans are implemented as per EPSEN Act. Improve the coordination of sectors important to the lives of children and young people with disabilities and their families through a joint review of EPSEN and Part 2 of the Disability. Create a more inclusive educational environment though applying the principles of Universal Design and Universal Design for Learning that enables all students to prosper and grow and in particular for children with disabilities.</p> <p>Ensure communication, whether verbal, written, signed or digital,</p>	<p>This exclusion continues despite progressive policy statements (NCSE, 2018; NCSE, 2019) and legislative change (UNESCO, 1994; Government of Ireland, 2004; UNESCO, 2005; UN General Assembly, 2007) advocating for and legally guaranteeing every child's right to inclusion.</p> <p>Fully implement the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 .</p> <p>Deliver on a statutory requirement that public websites and mobile apps are accessible from June 2021.</p> <p>Implement the provisions of Section 5 of the Act (Education Supports for Deaf Children) (progress required as reported in Report on the Operation of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017).</p> <p>Progress the National Comprehensive employment strategy for YP with disabilities. Increase investment in personal assistance service.</p>

supports in schools can face severe difficulties.	is designed so that they are accessible, understandable and usable by all children.	Provide adequate support via Department of Social Protection for cost of living with sight loss. Address FASDs in systemic manner.
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Climate/Environment Matters

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to climate/environmental matters focussed on climate change solutions and sustainable energy policies.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
Still difficult for CYP to have a real say on this issue which will affect their future	More Youth parliaments or decision-making forums for CYP to express concerns and take action. Introduce legislation to protect the environment	Reduce voting age to 16 so that young people can have specific influence on this issue

COVID-19 Deficit

The key priorities and messages raised in the consultation in relation to COVID-19 deficit focused on the negative impacts of COVID-19 and how these should be addressed.

Key Messages	Action	Policy / Strategy messages
	Government needs to take action on evidence and recommendations relating to COVID-19	Joint Oireachtas Ed Committee report on COVID response (Jan 2021)

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms used in the Report

Term	Detail
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)	ACEs are potentially traumatic experiences that can occur during childhood and include experiencing violence, abuse or neglect; witnessing violence in the home or community; having a family member attempt or die by suicide; growing up in a home with substance misuse, mental health problems or instability due to parental separation or family members in jail. ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness and substance misuse in adolescents and adults. Creating and sustaining safe, stable and nurturing relationships and environments can prevent ACEs and help CYP reach their full potential. (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022)
Aftercare	When a child leaves care as they turn 18, the Agency may assist them in various ways to help transition into adult life. This assistance is described as aftercare. Under Section 45 of the Child Care Act 1991, Tusla has a statutory duty to prepare an aftercare plan for an eligible CYP. This plan identifies transitional supports that the young person may require, such as education, training, financial support and social network support.
Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)	The goal of AIM is to create a more inclusive environment in pre-schools, so all children, regardless of ability, can benefit from quality early learning and care. The model achieves this by providing universal supports to pre-school settings, and targeted supports, which focus on the needs of the individual child, without requiring a diagnosis of disability. https://aim.gov.ie/
DEIS	DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools. The DEIS programme is an internationally recognised programme that provides targeted resources to schools with the highest levels of concentrated educational disadvantage to support their students to have an equal opportunity to achieve their potential in education.
Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme	The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme is a universal two-year pre-school programme available to all children within the eligible age range. It provides children with their first formal experience of early learning prior to commencing primary school. https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2459ee-early-childhood-care-and-education-programme-ecce/
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder	FASD refers to the range of neurodevelopmental problems caused by pre-natal exposure to alcohol. The effects are diverse and impact the individual throughout their life course. (NHS)
Hub na nÓg	Hub na nÓg is a national centre of excellence and coordination on giving children and young people a voice in decision-making. It supports Government Departments, State agencies and non-government organisations to give children and young people a voice in decision-making with a particular focus on those that are seldom heard. https://hubnanog.ie/what-is-hub-na-nog/
Meitheal	A national practice model for multi-agency early intervention that enables the needs and strengths of children and their families to be properly identified and understood. A lead practitioner will identify a child's and their family's needs and strengths and then bring together a 'team around the child'.
Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS): Child and Youth Participation	Child and Youth Participation Programme of Work is the term used by Tusla to describe its programme of work that has been implemented to promote CYP's participation in decision-making in Tusla. It forms part of a wider body of work being implemented under Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme within Tusla since 2015.
Participation Framework	The National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision provides supports and guidance for departments, agencies and organisations to improve their practice in listening to CYP and giving them a voice in decision-making. https://hubnanog.ie/participation-framework/
UBU	UBU – Your Place Your Space is a government funded scheme that targets young people aged between 10 to 24 years who are experiencing economic, social and cultural disadvantage. The scheme provides funding to youth services that support young people to develop the personal and social skills required to improve their life chances. This includes services covering health and wellbeing, education, employment and social connectedness.

Appendix 2: List of Written Submissions

Reference	Source
WS1	Action for Children and Families of Prisoners Network
WS2	Alcohol Action Ireland
WS3	Barnardos – Christchurch Square Dublin
WS4	Barnardos – Empower Kids Project
WS5	BeLonG To Youth Services
WS6	Care Alliance Ireland
WS7	Childhood Development Initiative
WS8	Children in Hospital Ireland (CIH)
WS9	Clare Youth Service
WS10	COPE Galway Day Centre
WS11	Cork Education and Training Board
WS12	Drinkaware
WS13	Dublin City Community Cooperative
WS14	Early Childhood Ireland
WS15	Family Carers Ireland
WS16	Foróige
WS17	Galway City Partnership
WS18	HIQA Health Information and Quality Authority
WS19	Inclusion Ireland
WS20	INMO
WS21	ISPCC
WS22	Le Chéile Mentoring
WS23	Léargas
WS24	Macra Na Feirme
WS25	Maynooth University - Department of Applied Social Studies
WS26	Anonymous Individual # 1
WS27	Anonymous Individual # 2
WS28	National Disability Authority NDA
WS29	National Youth Council of Ireland NYCI
WS30	OCO Ombudsman For Children
WS31	One Family
WS32	Play Research Forum UCC

WS33	Prevention And Early Intervention Network PEIN
WS34	Respond Voluntary Housing Association
WS35	Roscrea Youth Union (RYU) Youth Working Individual Surveys
WS36	SICCDA South Inner City Community Development Association
WS37	South Roscommon FRC_1
WS38	South Roscommon FRC_2
WS39	South Roscommon FRC_3
WS40	The Policing Authority
WS41	Triple P UK and Ireland
WS42	Young Social Innovators
WS43	Young Voices EU Youth Dialogue

Appendix 3: Approach to Thematic Analysis of Responses to the 12 Open-ended Questions

Based on methodology devised by Braun and Clarke²⁵

1. Data familiarisation (read and re-read the online surveys, written submissions and supporting documents in full)
2. Generate initial codes (each code captures interesting features in the data in a systematic way)
3. Search for themes across the data (collate clusters of codes into themes)
4. Review themes (re-read material, validate codes and create a thematic map)
5. Define and name the themes (this involves further refining of themes, identifying sub-themes and naming or describing each specific theme)
6. Write-up the report (reflecting consultation questions)

Following the data familiarisation stage, initial codes were generated using the inductive process described above. Taking 10% of the responses, the report writers undertook a joint exercise to cross-check for consistency in the coding. This cross-checking task provided the researchers with a basis to discuss and agree initial codes and potential themes identified in the data and to generate a coding frame.

This initial coding frame was shared with the Project Team at DCEDIY for validation. The researchers continued to code the data, defining and further refining the codes, which were then clustered. This resulted in the identification of overarching themes and sub-themes which are presented in the report.

²⁵ Braun V and Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101

Appendix 4: Examples of Research and Policies Cited in Survey Responses and Submissions

Research Source	Example of quote from survey/submission	Theme
Amarach and YSI	<p>A recent survey conducted by Amarach and YSI on GenZ (1000+ young people) found young people describing the mood of their generation as anxious. Seven in 10 believe the biggest issue facing youth is depression or anxiety (an increase of 8% since 2019). This is followed by fear and anxiety about the future (59%). https://www.youngsocialinnovators.ie/learning-lab/research-and-insights/</p> <p>The recent survey on GenZ conducted by Amarach and YSI indicates that their greatest fears are unaffordable living costs (79%) and climate change (78%). Three in 10 believe that financial security is the greatest sign of a successful life, an increase of 10% from 2019, while making a difference to your community has decreased from 39% in 2019 to 24% in 2021.</p>	Mental Health Climate change
CDI	<p>Previous research by CDI identified some fundamental changes to housing policy which could improve quality of life and outcomes for children and families: https://www.cdi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/CDI-Housing-Policy-Summary-v3.pdf</p>	Housing / Homelessness
Central Statistics Office	<p>The findings of the 2019 Survey on Income and Living Conditions found that 8.1% of children are living in consistent poverty and 15.3% are at risk of poverty</p>	Income Poverty
Children in Hospital Ireland (CIH)	<p>Research carried out by Children in Hospital Ireland (CIH) and published in its report, Childhood Illness, Financial Stress (2020) provides compelling evidence of the range of non-medical financial costs which may be incurred by parents whose child requires prolonged and/or repeated hospital care. https://childreninhospital.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Children-in-Hospital-Report-1-FINAL.pdf</p>	Health Financial stress Income Poverty
Children's Rights Alliance	<p>In 2018, the Children's Rights Alliance commissioned a study, on the educational needs of children experiencing homelessness and living in emergency accommodation Home Works – Executive Summary (2018) Children's Rights Alliance https://www.childrensrightrights.ie/sites/default/files/submissions_reports/files/Home%20Works%20Study%20on%20the%20Educational%20Needs%20of%20Children%20Experiencing%20Homelessness%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf</p> <p>The effects of homelessness on children include feelings of low self-esteem and isolation leading to self-harm, to exhaustion and developmental delays and illness</p>	Housing / Homelessness Mental health
Children's Rights Alliance	<p>Homelessness - according to the Children's Rights Alliance (CRA), in December 2021 there were 2,451 homeless children and almost one in four of homeless Dublin children had been living in emergency accommodation for more than two years.</p>	Homelessness
DCEDIY	<p>The NDA notes that the Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth launched the National Framework on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making in April 2021 which is underpinned by UNCRPD. They note that children with disabilities have been identified by the Department as a priority cohort and that it is intended that inclusive methodologies will be developed and piloted to strengthen the delivery of the Framework for this group.</p>	Human rights Disability CYP Participation
ESRI	<p>The findings of the Ombudsman's 2022 Annual Report are supported by findings of the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), who in conjunction the Department of Child and Youth Affairs prepared a report into: 'The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: a research review.' https://www.esri.ie/publications/the-implications-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-for-policy-in-relation-to-children-and-young</p>	Implications of Covid-19
Growing Up in Ireland	<p>From a literacy and access to reading perspective, The Growing Up in Ireland longitudinal study informs the work we have to do at each age and stage of a child's life: at nine months old, 19.5% of infants are never read to. At three years old, 20% of children are read to infrequently – three or fewer days a week. Reading frequency at three years of age proved to be highly predictive of reading habits two years later, and this predictive pattern extends throughout childhood: reading for pleasure at the age of seventeen is strongly associated with patterns at nine and thirteen years of age. At nine years old, only 6% of children report never reading for pleasure. At thirteen, however, this figure rises to 19%, and within another four years, there is a significant decline: over half of 17-year olds never read for pleasure. Literacy levels are linked to a range of other evidenced outcomes for CYP including academic self-confidence, literacy, numeracy, vocabulary development and improved mental wellbeing.</p>	Literacy Reading for pleasure

Indecon (2022)	In relation to poverty and housing it is worth looking at some of these positive findings with reference to the Cost of Disability in Ireland report. Overall the Cost of Disability Report found that households with a member with a disability were more likely to live in poverty than households with (out) a member with a disability. Indecon (2022) Cost of Disability in Ireland (Commissioned by the Department of Social Protection)	Disability Poverty Housing
National Disability Authority	The NDA has produced a briefing paper on UNCRPD Article 7 which highlights key data and measures in place relevant to Article 7. National Disability Authority, 2020, Article 7 Briefing Paper https://nda.ie/publications/others/uncrpd/series-of-papers-on-individual-united-nations-convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-uncrpd-articles.html	Human rights Disability CYP Participation
OCO (2021)	A recent OCO report (2021) identified significant barriers facing children with disabilities in Ireland relating to play, including a failure to effectively include children with disabilities in research, lack of legislation and policy for inclusive play, and a lack of up-to-date disaggregated data on play for children with disabilities.	Disability Play
Ombudsman for Children	The Ombudsman for Children commissioned a report Mind the Gap which cited evidence from a study based on Growing Up in Ireland data that primary carers of a child with a disability is considerably less likely to be employed (when compared to a primary carer of a child without a disability) and that across a range of socioeconomic measures, presence of a child with a disability in a household was strongly correlated with worse outcomes. Moloney (2021) Mind the Gap Barriers to the realisation of the rights of children with disabilities in Ireland.	Disability Income Poverty
Ombudsman for Children	People with disabilities are discriminated by a lack of available health and social care services. For example, 12,229 children are waiting more than 12 months for an occupational therapy assessment. The Office of the Children’s Ombudsman has also highlighted the years children wait for an assessment and any treatment identified in such assessments which is detrimental to the child’s development. Letter from HSE to Sean Sherlock, TD to answer PQ 14149/20. Unmet Need, Office of the Children’s Ombudsman, 2020. The Office of the Children’s Ombudsman has recently highlighted the years children wait for assessments and any treatment identified. This can be detrimental to the child’s development.	Disability Health Assessment Waiting lists
Prof O Donnell	Research by Professor Ian O’Donnell of UCD, shows that the prison population of Ireland are twenty-three times more likely to come from and return to seriously deprived areas, compared to the least deprived area. Poverty often leading to a cycle of criminality driven by need, as opposed to as a choice. Coercive confinement in the Republic of Ireland: The waning of a culture of control , SAGE Journal 9(1)	Poverty Offending Prison
RTE	Research from social scientists have shown that excessive social media use can be problematic for self-esteem, sleep, and anxiety. https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2020/0825/1161120-young-people-mental-health-pandemic-social-media-loneliness/	Social media Loneliness Anxiety / Depression
State of the Nation’s Children	Information about the housing crisis in the State of the Nations Children: Key Findings (www.gov.ie) – Households with children that were identified as needing social housing increased by 55% between 2008 and 2017.	Homelessness
The Children’s Society	Data highlighting differences in the young carer population compared to YP who are not carers. The Children’s Society (2019) https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/helping-children/young-carers	Young Carers