

An Roinn Leanáí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Annual Report 2021

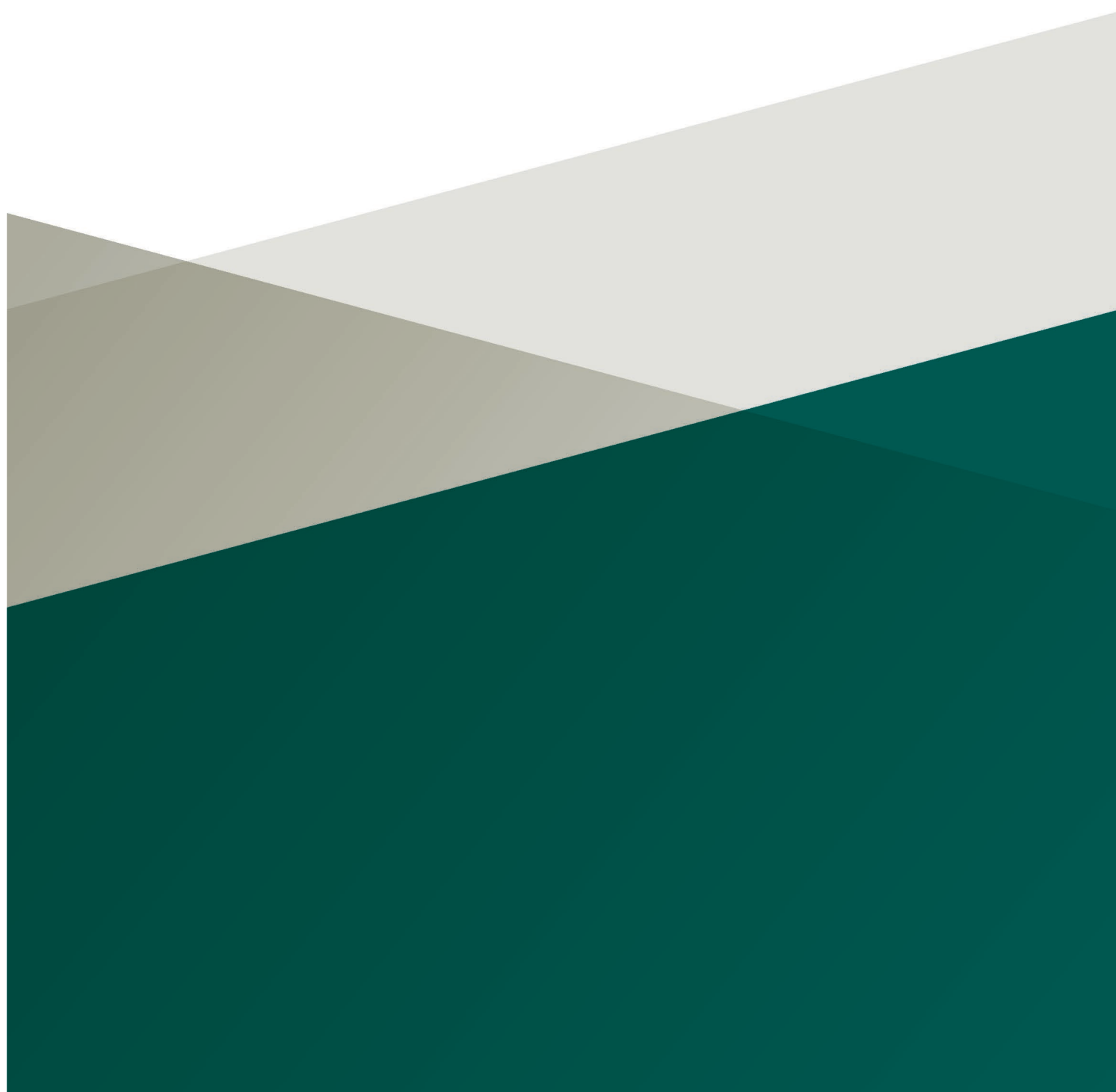


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FOREWORD BY THE MINISTER

I am very pleased to present the Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth's 2021 Annual Report.

This Report provides a detailed account of the activities, outputs and achievements in 2021. This was the first year of our three-year Strategy which outlines how the Department aims to deliver a fair, equal and inclusive society where rights are respected, and where everyone can reach their potential.

The work of the Department its agencies and funded bodies continued to enhance the lives of children, young people, adults, families and communities, recognised diversity and promoted equality of opportunity across the range of areas throughout 2021. In promoting a progressive, respectful and equal society, we are learning from the experiences of past generations and are seeking to respond to the needs of survivors.

A strong feature of our work during 2021 was the implementation of a variety of national strategies for which the Department had lead responsibility.

The Department's strategic priorities are set out in its Statement of Strategy 2021-2023. This provides a clear roadmap and focusses efforts on:

- Ensuring that we have the right policies, legislation, resources and systems in place to meet the particular needs of children, young people, adults, families and communities within a diverse and equal society.
- Supporting children and young people in active learning and participation.
- Looking at policies across Government through the lens of children, young people, families, communities and diverse groups.
- Working effectively across Government to promote the well-being of Irish society and developing policies that are responsive to its changing nature.
- Ensuring that we address inequalities and barriers which prevent migrants, refugees, applicants for international protection, LGBTI+ individuals, Travellers, Roma, disabled people, and women from participating fully in Irish society.

- Promoting the values of equality, respect for human rights and freedom from racism, xenophobia and discrimination.
- Critically evaluating our performance, making necessary improvements and taking decisions informed by the best available evidence and research.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to place extraordinary demands on our Department and stakeholders during 2021. The Department and its agencies did everything possible to keep service users, staff and families safe as essential services were delivered.

We had a change of Secretary General earlier this year. As well as warmly welcoming our new Secretary General, Kevin McCarthy, and wishing him every success in the role, I want to thank our previous Secretary General, Fergal Lynch, for all his hard work and commitment to the work of the Department over the years.

I also wish to take this opportunity to convey my thanks to the Secretary General, the staff of the Department and all stakeholders who have worked collectively to deliver the Department's strategic goals, and for their continued efforts for the significant work undertaken in 2021, in what was a challenging year.

Roderic O’Gorman TD

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth



INTRODUCTION BY SECRETARY GENERAL

I am pleased to introduce the Department's Annual Report for 2021. It is published in accordance with section 4 of the Public Service Management Act 1997.

The Annual Report takes a look back at 2021 and at the impact we, as a Department, have made in the lives of children, young people, members of diverse groups across our communities and vulnerable members of society. I would particularly like to thank my predecessor, Dr Fergal Lynch, for his leadership of the Department's work throughout 2021 in implementing the priorities set out in our *Statement of Strategy 2021-2023*. Policy initiatives and legislation were advanced across all areas of our wide-ranging remit, from child protection and welfare, to early learning and childcare supports, to youth services, to prevention and early intervention, to direct provision, to equality, to disability, to integration and to the difficult legacy issues from the country's past.

Since joining the Department at the beginning of 2022, I have grown my appreciation of the professionalism, dedication, flexibility and commitment to public service values that is continually demonstrated by the staff of the Department in their approach to this broad ranging work.

We are keenly aware of how wider geo-political, economic and environmental circumstances can impact directly on our work and on our capacity to deliver on our mandate. The commitment that I have witnessed to delivering in imaginative and innovative ways in the face of major challenges, was also evident in the Department's response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during 2021 and the uncertainty that this brought.

I am very grateful to the Minister for his continuing leadership of our work and to everyone in the Department, its agencies and funded bodies, for their commitment and support as we build on the progress set out in this annual report to continue to deliver for everyone we serve.

Kevin McCarthy

Secretary General

Our Vision

A fair, equal and inclusive society where rights are respected, and where everyone can reach their potential.

Our Mission Statement

Enhancing the lives of children, young people, adults, families and communities, recognising diversity and promoting equality of opportunity.

Our Values

We place people, both children and adults, at the heart of what we do.

We listen to children, young people and adults, realising their right to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives.

We act to protect those most vulnerable and disadvantaged, and to champion their needs.

We recognise the role and importance of all families in our society.

We integrate the principles of equality and respect for human rights into our work.

We respect the rights of all people to participate fully in society and we acknowledge the State's role in supporting positive integration.

We value and support our staff and we encourage new ideas and new ways of working in the delivery of our vision and mission.

We deal respectfully with each other and with all of our stakeholders.

We act with integrity and impartiality at all times and are accountable for our actions.

Statement of Strategy 2021-2023

Part 1 – An Overview

Our Strategic Goals

The work of the Department was underpinned by our Statement of Strategy 2021-2023, which includes six strategic goals as follows:

1. We will develop, implement and influence evidence informed policies and legislation that improve the outcomes for those we serve.

- The Gender Pay Gap Information Act, 2021 was signed into Law on 13 July 2021.
- The family leave provisions under the Family Leave and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2021 were commenced on 1 April 2021, which enabled parents to avail of three weeks additional Parent's Leave and Parent's Benefit.

2. We will ensure the provision of a range of quality and sustainable services, underpinned by strategic investment, that meet the needs of individuals, families and communities.

- Budget 2022 saw the introduction of additional funding of €183 million comprising:
 - an increase of €78m for Early Learning and Childcare
 - an increase of €41m for International Protection Support and White Paper Transition
 - an increase of €41m for Tusla, the Child & Family Agency
 - additional funding of €23m secured for a range of areas in the department including for Youth Services, Equality and Inclusion, Disability, Mother and Baby Homes actions, Refugee and Migrant Integration; Traveller and Roma Initiatives and for the Adoption Authority, amongst others
- The Department published a White Paper to end Direct Provision and to establish a new International Protection Support Service.
- The Department published the National Action Plan for Childminding, which aims to improve access to high quality and affordable early learning and care and school-age childcare through childminding.

3. We will help those who are vulnerable, including children, young people and at risk individuals, to overcome adverse circumstances and to achieve their full potential.

- National Children First Awareness Week ran from 1 - 7 November 2021. The aim of the week was to raise awareness of Children First and remind wider society, including organisations working with children and young people, of our collective responsibility to keep them safe in our communities.

- The Department announced new funding schemes worth €800,000 as part of What Works Initiative.
- The Government approved the drafting of the Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2021, which provides for reform of the Guardian ad litem (GAL) system.

4. We will promote the development of a progressive, respectful and equal society, informed by the experiences of past generations and seek to respond to the needs of survivors.

- The Department published An Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions and details of the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme.
- The Department launched a consultation on the review of the Equality Acts.

5. We will work in partnership with individuals, families and communities, and across Government Departments, public bodies and civil society to achieve better outcomes.

- Ireland's draft State Report under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was published for consultation in October 2021.
- The Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Disability, Ms Anne Rabbitte T.D., has published Ireland's first report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- The Department launched the 'National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making'.
- The Department announced major reforms to the funding model for early learning and childcare services.

6. We will maintain high standards of performance and corporate governance with engaged, motivated and supported staff.

- The Department recruited 171 new staff in 2021, accounting for around 35% of employees in the Department. 32 employees or 6% of all staff were promoted through internal or external competitions. A number of specialist external recruitment competitions were also carried out to increase the Department's skillset.
- The Department reviewed and amended its Risk Management Framework in September 2021

Finance Overview in 2021

The gross funding provision for the Department under Vote 40 in 2021 was €1.919 billion (€1.887 billion).

- €1.887 billion (current expenditure) and €32 million (capital expenditure)

In addition to this a further €4.1 million of unspent 2020 capital funds were carried forward to 2021 to the following areas:

- A3 Child and Family Agency €1.482m
- A4 Youth Justice – Oberstown Children Detention Campus €0.330m
- B5 Childcare Programmes, Delivery Supports and Other Initiatives €2.288m

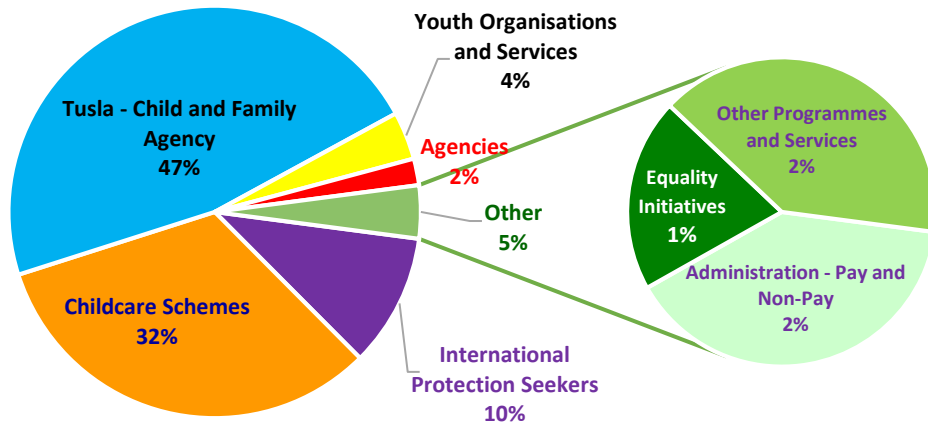
The 2021 gross provision represented an increase of €82 million (4%) on 2020.

Further Revised Estimates and an increase of €206 million, or 11%, over 2020 outturn.

The actual gross expenditure incurred by the Department and its agencies was €1.824 billion. The expenditure in 2021 enabled a significant level of services to be delivered across five programme areas as follows:

Programme Expenditure 2021		Outturn
		€000
A	Children and Family Support Programme	887,622
B	Sectoral Programmes for Children and Young People	680,612
C	Policy and Legislation Programme	28,896
D	An Equal and Inclusive Society	26,634
E	A Fair and Efficient Support System for International Protection Seekers	200,460
Gross expenditure		1,824,224
Deduct		
F	Appropriations-in-aid	(39,175)
Net expenditure		1,785,049

Programme Expenditure 2021



Review of the Year 2021

Key 2021 highlights include:

In January, Minister O’Gorman confirmed that €66.8 million in funding was made available to support the provision of youth services nationwide in 2021.

The Minister of State with responsibility for Disability, Anne Rabbitte T.D., held her first meeting with the newly established Disability Participation and Consultation Network. The Network ensures people with a disability are involved in the development of policy and legislation, in line with the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

In February, Minister O’Gorman launched the second Supporting Children campaign aimed at encouraging everyone to be mindful of vulnerable children and young people in these challenging times.

Minister O’Gorman also published a White Paper to end Direct Provision and to establish a new International Protection Support Service. This White Paper sets out a new Government policy to replace Direct Provision, which will be phased out over the next four years.

In March, Minister O’Gorman published an independent review report into incorrect birth registrations. This independent report was commissioned by the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, following Tusla’s discovery in early 2018 of evidence of illegal birth registrations in the files of the St. Patrick’s Guild adoption society.

In April, the family leave provisions under the Family Leave and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2021, were commenced, meaning that parents could now avail of three weeks additional Parent’s Leave and Parent’s Benefit.

Minister O’Gorman invited applications from eligible youth organisations for funding under the Youth Climate Justice Fund 2021. The Department also launched the ‘National Framework for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making’.

Minister O’Gorman published the Interim Report of the Independent Anti-Racism Committee, as part of the development of a new National Action Plan against Racism for Ireland.

In May, the Department published the General Scheme of the Birth Information and Tracing Bill. Minister O’Gorman launched the ‘LGBTI+ Youth in Ireland Europe: A two-phased Landscape and Research Gap Analysis’.

In June, the Department announced €6 million in funding to support outdoor play as part of the Summer of Play initiative.

The Department also launched a new initiative to support youth services working with disadvantaged, marginalised and vulnerable young people under the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme.

Minister O’Gorman announced funding of €1.4 million for frontline youth services and clubs nationally to support them with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

In July, the Department launched a public consultation process as part of a review of the Equality Acts (Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 and the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015).

Minister O’Gorman launched the Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan at the annual Comhairle na nÓg Organisers Information Event.

In August, Minister O’Gorman announced that €250,000 would be available in grants for Parent and Toddler Groups, as part of the Summer of Play initiative.

Minister O’Gorman also announced a new programme of consultation on the future early learning and care and school-age childcare workforce and a future funding model for the sector.

In September, Minister O’Gorman published the General Scheme of the Preservation and Transfer of Specified Records of the Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters) Bill.

Minister O’Gorman launched National Quality Guidelines for School-Age Childcare Services. He also announced the award of the 2020 round of Childminder Development Grants, totaling just over €190,000.

Minister O’Gorman also approved a grant to youth clubs and services as a contribution towards some of the additional costs arising from COVID-19 restrictions. The total fund available was €338,000.

In October, Budget 2021 saw extra funding of some €121 million for Tusla, International Protection Seekers Accommodation, Traveller and Roma Initiatives and Youth services, bringing the total investment by his Department to over €1.9 billion for 2021.

The significant additional funding will be targeted at improving outcomes for children, young people and their families as well as the promotion of equality and human rights. The funding also provides for the inclusion and integration of persons seeking international protection.

Minister O’Gorman launched the Independent Review of the Cost of Providing Quality Early Learning and Childcare in Ireland.

Minister O’Gorman and Minister McEntee published the report by the Advisory Group on Direct Provision and announced a reduction in the waiting period for international protection applicants to access work.

Minister O’Gorman announced a €90,000 Comhairle na nÓg ICT Capital Funding Scheme, open to applications from all Local Authorities to support the work of Comhairle na nÓg. He also launched the publication of *‘How’s Your Head – Young Voices during COVID-19’*, a national consultation with young people on mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19.

Minister O’Gorman announced the 113 community projects around the country that will receive funding under the 2020 Communities Integration Fund. A total of almost €500,000 in grant

funding has been provided. This was the fourth year of the Communities Integration Fund, bringing the total amount made available to date to over €2 million.

In November, the Government published proposals for a Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme, as well as an Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions.

The Minister of State with responsibility for Disability, Ms Anne Rabbitte, T.D., invited interested parties to apply to become members of Ireland's Disability Participation and Consultation Network. The Network will make sure people with a disability will be involved in the development of policy and legislation

Minister O'Gorman published the Government's First 5 Annual Implementation Report 2019.

He also announced the allocation of additional funding of €4.7 million to support domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV) services across the country in 2021.

Minister O'Gorman also confirmed the 29 projects around the country that will receive funding under the 2020 LGBTI+ Communities Services Fund. The funding amounts to €700,000.

In December, Minister O'Gorman confirmed that the Government had approved drafting of the Bill to extend paid Parent's Leave from two weeks to five as well as approving provisions to amend Adoptive Leave Act 1995 to allow male same-sex couples avail of adoptive leave.

Minister O'Gorman announced the launch of an online consultation process on the EU Child Guarantee on 1st December 2021.

Minister O'Gorman, in partnership with SIPTU and CSI/IBEC, began a short process in which interested parties were invited to discuss how best to address issues of pay and conditions in the sector and how a Joint Labour Committee might support this. He also announced that additional funding for the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) secured in Budget 2021 would be made available from January 2021.

Minister O'Gorman confirmed an additional €450,000 Dormant Accounts funding for a new book-gifting project to early learning and care settings.

A Commencement Order was signed by Minister O'Gorman and Minister of State Rabbitte, which provided for commencement of the Irish Sign Language Act, 2017 on 23rd December, 2021.

Minister O'Gorman marked International Migrants Day with the announcement of €2.2m in funding to support migrant integration projects across Ireland.

Minister O'Gorman also announced his intention to bring forward a strengthened Gender Pay Gap Information Bill in early 2021. The Gender Pay Gap Information Bill 2019 will require organisations to report on the pay differences between female and male employees, including any bonuses.

Finally, Minister O'Gorman together with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Irish Human Rights Equality Commission (IHREC) and Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, launched a report on the rights and living conditions of Travellers in Ireland.

In summary, despite the challenging operating environment in 2021, the work of the Department continued at a pace. Numerous policy and legislative initiatives were advanced with the objective of improving the lives of children and young people, and ensuring that the

vulnerable, and marginalised at the very centre of its work. Extending equality to all our citizens has also been a key theme of these policy achievements in 2021.

The work of the Department also required staff to discharge the full range of responsibilities of a Government Department in supporting the work of the Minister and the Government, and in discharging financial and other accountability objectives to the Oireachtas.

Part 2 of our Annual Report summarises the progress achieved during 2021 in respect of each of the **six strategic goals** as set out in the Department's Statement of Strategy 2021-2023. It also includes the key strategic enablers that the Department had in place that ensured their successful implementation. Relevant goals and strategic actions are reflected in the annual Business Plans of each Unit of the Department.

1. We will develop, implement and influence evidence informed policies and legislation that improve the outcomes for those we serve.
2. We will ensure the provision of a range of quality and sustainable services, underpinned by strategic investment, that meet the needs of individuals, families and communities.
3. We will help those who are vulnerable, including children, young people and at risk individuals, to overcome adverse circumstances and to achieve their full potential.
4. We will promote the development of a progressive, respectful and equal society, informed by the experiences of past generations and seek to respond to the needs of survivors.
5. We will work in partnership with individuals, families and communities, and across Government Departments, public bodies and civil society to achieve better outcomes.
6. We will maintain high standards of performance and corporate governance with engaged, motivated and supported staff.

Statement of Strategy 2021-2023

Part 2: Progress Achieved in 2021

Strategic Goal 1

We will develop, implement and influence evidence informed policies and legislation that improve the outcomes for those we serve.

The passage below sets out progress made by the Department in 2021 in its action plans for its 1st Strategic Goal:-

Strategic Action 1.1 *We will ensure that delivery of the Strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive programme of legislation and reflective of the Programme for Government.*

Pieces of legislation enacted in 2021:

- **General Scheme of an Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Bill**

The Government approved the General Scheme of an Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Bill on 22nd November 2021.

This legislation amends the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015, improving processes and safeguards for those who will make use of the new decision-making supports. The full commencement of this Act will bring about an end to wardship in Ireland, changing the existing law on capacity from the status approach of the wardship system to a flexible functional approach, where capacity is assessed on an issue and time-specific basis.

The proposed Bill also includes measures to further realise the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Ireland, including legislating for the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's (IHREC) position as the national monitoring body for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and increasing the public sector duty regarding the employment of persons with disabilities from 3% to 6%.

The Decision Support Service (DSS), which is the organisation that will operate the progressive provisions of the 2015 Act, will respond to the complex decision-making needs of people with capacity difficulties.

- **Birth Information and Tracing Bill progression in 2021.**

In May 2021 the Minister published the general scheme and heads of bill of the Birth Information and Tracing Bill. The heads were then referred to the relevant Joint Oireachtas Committee for pre-legislative scrutiny. The report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee was published in December 2021. In the latter part of 2021, the drafting of the Bill was significantly advanced in preparation for publication in early 2022.

The intention of the Bill is to provide a full and clear right of access to birth certificates, birth and early life information for all persons who were adopted, boarded out, the subject of an illegal birth registration or who otherwise have questions in relation to their origins. It also establishes a robust tracing service and a Contact Preference Register, as well as a range of new bespoke measures to address issues arising for people affected by illegal birth

registration. A broad spectrum of counselling and support is also available to persons affected on request.

- **Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2021**

In October 2021, the Government approved the formal drafting of the Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2021, which provides for the reform of the existing Guardian *ad litem* system. The principal objective of this Bill is to extend and regulate the Guardian *ad litem* system so that it benefits the greatest number of children and young people, and to ensure that a high quality service is provided to children and young people in public law child care proceedings.

- **Child and Family Agency (Amendment) Act**

In December 2021 the Child and Family Agency (Amendment) Act was commenced in its entirety. The purpose of this Act was to provide the Minister for Education with appropriate governance and oversight of the education welfare functions performed by the Child and Family Agency, following the transfer of responsibility for those functions from the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to the Minister for Education.

- **The Family Leaves and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2021** which extended the entitlement under the Parent's Leave and Benefit Act 2019 to five weeks for each parent to be taken before the child is two or within the first two years of a child's life. The Act also amended the Adoptive Leave Act 1995 to permit a couple to choose which parent avails of the leave – these amendments ensure that male same-sex adoptive couples can also avail of the leave.

- **The Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021** which provides a legislative basis for the introduction of gender pay gap reporting in Ireland by employers with over 50 employees. Regulations have been put in place this year to require reporting for organisations with over 250 employees in December 2022.

- **The General Scheme of the Institutional Burials Bill** underwent Pre-Legislative Scrutiny (PLS) by the Joint Oireachtas Committee and drafting was significantly advanced with regard to the recommendations of the Committee. The legislation seeks to ensure that the remains of those who died in residential institutions, and who were buried in a manifestly inappropriate manner, may be recovered and re-interred in a respectful and appropriate way. It also provides for the identification of remains and their return to family members, where possible.

- **Vetting recommendation of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection.**

In December, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Department of Justice (DoJ) made a joint submission to the DoJ Vetting Review Group proposing an amendment to the existing vetting legislation, which would provide for a responsive system of re-vetting, in line with a recommendation of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection.

Strategic Action 1.2 *We will build on the success of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF), and its implementation infrastructure, by developing a successor strategy that is integrated, action-focused and whole of society oriented in its input and application.*

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures

The Department held responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF) over the lifespan of the policy framework, 2014-2020. Individual

commitments remained the responsibility of the relevant Government Departments. Although Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures concluded at year-end 2020, some elements of the implementation infrastructure were maintained throughout 2021. The National Advisory Council for Children and Young People continued to meet, in accordance with a limited terms of reference. The Council submitted a paper to the Minister on the issue of child poverty, and had an engagement with the Minister and the Secretary General in this respect. In December 2021 the sixth and final Annual Report for Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures was finalised with a view to publication in January, 2022.

Updates to the BOBF indicator set and the 2021 edition of The State of the Nation's Children (SONC) were prepared in 2021 and set for publication in early 2022.

EU Child Guarantee

Text of EU Child Guarantee was agreed across all Member States and work was underway in relation to EU Child Guarantee National Action Plan and Enabling Policy Framework.

Strategic Action 1.3 *We will continue to develop and implement high quality, evidence based policy to improve access to high quality and affordable Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare (ELC and SAC) that will deliver better outcomes for children, families, the economy and society.*

The following papers were published in 2021:

- **Fathers and children from infancy to middle childhood (Emer Smyth and Helen Russell, 2021)**

This paper was funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and produced as a result of the Research Partnership between the Department and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). The report made use of data obtained from the 2008 cohort of Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) to study the relationship between fathers and their children. The findings of this report indicated the importance of fathers' early involvement in caring for and playing with their children, and highlighted the benefits children experience later in their childhood from this interaction while noting some of the barriers families may face in facilitating this involvement. When launching the report, the Minister noted the Government's commitment to improving work-life balance for parents by the extension of paid parent's leave by two to seven weeks in 2022, which will support fathers in adopting a more prominent role in caring for their young children.

- **The dynamics of child poverty in Ireland: Evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland survey. (Bertrand Maître, Helen Russell, Emer Smyth, 2021)**

This paper was funded by the Department and produced as a result of the Research Partnership between the Department and the ESRI. The report used data from both cohorts in GUI to study children in poverty. The report focused on factors that influence a family's entry into and exit from poverty, such as relationship breakdown or parent job loss, and the long-term consequences this exposure can have on children, with worse performance indicated across many different areas in their life. When the Minister launched this report he noted the need for the Government to support parents by ensuring childcare was accessible, affordable and of high-quality, as mentioned in the report.

Strategic Action 1.4 *We will develop quality, evidence informed youth policy, including through the establishment of a new National Youth Sector Engagement Structure and the production of a renewed Youth Strategy.*

In 2021, the Department focused its youth sectoral engagement on managing the impact of the pandemic on youth services through the Covid 19 Oversight Group. This group met regularly throughout the year.

Rather than developing a standalone Youth Strategy, the Department pursued a composite child and youth policy framework within successor to Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures policy framework. Youth Affairs was included on the Working Group for the new composite policy framework and actively supports the work in relation to youth service policy.

Reflection on previous youth strategy with stakeholders took place.

There was participation at official and stakeholder level in the development of a successor to Better Outcomes Brighter Futures, which will provide underpinning principles for the next youth strategy.

There was also engagement with stakeholders on youth information and a consultative group on future developments was set up.

A sectoral forum was convened 2021 to respond to the Covid 19 pandemic which will form the basis for future structures.

Strategic Action 1.5 *We will lead on the development of family and parenting support policy. This will include clear policy guidance for, and oversight of, the provision and commissioning of family and parenting support services by Tusla and other relevant services.*

In 2021, a national model of parenting support services was developed, including a detailed action plan. This was developed and informed by input from key stakeholders.

The Department conducted a public consultation on parenting supports in April 2021. The Department also published a Parents in Ireland spotlight report.

National Action Plan for Childminding

The National Action Plan for Childminding was published in April 2021. Implementation of Phase 1 actions of the Plan commenced during the year, overseen by a Steering Group and Advisory Groups with strong representation of childminders and other stakeholders.

New Funding Model

The report of the Expert Group, Partnership for the Public Good, A New Funding Model for Early Learning & Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) of Expert Group was published in December 2021 and its recommendations were accepted in full by Government. Budget 2022 announced a significant package of funding to commence implementation of these recommendations, including the introduction of a new core funding stream.

Workforce Plan

Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Plan for ELC and SAC, 2022-2028 was published in December 2021. This Plan sets out commitments on strengthening qualifications, career pathways and

Continuing professional development (CPD) for early years educators and SAC practitioners, and actions to raise the profile of careers in the sector.

Joint Labour Committee

Following a process begun by Minister O’Gorman to examine the possibility of regulating pay and conditions in the ELC and SAC sector and the suitability of a Joint Labour Committee (JLC), an Establishment Order for a JLC for Early Years Services took effect in July 2021.

Regulatory reform of ELC and SAC

Work on regulatory reform of the ELC and SAC sector recommenced in late 2021 having been paused due to COVID-19.

Strategic Action 1.6 *We will provide for reform of the Guardian ad litem service in child care proceedings through publication and enactment of a new Child Care (Amendment) Bill, preparations for commencement of the Act and the establishment of a new national Guardian ad litem service.*

The General Scheme for the Child Care (Amendment) [Guardian ad litem] Bill was published and Government approval was granted on 4 October 2021 for the drafting of a Bill. The Scheme was referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth for pre-legislative scrutiny.

Strategic Action 1.7 *We will develop and implement detailed proposals for the legislative, policy and operational modernisation of the Child Care Act, 1991 to ensure that the best interests of children are upheld.*

Children and Young People’s Services Committees

Children and Young People’s Services Committees (CYPSC) are a key structure identified by Government to plan and co-ordinate services for children in every county in Ireland. The Department provided funding of €2.405 million towards the initiative with funding also allocated by Tusla and the Department of Health under the Healthy Ireland Initiative. CYPSC projects in 2021 included COVID-19 supports, mental health and well-being supports, parenting supports, health, nutrition, activities, play, children and young people’s participation, LGBTI+ supports and resources, anti- racism supports, and homelessness supports. See www.cypsc.ie for more details.

Work on the implementation of **CYPSC Shared Vision, Next Steps 2019–2024** continued in 2021.

Government approval was granted in July 2021 for the drafting of a General Scheme of an Amendment Bill to the Child Care Act 1991, to revise and update the existing legislation. This followed extensive consultation with stakeholders. Drafting of the General Scheme is underway.

Proposal for National Vetting Bureau Act amendment

In December, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Department of Justice (DoJ) made a joint submission to the DoJ Vetting Review Group proposing an amendment to the existing vetting legislation, which would provide for a responsive system of re-vetting, in line with a recommendation of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection.

Strategic Action 1.8 *We will oversee an effective adoption framework, with the best interests of children at its centre, and drive policy and legislative reform in the area of adoption services, with a priority focus on expanding access to birth information.*

Birth Information and Tracing Bill

The Heads of the Birth Information and Tracing (BIT) Bill were published in May 2021. The Pre-legislative scrutiny report on the BIT Bill was received in December 2021, reviewed and the majority of its recommendations were accepted. On foot of issues raised during the pre-legislative scrutiny process, significant additional policy areas were developed, drafted and inserted in Bill. The BIT Bill was drafted and finally approved by Government in December 2021.

Strategic Action 1.9 *We will plan and deliver a new model of delivery for “Growing up in Ireland, the national longitudinal study of children and young people.”*

Four Growing Up in Ireland reports were finalised and published in 2021. Planning has progressed significantly for the transfer of Growing Up in Ireland from the Department to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) by 2023.

Strategic Action 1.10 *We will develop and implement gender equality and wider equality policies, which address the under-representation of women in leadership and decision-making and the needs of working families. We will do this through the provision of family leave and other initiatives.*

The CSO consulted and collaborated with the Department in designing questions on a Personal and Work-Life Balance module which was included in Question 3 of the CSO’s General Household Survey 2021.

Strategic Action 1.11 *We will develop and implement policies which facilitate the integration of migrant populations, promote the inclusion and participation of Travellers, Roma and people with disabilities, and which address racism.*

International Protection Accommodation Policy and Anti-Racism Policy (IPAPARP)

The Anti-Racism Committee submitted its Interim Report to the Minister in April 2021 and ran a Public Consultation from April to July 2021. The National Action Plan Against Racism was being developed throughout 2021.

Strategic Action 1.12 *Working across sectors, we will lead implementation of Ireland’s LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy and National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy, 2019-2021 to ensure that LGBTI+ adults and young people are visible, valued and included.*

Youth Reform Strategy and Participation

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI+) Youth Forum supported implementation of the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy. The LGBTI+ Capacity Building Grant Scheme provided €150,000 to organisations that work with LGBTI+ young people and their

families. The national Live Out Loud campaign and event celebrated LGBTI+ young people. Final progress reporting on the implementation of the Strategy is underway.

The Department published an evaluation of the LGBTI+ Capacity Building Grant Programme, which has been delivered annually as per the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020.

Strategic Goal 2

We will ensure the provision of a range of quality and sustainable services, underpinned by strategic investment, that meet the needs of individuals, families and communities.

The passage below sets out progress made by the Department in 2021 in its action plans for its 2nd Strategic Goal:-

Strategic Action 2.1 *We will ensure that delivery of all of our priorities is underpinned by strategic investment and robust financial planning. This will include a strong focus on workforce planning with a view to ensuring that the delivery system has both the capacity and supply to respond to identified need.*

The EU and International Unit was established in 2021 and operated for the first time with an attaché presence in Brussels. Significant progress was made on the formulation and detail of Ireland's National Action Plan for the EU Child Guarantee. Finalisation of the National Action Plan was expected in early 2022, following stakeholder engagement and consideration by Inter-Departmental Group.

A detailed submission was submitted for consideration to the Directorate-General (DG) for Structural Reform for a Technical Support Instrument (TSI) Project. The TSI Project is designed to support the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee and the development and implementation of the new Framework for Children and Young People (the successor to BOBF - Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures).

The Research and Evaluation Unit projected demand for the workforce for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) sector, contributing to Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, 2022-2028.

Strategic Action 2.2 *We will develop and enhance youth service provision in Ireland, including through reform of youth funding programmes and strengthening of youth quality initiatives.*

Youth Services Grant Scheme Reform Project

There was strong engagement with the youth sector, young people and other key stakeholders on the Youth Services Grant Scheme Reform Project. The Department underpinned the high priority of this work by continuing with its high level engagement.

There was continued investment throughout 2021 in the promotion of play and recreation as a child's right and development of National Play Day in collaboration with Local Authorities.

The Department's Capital Funding Scheme, working with Local Authorities, provided €450,000 for new and refurbished play facilities. National Play Day supported a focus on play and recreation in local communities and children with additional challenges.

The reform of youth funding continued, embedding UBU Your Place Your Space, starting the reform of Youth Services Grant Scheme. As part of annual funding of €70 million approx.:

- over 250 existing youth services received annual funding;

- an additional 8 new UBU funded services were set up;
- a targeted scheme allocated an additional €0.8 million to 65 UBU Funded Organisations;
- additionally, approx. €2 million was disbursed to national youth organisations, UBU Funded Organisations and Youth Clubs to support engaging volunteers and to contribute towards some Covid19 costs; and
- over €0.45 million was committed to play and recreation in capital funding with local authorities.

Strategic Action 2.3 *We will deliver a range of schemes and initiatives to ensure that children and families can access high quality and affordable Early Learning and Childcare (ELC). We will ensure that Government investment is utilised to best effect through monitoring of delivery, a robust programme of evaluation, and continuous quality improvement including feedback from service users.*

Early Learning and Childcare and School Age Childcare funding programmes and schemes

In 2021, €530 million was allocated to the Department's subsidised Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) funding programmes/schemes – the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, the National Childcare Scheme (NCS), and the Community Childcare Subvention Programme (CCSP).

National Childcare Scheme Review

A review of the NCS was published in December 2021, along with an action plan to respond to findings from the Review.

Programme Support Payments

€19.4 million in Programme Support Payments were provided to ELC and SAC services to contribute towards the administrative costs associated with the operation of these programmes/schemes.

ELC and SAC Capital Programme

The ELC and SAC Capital Programme 2021 provided €4.7 million to assist services complete any outstanding fire safety works. A further €4.6 million to support services to enhance their outdoor spaces for play and learning (supporting the overall Covid-19 response).

Quality Improvement Supports

The Department continued to provide oversight and funding, and support coordination and consistency, in quality practice supports provided by a range of organisations in the ELC and SAC sector, including Better Start, a national initiative established by the Department and hosted by Pobal.

Learner Fund

In 2021, over 330 bursaries were awarded to graduates of degree programmes in ELC, and 34% of early years educators now had a level 7 or 8 qualification in ELC, surpassing the First 5 interim target of 30% of staff having a relevant degree by end 2021.

Workforce Qualifications

The Department maintains a list of qualifications that meet regulatory and contractual requirements for early learning and care. In 2021, over 980 applications for recognition of qualifications were processed by the Department with the assistance of Better Start.

OECD County Policy Review

A Country Policy Review of ELC in Ireland was published by the OECD in December 2021. The review, which focused particularly on quality, included recommendations in relation to workforce development, quality assurance, and reform of the inspection system.

What Works and Dormant Accounts Funding - Educational Champions for Children in Care

In 2021, the Department secured €560,000 of Dormant Accounts funding to provide educational supports for children in care to assist them in achieving their full potential in education.

Strategic Action 2.4 *We will manage the latest phase of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme to bring 2,900 refugees to Ireland and to resettle them in communities across the country.*

Irish Refugee Protection Programme

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme provide accommodation for Programme Refugees arriving in Ireland in one of three Residential centres. These are located in Clonea, Ballaghaderreen, and Mosney.

A range of services were provided to Refugees in the Residential centres including access to medical appointments, social welfare payments and education as well as a local initiatives.

416 was the number of people who were living in Residential Centres by the end of 2021. These comprised of 231 adults and 185 children. The residents were mainly of Syrian and Afghan origin. Orientation courses were provided for Residents to help adapt to life in Ireland. Interpreters and English language classes were also available to prepare them for later resettlement in the community.

Irish Refugee Protection Programme staff held monthly clinics with residents to check on their wellbeing and to follow up on any queries or concerns they may have had.

Irish Refugee Protection Programme hold monthly management meetings in all Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROCs) with a range of stakeholders including the HSE, Education Providers and other relevant parties to ensure quality services are available and managed.

During 2021 the Irish Refugee Protection Programme provided €10,529 in funding for the running of the three residential centres as well as overseeing the provision of services provided by them.

The majority of Refugees were ultimately re-settled in Local Authority housing. The Irish Refugee Protection Programme provided funding for Local Authorities toward housing and signed grant agreements with individual counties to facilitate this.

Some Refugees were identified as being suitable for resettlement with Community Sponsorship Groups. Community Sponsorship Groups are members of the local community who formed a group to help house and assist Refugees integrate into Irish society.

Separated Children Seeking International Protection

The Department secured €5 million funding for Tusla to ensure Ireland could honour its 2018 commitment to receiving 36 separated children seeking international protection from Greece under the European Union Relief Projects. By end 2021, 37 children had arrived in Ireland from Greece.

Strategic Action 2.5 *We will develop and implement a new model of accommodation and related supports for persons in the International Protection process, centred on a not-for-profit approach, and delivery of ongoing services to such persons.*

A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service was published in February 2021. Work on implementing the new model had progressed well.

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme held monthly management meetings with a range of stakeholders including the Health Service Executive (HSE) and Waterford Education and Training Board (ETB) to ensure quality services were available and managed.

Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) staff held monthly clinics with residents to check on their wellbeing and to follow up on any queries or concerns they may have had.

Strategic Action 2.6 *We will support Tusla in their commitment to continued improvements in service provision and performance to optimise outcomes for children, young people and their families.*

The Department engaged with Tusla on the development of Tusla's new Parenting Support Strategy, and regularly engaged with Tusla on specific parenting services and Tusla-funded projects.

The Department supported the provision of child-centred and high quality adoption services through governance of the Adoption Authority of Ireland and Tusla Adoption Services.

Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

In 2021, Tusla allocated €28m in core funding for Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV) services plus €2m in contingency funding to address challenges arising from Covid-19. Tusla provides funding to approximately 60 DSGBV services, providing 149 units of safe emergency accommodation, including shared and independent units.

Family Resource Centre Programme

In 2021, the Department provided €18m to Tusla to support 121 Family Resource Centres (FRCs) around the country. An additional €650,000 was provided to Tusla under Dormant Accounts Funding, to enable minor maintenance works, purchase essential equipment and to respond to the challenges arising in local communities as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tusla Budget

In the Budget process in 2021, the Department secured an allocation of €898.5 million for Tusla in 2022. This represented an increase of €40.5 million or 4.7% over its 2021 funding. This will allow Tusla to improve services for children and families in 2022.

The Department engaged with Tusla on the development of Tusla's new Parenting Support Strategy, and regularly engaged with Tusla on specific parenting services and Tusla-funded projects.

Fáilte Care

The Department awarded funding of €106,000 from the What Works Programme in 2021 to support Tusla develop a specialist foster carers for separated children seeking international protection.

Aftercare Support for Separated Children Seeking International Protection

The Department awarded €800,000 to this project for additional supports required to provide specialist transitional supports to young adults who had come to Ireland as separated children under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme or through Irish Ports or and who require additional supports to progress to independent living.

Traveller and Roma Foster Carer Project

The Department secured funding of €275,000 from What Works and Dormant Accounts to assist Tusla to support initiatives to increase the recruitment of foster carers from the Traveller and Roma communities.

Strategic Action 2.7 *We will ensure that the Department and aegis bodies have well-planned and resourced responses in place to address the current and potential impact of COVID-19.*

COVID-19 Public Health Supports for ELC and SAC

The Department continued to provide COVID-19 supports to ELC and SAC services in collaboration with a number of Government Departments, including Department of Education, Finance and Health as well as agencies, including HSE/Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC), Tusla, Better Start. This helped ensure continued safe operation of ELC and SAC services through the pandemic. Supports in 2021 included a continuation of the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) at enhanced rates throughout 2021; as well as:

- Continuation of DCEDIY ELC and SAC schemes/programmes (4 January – 31 January)
- Funding arrangements for ELC and SAC during extended Level 5 restrictions (1 February – 5 March) including a new Covid-19 Operating Support Payment and a new Covid-19 strand of the Sustainability Fund.
- Funding arrangements for ELC and SAC during the phased lifting of restrictions from 8 March-29 March 2021 including an extension to the Covid-19 Operating Support Payment.
- A range of one-off grants (including the €5.5m playing outside grant in June 2021 and to respond to increasing COVID-19 cases due to the omicron variant, a €10 million Grant Programme for Improved Ventilation and Other Measures to Reduce Transmission in December 2021) and other measures such as Student Temporary Employment Arrangements and an Antigen Programme for ELC and SAC (both introduced in December 2021).
- An extensive range of provider/practitioner public health resources/ guidelines to assist services operate safely.
- An extensive range of CPD resources for practitioners to engage in training.
- An extensive range of parent/child resources/ guidelines to prepare for the transition back to ELC and SAC and to continue learning at home during periods of reopening and restricted access.

In 2021 the Irish Refugee Protection Programme provided funding of €10,529 for the running of three residential centres as well as overseeing the provision of services provided by them.

Strategic Goal 3

We will help those who are vulnerable, including children, young people and at risk individuals, to overcome adverse circumstances and to achieve their full potential.

The passage below sets out progress made by the Department in 2021 in its action plans for its 3rd Strategic Goal:-

Strategic Action 3.1 *We will further develop Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) programmes and schemes to ensure that children and families who need services most can access them. This will include children living with economic disadvantage, children with additional needs and parents seeking to engage in or return to work.*

Tackling Disadvantage Funding

The report of the Expert Group, Partnership for the Public Good, published in December 2021, included among its recommendations, a recommendation to introduce a tackling disadvantage strand to the funding model for ELC and SAC. All recommendations from the Expert Group were adopted by Government and implementation of this recommendation will be led by the new Access and Inclusion Unit established by the Department.

Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

The AIM supported 4,262 children with disabilities to access and meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme across 2,048 ELC services in the 2020/2021 programme year.

The Leadership in Inclusion (LINC) training programme - one of several AIM supports - had over 585 graduates for the academic year 2020/2021, most of whom were appointed to the role of Inclusion Co-ordinators in ELC service.

AIM Evaluation

In 2021, an evaluation of AIM was progressed. The report of this evaluation, which will be published in 2022, will inform further enhancements to, or expansion of AIM.

National Childcare Scheme Access

The National Childcare Scheme (NCS), through Section 14 of the Childcare Support Act, 2018 makes provision for vulnerable children. The NCS received 4,966 applications for sponsorship in respect of 4,228 children.

A Review of the NCS and recommendations in the Partnership for the Public Good informed Budget 2022 to make significant enhancements to the NCS. Among these enhancements was the discontinuation of the practice of deducting hours in preschool or school from NCS subsidised hours. This would benefit up to 5,000 children from disadvantage families.

Strategic Action 3.2 *We will strengthen the safeguarding and protection of children through leadership across Government, strong direction and support to Tusla and engagement with other stakeholders to enhance child welfare and protection.*

Children First Inter-Departmental Implementation Group

The Children First Inter-Departmental Implementation Group (CFIDIG) met twice in 2021 and continued to focus on monitoring implementation of the Children First Act 2015. This Group

included representatives from every Government Department, the HSE, Tusla and An Garda Síochána.

Children First Awareness Week took place in November 2021 and was delivered by Tusla on behalf of the CFIDIG. This information campaign raised awareness about Children First and reminded everyone, including organisations working with children and young people, of our collective responsibility to keep children safe.

Barnahus

The Department chaired an Interdepartmental Group to develop the Barnahus project – a service for children and families affected by child sexual abuse. The Barnahus National Steering Group is responsible for its implementation and continues its work under an Independent Chair. The Barnahus West service opened its custom designed premises in 2021. This service will be expanded to two further sites in the East and South of the country.

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme is committed to resettling Programme Refugees in Ireland. This cohort includes many vulnerable and at risk individuals, families, and children.

As part of the interview process on selection missions, Refugees were screened to identify their medical and other needs so that they could be offered support and assistance on their arrival in Ireland. Supports including medical, psychological, and education services were put in place in the Residential accommodation to help vulnerable people and children.

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme through clinics and management meetings at the Centres continued to monitor vulnerable people and provide them with every possible assistance.

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme flagged issues and concerns with local authorities ahead of the resettlement of people in the community to ensure they had appropriate supports and services in place.

Strategic Action 3.3 *We will further develop the policy and strategic approach to children in care (Residential, Foster and Special Care) and work with stakeholders to enhance outcomes and ensure that the rights of children in care to access required services are upheld.*

Alternative Care Policy Unit

In 2021 the Alternative Care Policy Unit (ACPU) launched the Child Care Law Reporting Project's (CCLRP) final report – 'Ripe for Reform.' This report built on existing work by the CCLRP, to support better outcomes for children and their families, by providing information to policy makers on the operation of the child care system in the courts.

APCU also introduced new Guidance to support the operation of the National Review Panel (NRP), which reviews cases of death or injury of children and young people known to Tusla. The NRP reviews the circumstances of each incident and works to identify any learnings from these cases.

Strategic Action 3.4 *We will conduct formal assessments of international protection applicants to determine any special reception needs for vulnerable persons, including children.*

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme

- As part of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP), their mission statement was committed to resettling Programme Refugees in Ireland. This cohort includes many vulnerable and at risk individuals, families, and children.
- As part of the interview process on selection missions, Refugees were screened to identify medical and other needs so that they could be assisted upon their arrival in Ireland and supports provided.
- This process was not followed with the Afghan arrivals as the sudden collapse of the Government prevented any Selection Mission. Instead interviews and clinics were held with them to identify issues of concern.
- Supports including medical, psychological, and education services were put in place in the Residential accommodation to help vulnerable people and children
- The Irish Refugee Protection Programme through clinics and management meetings at the Centres continued to monitor vulnerable people and to provide them with every possible assistance. The IRPP flagged issues and concerns with local authorities, ahead of the resettlement of people in the community, to ensure they would have appropriate supports and services in place.

Strategic Action 3.6 *We will continue to lead on innovations in prevention and early intervention to optimise outcomes for children, young people, their families and communities.*

New Paper published in 2021

Risk and protective factors in adolescent behaviour: The role of family, school and neighbourhood characteristics in (mis)behaviour among young people (Emer Smyth, Merike Darmody, 2021)

This paper was funded by the Department and produced as a result of the Research Partnership between the Department and the ESRI. The report used data from the 1998 cohort of GUI to study the factors that influence a 17 year old's behaviour. The report studied the influence of socioeconomic status, school and home location, gender, and relationships with teachers, parents and peers on behaviour at home, in school and in the community, and concluded that rates of misbehaviour are generally low. When the Minister launched the report he noted that these low rates show that our policies supporting young people do work in this area, and the value that schools and youth services can have for a young person. He said that he would continue to support and promote the essential work of youth services across Ireland.

What Works

The Department hosted a series of virtual events under the What Works initiative in November 2021 under the 'Festival of Learning' banner. The series addressed disadvantage for children, young people and families and included international policymakers, practitioners and academics in the field.

The Department also funded several programmes under What Works which promoted evidence informed approaches to prevention and early intervention services. This saw a total of €324,788

awarded to community and voluntary organisations under the Learning Together Fund and €206,997.18 under the Training Fund.

Rethink Ireland was allocated €600,000 in funding under the What Works Children and Youth Digital Solutions Fund. This funding was shared amongst eight community and voluntary groups to help projects become more efficient and accessible by means of innovative use of technology.

The University of Limerick began a series of training for practitioners working to improve outcomes for children and young people in Ireland through an on-going partnership with the Department under What Works.

Supporting Children and Parents website

The Supporting Children and Parents website was launched on Gov.ie in 2021, providing a platform for children, young people and parents in Ireland to get reliable, trustworthy information about issues which affect them and relevant services. The website merged pre-existing supports previously developed by the Department during the COVID-19 pandemic on one accessible website.

North East Inner City (NEIC) Initiative

The Department chaired Subgroup 6 of the NEIC Initiative throughout 2021, and was represented on the NEIC Project Implementation Board.

In 2021, work on the City Connects pilot programme continued. The Department collaborated with the Department of Education to implement this pilot in the 10 NEIC primary schools with the view to its expansion following a number of evaluation processes. The City Connects model founded by Boston College is a school based programme which works to the principle of progressive universalism. This approach means that the strengths and needs of each individual child within a school setting are identified, and a set of supports identified.

The Department also worked with other stakeholders on the development of action plans for the youth and early years sectors in the NEIC.

A Multi-Disciplinary Team comprising occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and NEPS psychologist continued work in these 10 schools. The work of the Multi-Disciplinary Team reduced waiting times for students in accessing relevant health services. Mainstream funding for the initiative was secured via the HSE Estimates process for Budget 2022.

Children's Rights Alliance

The Department allocated €180,000 to the Children's Rights Alliance (CRA) to support the implementation of the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures and to consolidate and enhance children's rights and entitlements through engagement with frontline services. The CRA and the Department agreed a work plan for 2021, and the CRA provided quarterly progress reports.

St. Ultan's Childcare Project

The Department supported the work of St. Ultan's Childcare Project, Cherry Orchard, in securing improved outcomes for children and young people in the locality of Cherry Orchard and its environs. In 2021, the Department provided €75,000 toward St. Ultan's Home Parenting Programme, €150,000 towards St. Ultan's Childcare Project's established programmes and €425,000 for the nursery, toddler and early years education, learning and care services, as allocated by the Department's Early Years Division.

Strategic Goal 4

We will promote the development of a progressive, respectful and equal society, informed by the experiences of past generations and seek to respond to the needs of survivors.

The passage below sets out progress made by the Department in 2021 in its action plans for its 4th Strategic Goal:-

Strategic Action 4.1 *We will support the State’s response to the Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes.*

The Department published the Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters (January 2021).

It developed and published an Action Plan for Survivors of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions to support the State’s response to the legacy of these institutions (November 2021). The Action Plan is a high-level framework to drive, monitor and report on implementation of the 22 wide-ranging measures across eight strategic themes. Of the 22 Actions, 6 have already been substantively completed while another 13 are currently in progress.

Government approval was received for the establishment of the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme and details of the Scheme published (November 2021).

The General Scheme of a Certain Institutional Burials (Authorised Interventions) underwent Pre-Legislative Scrutiny by the Joint Oireachtas Committee in the first half of 2021. The recommendations informed the development of the draft Bill.

In March 2021 the Independent Review into illegal birth registrations was published. The Interdepartmental Group on Illegal Birth Registrations (IBR) was established in January 2021 and submitted its report to the Minister in April 2021. The proposals developed by the Group were included in the Birth Information and Tracing Bill. A Ministerial consultation with people affected by IBR was completed and a thematic review produced.

The consultation informed development of the Birth Information and Tracing Bill. A Special Rapporteur report on illegal birth registrations was requested in March 2021 and received on 30 September 2021.

The Department’s Research and Evaluation Unit developed a comprehensive cost model to help support interdepartmental work on the establishment of the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme.

Strategic Action 4.2 *We will develop policies and legislation to promote gender equality and wider equality and to address barriers preventing individuals from full participation in Irish society.*

The Department published a Statistical Spotlight on Gender Norms which tracks Ireland’s progress on the indicators used to measure the OECD’s 10 norms of restrictive masculinities. Ireland is the first country to apply the model to national data.

Strategic Goal 5

We will work in partnership with individuals, families, and communities across Government Departments, Public Bodies and Civil Society to achieve better outcomes.

The passage below sets out progress made by the Department in 2021 in its action plans for its 5th Strategic Goal:-

Strategic Action 5.1 *We will lead Ireland's effort to realise the right of children and young people to have a voice in decisions that affect their individual and collective lives through effective legislation, policy and service provision.*

Enhanced national participation service were put in place during 2021 with increased consultations nationally and locally, in collaboration with a number of Government departments and public bodies. Comhairle na nÓg published its Five Year Development Plan and its implementation began in 2021. A National Youth Assembly of Ireland was established which is to include annual Youth Climate Assembly and Rural Youth Assembly. A Participation Strategy was reviewed and next phase developed.

Strategic Action 5.2 *We will continue to oversee the implementation of First 5 and continue to contribute to the development of cross Government policy, taking shared ownership for delivery.*

We will use our comprehensive stakeholder engagement framework to consult with children, families, the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare providers and staff, and other stakeholders in developing policy and overseeing implementation.

First 5 Strategy

The Department provided ongoing oversight of implementation of First 5 with updates provided as requested to BOBF Advisory Council. The Department also progressed a number of key First 5 Projects.

First 5 Campaigns

First 5 campaigns - Let's Play Ireland and Let's Get Ready (supporting children's transition to primary school) were rolled out again in 2021, with updated gov.ie resources.

First 5 Little Library Initiative 2021

4,500 ELC and SAC services, including childminders, received two instalments of book bags in 2021. The Initiative formally linked ELC and SAC services and their local libraries.

Stakeholder Engagement

In-depth process of stakeholder engagement took place throughout 2021 on the COVID-19 response and to inform other policy developments, including the new funding model for ELC and SAC, the new workforce plan for ELC and SAC, initial implementation of the National Action Plan for Childminding and the review of the operating model and the NCS.

The Department ran a public awareness campaign on positive parenting during 2021.

Strategic Action 5.4 *We will engage with EU institutions, and lead and coordinate Ireland's reporting process to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on our implementation of the UNCRC, and Ireland's response to the Committee's Concluding Observations*

Data items for the UNCRC report Statistical annex were sourced and updated by the Department's Research and Evaluation Unit.

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP)

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme are committed to ultimately housing all Programme Refugees that enter Ireland in the community.

To achieve this they worked with a range of stakeholders including community groups, Local Authorities, and a range of partners to provide housing along with medical and education services.

Some Refugees were identified as being suitable for resettlement with Community sponsorship groups. These were members of the local community who formed a group to help house and assist Refugees integrate into Irish society.

The majority of Refugees were housed by local authorities. The Irish Refugee Protection Programme provided funding for Local Authorities toward housing and signed grant agreements with individual counties to facilitate this.

The Refugees were resettled in housing suitable for their family size and fitted out to suit their particular needs. Local resettlement workers liaised with the families to help them adapt and integrate into the local community.

Ireland was represented at EU level on developments and engaged as appropriate on the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the EU Child Guarantee.

The deadline for submission of the State Report to the UNCRC Committee was extended to February 2022 and was expected to be delivered on time.

Professor Conor O'Mahony conducted an initial assessment of how an audit of legislation to ensure compliance with the UNCRC could be structured. This piece of work was under review. Attention continued to be given to the introduction of Child Rights Impact Assessment and further examination continued.

The Government continued to be strongly committed to the ratification of the Second Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Department continues to engage with the Department of Justice and the Office of the Attorney General to determine whether a small number of additional legislative measures may be required to ensure that the State is compliant with all of the extra-territorial jurisdiction requirements under Article 3.1 of the Protocol.

Strategic Action 5.5 *We will review how we communicate with our stakeholders, and develop and implement a comprehensive Communications Strategy to support delivery of the Department's strategic objectives.*

Mother and Baby Homes Investigation Unit

In recognising the importance of accessible and up to date information, the Department created a dedicated information hub on our website to bring together information which may be helpful to

survivors of Mother and Baby Institutions, their families and supporters. Dedicated points of contact were established to assist with related telephone and e- mail queries.

Strategic Goal 6

We will maintain high standards of performance and corporate governance with engaged, motivated and supported staff.

The passage below sets out progress made by the Department in 2021 in its action plans for its 6th Strategic Goal:-

Strategic Action 6.1 *We will ensure that there is a strong and effective corporate governance framework operating within the Department, including structured governance and performance oversight, led by senior management, of aegis bodies and funding intermediaries.*

Registration and inspection of ELC and SAC services

The Department continued to ensure appropriate oversight of the registration, inspection and monitoring systems for ELC and SAC services being managed by Tusla and the Department of Education Inspectorate.

DCEDIY engaged with Tusla to finalise and publish the Agency's third Corporate Plan (2021-2023), setting out its priorities for the next three years. This was informed by the Ministers Performance Framework, submitted to Tusla in September 2020.

A review of the existing DCEDIY-Tusla Oversight Agreement was completed. This sets out the key aspects of the relationship and governance arrangements between the Department and Tusla. The revised Oversight Agreement was finalised and signed by both parties in 2021.

The Department worked with colleagues in Tusla and Public Appointments Service to increase membership of Tusla Board from 9 to 11 members, and completed process to fill both new vacancies and a further vacancy arising at the end of 2021

The Department developed a Performance Statement for 2022. This was issued by the Minister to Tusla in November 2021 and informed the development of Tusla's 2022 Business Plan.

Research and data project examining the lives of children in care and adults who were in care as children

In November 2020, a working group comprising officials from the Department and Tusla was formed to recommend to the Minister how Action 65 of the Ryan Report Implementation Plan should be best met. Action 65 states: *'the HSE will, with their consent, conduct a longitudinal study to follow young people who leave care for 10 years, to map their transition to adulthood'*.

The working group, chaired by the Department, met on nine occasions in 2021 and it will deliver a high-level recommendation report to the Minister at the end of Q1 2022.

Strategic Action 6.2 *We will develop a revised Strategic Workforce Plan to ensure that the Department has the resources, knowledge, skills and experience to deliver on its strategic objectives. We will also ensure an agile and flexible workforce, support our staff through Learning and Development initiatives, and create an environment where staff feel valued and respected.*

In 2021 the Department's Learning and Development (L&D) Unit delivered and enhanced its provision of learning and development options for staff. It adopted an agile approach in response to the challenges it faced as a result of COVID-19 to support new and existing colleagues while remote working.

L&D offerings in 2021 were informed by the Department's strategy, corporate and unit training needs, as well as that of the individual. Learning interventions were provided in a timely manner to support colleagues working towards delivering the Department's goals.

The Learning and Development (L&D) Unit maintained high standards of performance and corporate governance while it motivated, engaged with and supported staff. Throughout 2021 it provided virtual online training along with on-demand training. In addition to supporting colleagues with key general skills training, the L&D Unit also provided bespoke training and other individual offerings, with new initiatives and supports necessitated by COVID-19 that enabled a return to the workplace in the latter part of 2021.

The Department availed of the OneLearning Management System whenever possible, which provided courses to all Civil Service grades. This Civil Service centralised shared model for learning and development makes good use of public funds and provides value for money.

Using the Education Support Scheme, the Department also supported colleagues undertaking further education relevant to their role. Those who undertook subjects including (but not limited to) Leadership, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Public Policy and Legislation were provided with funding and study leave supports.

Strategic Action 6.4 *We will ensure that appropriate governance arrangements are in place for the Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare budget in order to achieve optimal outcomes and ensure value for money.*

Oversight of Funded Organisations

The Department continued to ensure oversight of Pobal, City/County Childcare Committees and funded National Voluntary Childcare Organisations.

Review of the Operating Model

The review of the operating model for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) concluded in 2021 and, subject to Government approval, work will commence in early 2022 on identifying how best to implement its findings.

ELC and SAC System Enhancement

A range of system enhancements was delivered in 2021, including CCC Portal, ELC and SAC HIVE, Fees Lists, online grant application systems (including COVID-19 supports), applicant validation, recoupment, compliance etc.

Strategic Enablers

A strong performance culture: Existing and one off funding schemes, including the establishment of a panel for new services under **UBU Your Place Your Space**, and revised annual reporting were fully implemented.

Collaboration & Evidence Informed policy: Youth Affairs Unit (YAU) established and maintained a high level stakeholder group to update sectoral specific guidance across the year. Regular engagement with Educational Training Boards (ETBs) and stakeholders was maintained. North-South youth policy and European Union (EU) level meetings continued online.

Through the work of the Research and Evaluation Unit, the Department has ensured that our policies are informed by the best available evidence and research. We implemented a programme of policy and service evaluation, enhanced access to and use of data, generated and commissioned research to meet evidence needs, and increased capacity across the Department for strategic engagement with research and evidence.

Information Management: A scoping paper for an Information and Communications Technology (ICT) system was prepared with a view to progressing from 2022 onwards.

Risk Management: Work with the Internal Audit Unit (IAU) continued, verification of work regarding Youth Services Grant Scheme (YSGS) funded organisations continued in line with public health guidance, and the annual review of progress reports and audited accounts was completed.

Financial and operational forecasting, capital planning: Disbursement of funds and management of one off schemes was completed, renewal and applications for funding into 2022 were received and processed.

Public Sector Duty: Support for Minister in engagements with the Oireachtas was provided, and all Freedom Of Information (FOI) requests, Parliamentary Questions (PQs), representations were addressed.

Remote Working: The significant impact COVID-19 had on the services DCEDIY provides and on the way it works as an organisation was recognised. While COVID-19 had significant negative impacts for a wide range of services and programmes, it also illustrated how innovation and breaking down traditional decision pathways can help to introduce new ideas quickly.

The move to remote working for the whole Department was an exemplar of innovation in response to a crisis. DCEDIY continued to create a supportive environment for staff working remotely and those working in the office, recognising the challenges and opportunities that this presented for the Department in conducting business. This included a strong focus on ensuring that staff were working in a safe environment at all times with appropriate support from their line manager. It also allowed for opportunities and efficiencies in terms of requirements for office space and faster development of IT solutions and supports for business activities.

Transfer of functions: The transfer of functions to the Department from the Department of Justice brought significant additional financial and governance accountability obligations. It required the Department to review and strengthen its corporate governance framework and structure. It required a particular focus to ensure that there was a seamless integration of the new functions and staff who had transferred into the Department. The planned transfer of disability services from the Department of Health was deferred to 2022. It will have significant additional implications for the Department and, when effected, will more than double the current Vote of the Department.

Appendix I: Public Sector Duty

The Department published its **Public Sector Duty Assessment and Action Plan** on the 11 March 2021, and will publish a separate report on the implementation of its actions for 2021 for that year.

The Department acknowledges the positive duty imposed on it by Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 to have regard to human rights and equality in the performance of its functions.

Under Section 42, a public body shall, in the performance of its functions, have regard to the need to—

- (a) eliminate discrimination,
- (b) promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and
- (c) protect the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.

Our work embodies proactive consideration of equality and the human rights of all individuals in the development of policy and legislation.

The Department is also committed to protecting the dignity and respect of staff working for the Department. The Department endorses and implements the **Civil Service Dignity at Work Policy**, which aims to promote respect, dignity, safety, and equality in the workplace. Every member of staff is aware that all forms of bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment are unacceptable and that every member of staff has a duty to behave in an acceptable and respectful manner.

In our **Customer Service Action Plan and Charter** we state our commitments to our customers.

We meet same by -

- giving our customers the best possible service and advice;
- treating customers in a proper, fair, impartial and courteous manner;
- aiming to ensure that rights to equal treatment set out by equality legislation are upheld in the delivery of our services;
- aiming, where possible, to meet any special needs our customers may have.

Appendix II: Publications in 2021

An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais, Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige Tuarascáil Bhliantúil 2020 - 10 December 2021

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Annual Report 2020 - 10 December 2021

Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC), 2022-2028 - 6 December 2021

12-Month Review of the National Childcare Scheme (October 2021) - 1 December 2021

Review of Work-Study Tests for Childcare Subsidies (November 2021) - 1 December 2021

Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Bill 2021: Draft General Scheme and Heads of Bill - 22 November 2021

Ireland's first report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - 10 November 2021

Budget 2022 overview and further information for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) providers and parents - 12 October 2021

Spending Review 2020 Tusla Residential Care Costs - 29 September 2021

Focused Policy Assessment of the Affordable Childcare Scheme: Cost Drivers, Model Assumptions and Policy Extensions - 29 September 2021

Child and Family Agency (Amendment) Bill 2021 - 4 August 2021

Guidance Document for Disability Stakeholder Group Expressions of Interest - 15 July 2021

Approved Terms of Reference of the Anti-Racism Committee - 2 July 2021

OECD Country Background Report – Early Learning and Care in Ireland - 25 June 2021

Annual Early Years Sector Profile Report 2019/20 - 15 June 2021

LGBTI+ Capacity Building Grant Scheme Evaluation Report - 27 May 2021

LGBTI+ Youth in Ireland and across Europe: A two-phased Landscape and Research Gap Analysis - 24 May 2021

'Building Momentum – A new public service agreement, 2021 – 2022': Action Plans linked to the Reform Agenda - 6 May 2021

A Review of Children's Rights and Best Interests in the Context of Donor Assisted Human Reproduction and Surrogacy in Irish Law - 7 April 2021

Family Leave and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2021 - 25 March 2021

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Statement of Strategy -
Ráiteas Straitéise 2021-2023 - 11 March 2021

Submission Guidelines | Restorative Recognition Scheme for the Former Residents of the
Mother and Baby Homes and County Homes - 10 March 2021

Submissions to the DCEDIY Statement of Strategy 2021 - 2023 | Thematic Analysis - 17
February 2021

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Public Sector Duty
Assessment and Implementation Plan Publisher - 17 February 2021

Period Poverty in Ireland: Discussion Paper | Period Poverty Sub-Committee, National Strategy
for Women and Girls 2017–2020 (February 2021) - 8 February 2021

Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes - 12 January
2021

Appendix III: Overview of Energy Usage in 2021

The Department's energy consumption is reported to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on an annual basis and tracked against the Climate Action Plan (2021) targets to achieve a 50% improvement in energy efficiency and a 51% reduction in energy related CO₂ emissions by 2030.

The Department has achieved a 62% improvement in energy efficiency to date relative to the 2012 baseline following the formation of the Department in 2011. This improvement significantly exceeds the 2030 target and is due to a number of factors including moving our headquarters to a newly redeveloped LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum accredited building in 2018 and also through the introduction of remote working arrangements to accommodate a growing workforce throughout the Covid-19 pandemic without a commensurate increase in office accommodation.

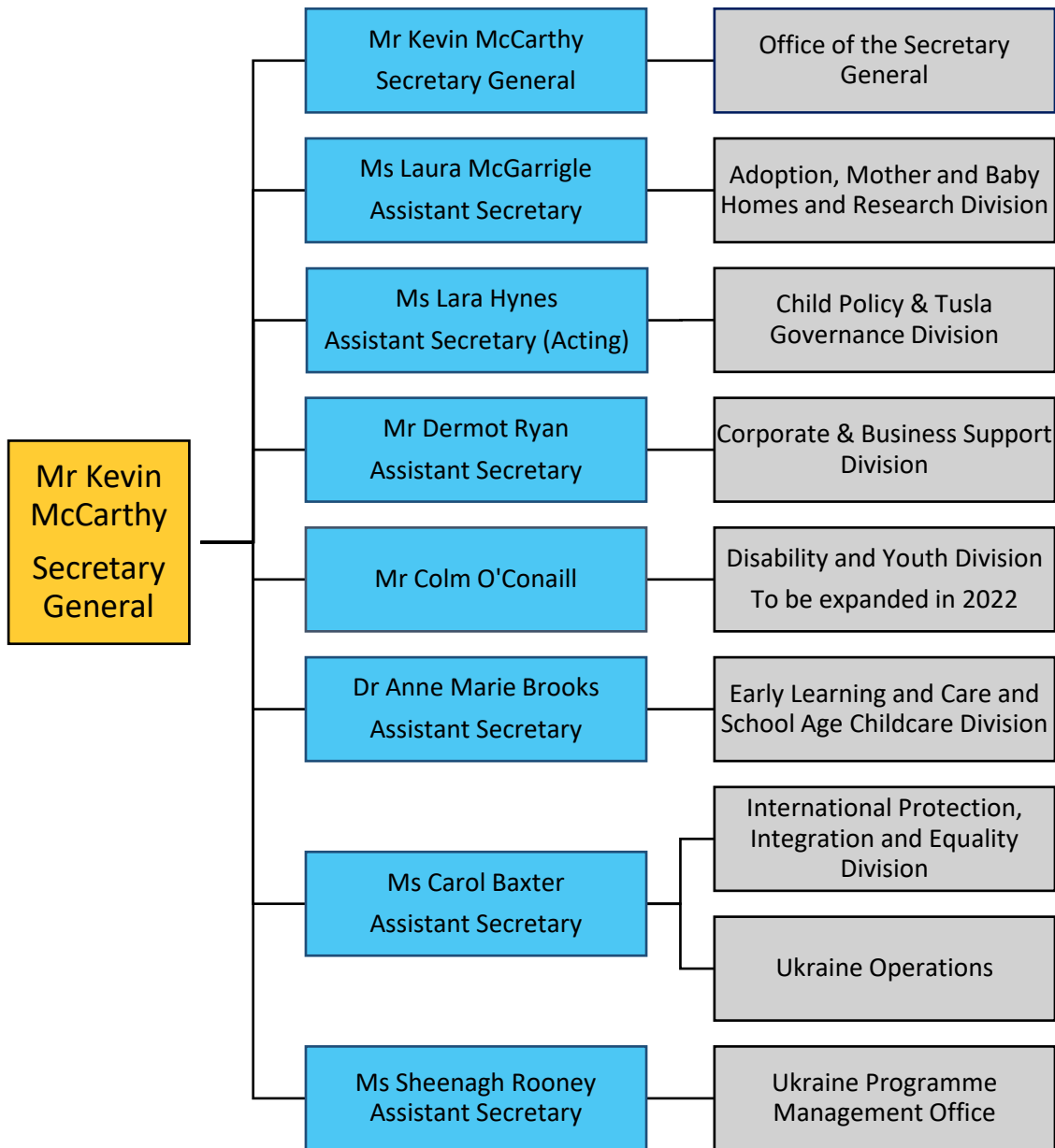
Energy related CO₂ emissions have increased by 20% relative to the 2016 to 2018 baseline established for the new emissions target that was introduced in the Climate Action Plan. This increase is partly due to the addition of a second office location under a transfer of functions from another Department in October 2020 following the formation of Government. The increase is also due to an increase in CO₂ emissions per unit of electricity from the grid. The 2016 to 2018 baseline for the Department was 277,452 kgCO₂ and the 2021 energy related CO₂ emissions for the Department was 332,282 kgCO₂.¹

The Department is engaged in a range of initiatives in working towards the 2030 energy targets. This includes energy auditing, Green Public Procurement, participation in the OPW's Optimising Power @ Work scheme, implementing an annual Resource Efficiency Action Plan including Energy Actions and through working with the SEAI and other Departments.

Agencies under the aegis of the Department report their energy consumption directly to the SEAI, and as a result their energy usage is not covered by this overview.

¹ Energy related CO₂ emissions data is current at the time of publication, however it should be noted that this data is subject to revision if the SEAI receive new or updated information from their sources.

Appendix IV: Management Board



Appendix V: Bodies under the aegis of the Department in 2021

<p>National Disability Authority</p>  <p>Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais National Disability Authority</p> <p>25 Clyde Road Dublin 4</p> <p>www.nda.ie</p>	<p>Tusla, Child and Family Agency</p>  <p>An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach Child and Family Agency</p> <p>The Brunel Building Heuston South Quarter St. John's Road West Kilmainham, Dublin 8</p> <p>www.tusla.ie</p>	<p>Oberstown Children Detention Campus</p>  <p>Oberstown Lusk, Co. Dublin</p> <p>www.oberstown.com</p>
<p>The Adoption Authority of Ireland</p>  <p>ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY of IRELAND</p> <p>Shelbourne House Shelbourne Road Dublin 4</p> <p>www.aai.gov.ie</p>	<p>Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission²</p>  <p>Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta an Duine agus Comhionannas Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission</p> <p>16-22 Green Street Dublin 7</p> <p>www.ihrec.ie</p>	<p>Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes (& Certain Related Matters)*</p> <p>73 Lower Baggot Street Dublin 2</p> <p>www.mbhcoi.ie</p> <p>*ceased operations on 28th February 2021.</p>
<p>Office of the Ombudsman for Children³</p>  <p>ombudsman do leanaí for children</p> <p>Millennium House 52-56 Great Strand Street, Dublin 1</p> <p>www.oco.ie</p>	<p>Gaisce, the President's Award</p>  <p>GAISCE THE PRESIDENT'S AWARD</p> <p>Ratra House, North Road Phoenix Park, Dublin 8</p> <p>www.gaisce.ie</p>	

² The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is independent in its functions and reports directly to the Oireachtas, in accordance with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014.

³ The Ombudsman for Children's Office is independent in its functions and reports directly to the Oireachtas, in accordance with the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002.