

# Voices of *Tomorrow*



ombudsman  
do leanaí  
for children



Youth  
Advisory  
Panel

## Voices of Tomorrow

This document was written by the Ombudsman for Children's Office's Youth Advisory Panel. We worked together to compile five asks for the new Government. Our voices are behind them. We are a group of young people aged 13-18 from all across Ireland.

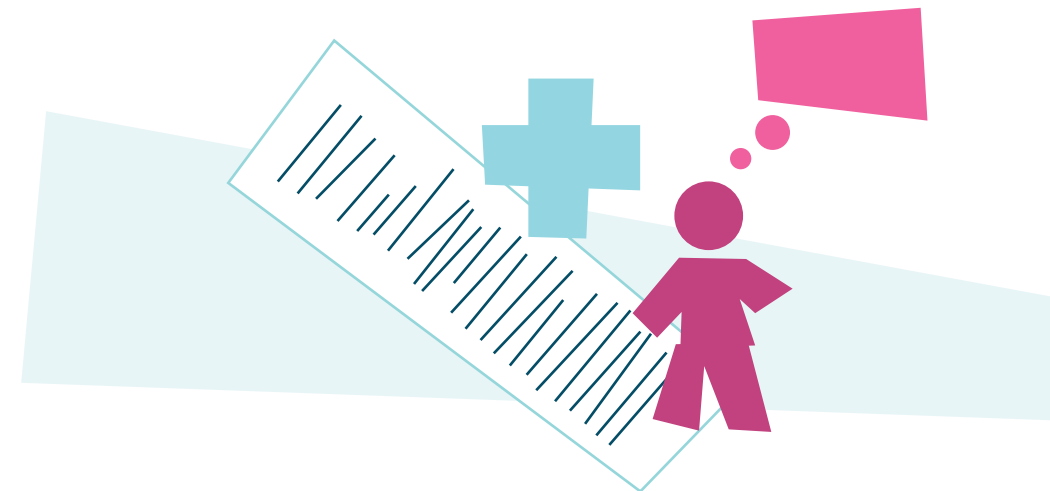
We may not be able to vote yet, but **we are the voters of the future, the voices of tomorrow, which is why we're asking the new Government to listen to what we have to say now. We are asking for change in five key areas over the next five years, not just for us, but for every child in Ireland.**

<b>Ailis</b> , 16, Offaly	<b>Killian</b> , 16, Dublin
<b>Alicia</b> , 16, Dublin	<b>Luke</b> , 17, Dublin
<b>Bel</b> , 17, Dublin	<b>Mia</b> , 16, Dublin
<b>Beth</b> , 17, Limerick	<b>Molly</b> , 16, Cavan
<b>Chris</b> , 17, Limerick	<b>Murphy</b> , 17, Dublin
<b>Ciaran</b> , 18, Dublin	<b>Princess</b> , 17, Cork
<b>Eoin</b> , 16, Dublin	<b>Rachel</b> , 17, Kildare
<b>Esther</b> , 16, Cork	<b>Sienna</b> , 18, Mayo
<b>Faith</b> , 17, Mayo	<b>Sinéad</b> , 17, Mayo
<b>Hassan</b> , 18, Dublin	<b>Toby</b> , 16, Dublin
<b>Karolina</b> , 17, Donegal	

## 1. We deserve our Right to High Quality Mental Health Services and Supports

Our mental health affects how **we feel, think and live**. It boosts our physical health, productivity and is important for a balanced life. It's also easier to learn and get our **right to education** if we have good solid mental health supports.

- Young people in Ireland are **under more pressure than ever**, between school, family and the online world. **Mental health support is a top priority for more than just us.**
- Despite this, we face **limited access to the support services we need**, services that are **understaffed** and have **long waiting lists**, especially in schools and rural communities.
- Marginalised young people, such as LGBTQIA+ children, Traveller children, children with disabilities and migrant children, are particularly impacted.



**We're calling on the new government to secure our right to the highest attainable standard of mental health. We need:**

1. Increased funding and supports to make mental health services work better
2. Education to help us look after our own mental health and to prevent stigma
3. Training and supports for teachers, staff and counsellors to look after mental health in schools
4. More support and resources so that children with disabilities can access mental health services
5. Less reliance on medication to treat youth mental health difficulties
6. Improved healthcare for transgender young people.



## 2. We deserve our Right to a Home

Every child in Ireland deserves to live **somewhere they feel safe**. If we don't, our other rights are put at risk, including our right to health, family and care, and education. When this happens, **we end up paying the consequences of adult decisions**.

- o Child homelessness in Ireland is **reaching record numbers**, with **over 4000 children trapped in homelessness in October 2024**. That's 4000 children just like us living in overcrowded, unsuitable accommodation that's detrimental to their future.
- o After 18 months living without a home, children begin to experience **serious developmental issues that can have a lasting impact throughout their lives**.
- o We believe the housing crisis is also leading to other issues, like racism and division.



## We're calling on the new government to secure our right to a home. We need:

1. A Tax on vacant homes owned by multi-property owners
2. More Social Housing and lower rents
3. Landlords to stop discriminating against tenants who receive HAP payments
4. The right to housing to be put in the Constitution
5. Direct Provision to be fully abolished.

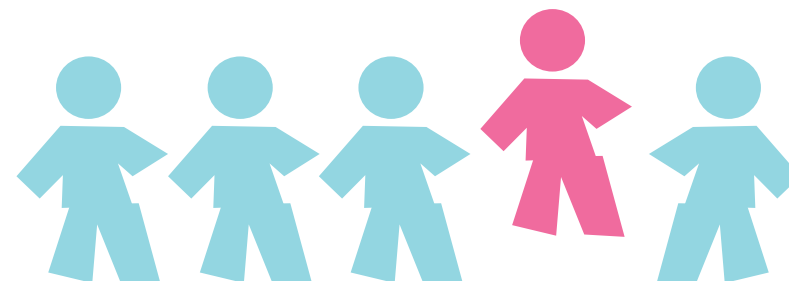


## 3. We deserve our Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

**Our future shouldn't depend on the situation we're born into.** Poverty affects us much more than simply "not having enough". It denies us food, clothes and medicine *and* impacts our mental health and education, rights that are **key to our development** and we should get **no matter what**. Children we **spoke to in 2022** also **experienced discrimination**, affecting their right to housing.

*"There's people that look down on people that live in flats, like landlords who are looking down at, 'Aw, they're poor', so we don't want them in our apartments." Pieces of Us (2022).*

- o **One in five children** in Ireland live in deprivation. We're more likely than adults to experience consistent poverty.
- o Children from lone parent families, children living in large households where someone has a disability, and Traveller and Roma families are **particularly at risk**.
- o The longer we live in poverty, the less likely we are to fulfil our potential.



**We're calling on the new government to secure our right to an adequate standard of living and end child poverty. We need:**

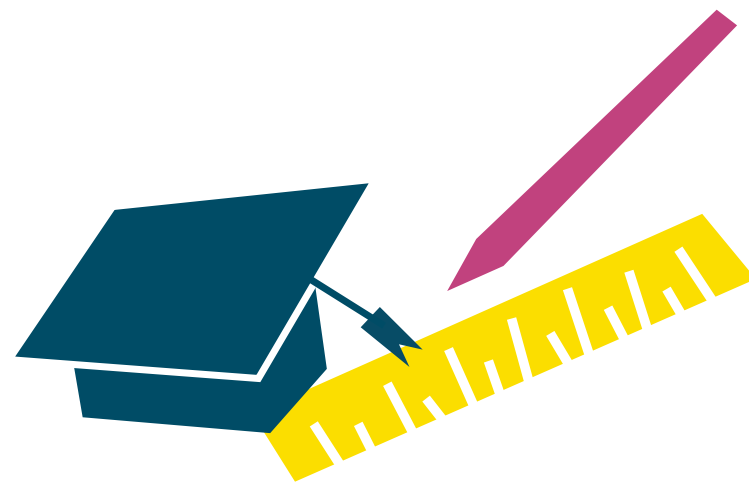
1. The UNCRC to be fully incorporated into Irish law, especially the right to housing
2. Targeted supports for families who are particularly vulnerable
3. Investment in better public services for the groups and communities most affected by poverty.



#### **4. We deserve our Right to High Quality, Inclusive Education**

**Education is fundamental to our growth and to our futures, as well as the future of Ireland. We know children aren't getting the support they need to thrive in school, especially children with disabilities.**

- o There are **not enough school places** and not every school is accessible or has the right supports in place that we need.
- o **Not every student feels accepted in school, especially LGBTQIA+ young people. 76% of LGBTQIA+ students felt unsafe at school in 2022, with 86% feeling isolated by other students.**
- o **Bullying and exam pressure** both have a negative impact on our experience of school.



**We're calling on the new government to secure our right to education. We need:**

1. Increased funding for schools
2. More training for teachers so they know how best to support students
3. Better protection for LGBTQIA+ students.



## 5. Children with Disabilities deserve to have their Rights Protected

We want all children with disabilities to have **an equal chance to achieve their goals and fully enjoy their childhood**. Everyone should feel included and be supported to fulfil their future potential.

- o Even though we're getting **1000 more SNAs**, that's still not enough. **We need more accessible public services and amenities, such as ramps, SNAs, technology and better public transport.**
- o Waiting lists for Assessment of Need and Children's Disability Network Teams are extremely long. Even after waiting years for an assessment, staffing shortages mean many children still cannot access the vital services they need.
- o **Children we spoke to** in our *Pieces of Us* report told us their right to education is impacted by a lack of school places and teachers who don't know how to support their specific needs.

*"I have Autism and there's a lot of cases being reported recently where there's kids can't get to the kind of schools that they need, either because of where they live, or they're just straight up being rejected."* **Pieces of Us (2022).**

## We're calling on the new government to secure the rights of children with disabilities.

We need:

1. Increased funding for healthcare services to shorten the waiting lists, provide assessments, and support families with disabled children.
2. Mandatory training on disability for all healthcare professionals and teachers.
3. Increased investment in schools and universal school supports so that all children access their right to education.
4. Disability-friendly public spaces as well as education and awareness around disability to create a more inclusive society.

