



Northern Ireland
Executive

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OUR PLAN:

Doing What Matters Most

Programme for Government
2024-2027

Child Rights Impact Assessment



Child Rights Impact Assessment template

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STAGE 1: SCOPING (Background and Rights Framework)

Question 1: Name the measure / proposal being assessed and describe the overall aim
Children's Rights Impact Assessment for the Programme for Government (PfG)
<p>Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most</p> <p>The Programme's aim is to provide clarity and shared purpose for the Executive so that only, 'significant or controversial matters that are clearly outside the scope of that programme' will need to go to the Executive Committee for discussion and agreement.</p> <p>The parties in the power-sharing Executive are democratically elected by their various constituents and communities. A Section 20 programme outlines areas of agreement.</p> <p>The Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most, as agreed by the Executive, aims more specifically to progress agreed priorities both in the short-term and longer-term. It sets out the meaningful changes the Executive hopes to drive forward this year, commits to taking forward infrastructure projects, and sets the direction for the remainder of the mandate with a longer-term focus on Missions.</p> <p>The 'Doing What Matters Most Today' section lists the following priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy • Deliver More Affordable, Accessible, High-Quality Early Learning and Childcare • Cut Health Waiting Times

- Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
- Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs
- Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing
- Safer Communities
- Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment
- Reform and Transformation of Public Services

The 'Building New Foundations' section commits to investing in public infrastructure and reshaping delivery under the following headings:

- Boost Housing Funds
- Improve the Planning System
- Deliver Better Public Services
- Support Our Net Zero Future
- Manage Our Water
- Upgrade Stadia and Support Local Sports
- Retrofit Homes
- Improve Our Transport Infrastructure for Safer Travel, Connected Communities and Sustainable Economic Growth.

The 'Shaping a Better Tomorrow' section sets out a direction towards three Missions of People, Planet and Prosperity, underpinned by a cross-cutting commitment to Peace.

There are also sections which break down anticipated costs and lay out an approach to monitoring progress through a Wellbeing Framework. The Wellbeing Framework is available online at: <https://northernireland.gov.uk/wellbeing>

This document should be read in conjunction with the [Equality Impact Assessment](#) on the [Programme](#). This Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) follows the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People's Office guidance as set out at [NICCY CRIA Guidance](#).

Question 2: Which children's human rights instruments and articles are relevant to the measure / proposal?		
Human Rights Instrument	Article	Further analysis on the expected / actual effect
<p>CRIAs are a key mechanism for implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Programme touches on a range of policies and programmes to which some articles may be relevant to varying degrees.</p>	<p>Non-discrimination (Article 2) Best interests of the child (Article 3) Making rights real (Article 4). Right to life, survival and development (Article 6) Right to be heard (Article 12) Freedom of expression (Article 13) Access to information from the media (Article 17) Parental responsibilities and state assistance (Article 18) Protection from violence, abuse and neglect (Article 19) Goals of education (Article 29) Sexual exploitation (Article 34) Recovery from trauma and reintegration (Article 39) Knowledge of rights (Article 42)</p>	<p>The Programme for Government, the consultation and engagement processes surrounding it, and the ongoing monitoring and review are intended to impact positively on, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 2 – this Programme for Government strives to eliminate discrimination against children and young people, and the principle of non-discrimination will underpin the work we do to achieve this. • Article 3 – this Programme for Government places the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in the development of actions and priority areas that concern children. • Article 6 – this Programme for Government seeks to ensure, through the three Missions of People, Planet and Prosperity supported by the cross-cutting commitment of Peace, that children and young people have the right to life, survival and develop to their full potential. • Article 12 – this Programme for Government and its associated consultation structures and processes gives space for children and young people's voices to be heard and to enable participation to help influence decision makers.

		<p>A Wellbeing Framework has been published alongside the PfG and is intended to help target future interventions and analyse wellbeing. It contains around 47 indicators spread across ten domains (including for example, Thriving Children – previously Happier Children but renamed to reflect consultation feedback). Some of the other articles are expected to be impacted by a specific commitment such as action to end violence against women and girls. (Further detail can be found in the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Child Rights Impact Assessment)</p>
<p>CRIA guidance states that it may be appropriate to consider the Human Rights Act and other treaties and mechanisms such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) • the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) • the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 	<p>The Programme seeks to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity. The Executive acts compatibly with Convention Rights and the UK Government's commitments in international law including the rights set out in the UNCRC. The Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) (see link in Q1) examines the rights of all Section 75 groups as required by the NI Act 1998. The EQIA examines the impact on those with a disability; this and the Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) will have attempted to flag impacts on Children and Young People (CYP) as needed.</p>	

Question 3: Which groups of children are most likely to be affected by the measure / proposal?		
Group of children	How are they likely to be affected?	How will you engage with them?
<p>The NICCY (Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People) Guidance on CRIAs states that, in most cases, the impact will be felt by specific groups of children, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in a particular geographical region; • a specific age group; or • only children accessing a particular service. <p>Often measures will have a differential impact based on inequalities already present in society, for example experienced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children in low-income households; • children with disabilities; • newcomer children; • children of different genders, or gender non-binary; • children from ethnic minority groups; or • children of different religious backgrounds. <p>Age is one of the Section 75 grounds considered in an EQIA. Data included in the EQIA shows that some of the policies will impact directly upon children and young people – for example girls who are at risk of violence, early years children (with regards childcare) and school-age children with special educational needs (with regards better provision), and upon people with dependants. This was welcomed in consultation feedback.</p>	<p>It is anticipated that there will be positive impacts upon targeted groups and positive impacts upon equality of opportunity between groups. Those policy areas which do not target a certain group will be taking forward relevant impact assessments as required with an expectation that they will result in positive impacts and that if adverse impacts are identified these will be mitigated or alternative options considered. Areas which have the potential for impact on certain groups include for example the retrofitting of existing housing stock which could positively impact children and young people living in cold and unsuitable homes.</p> <p>When asked about the potential for impact, a majority of online respondents to the consultation on draft impact assessments felt there would be a positive impact on the rights of Children and Young People generally.</p>	<p>All stakeholders have had the opportunity to engage through the publicly available consultations on the NI Executive website. A twelve-week consultation on the draft impact assessments for the draft Programme incorporated online and in-person events, and alternative versions of the PfG were made available on request, including a child friendly version and an easy read version. An online survey was used to enable stakeholders to provide feedback on the draft EQIA, CRIA and RNIA.</p> <p>Events were held online and in-person with the Youth Assembly and the NI Youth Forum respectively and stakeholders such as NICCY also took forward their own</p>

	There will also be monitoring procedures in place in individual business areas and centrally to assess the policies and impacts.	engagement with young people before responding.
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Question 4: Which stakeholder groups should be engaged during the policy development process? (e.g., parents/carers, NGOs, unions, NICCY, academics, etc.)		
Stakeholder group	What can they contribute to the process?	How will you engage with them?
<p>The groups of interested parties included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and carers; • Children & young people themselves; • NGOs working with children generally, or with specific groups of children; • Academics who may have undertaken research on the issues; • Unions; • Political Parties and • NICCY. 	<p>Practical and professional experience of what the likely impact could be, and how best to address the interests of children, promote positive impacts and mitigate negative impacts.</p>	<p>Individual policy areas will have the responsibility to engage with young people, if required, through their individual consultations and impact assessments.</p> <p>However, all stakeholders have had the opportunity to engage through the publicly available consultation on the NI Executive website. The consultation incorporated events and meetings with interested stakeholder groups and with the public as well as a survey asking specific questions relevant to the EQIA, CRIA and RNIA. As part of the consultation process many stakeholders were contacted; these included the following stakeholders specific to both Children and Young People: Youth Assembly, Youth Justice Agency, NICCY, CBI Youth, Include Youth, NI Youth Forum, Youth Action, Children's Law Centre, M-Power Youth Project-YMCA, National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS), Voice of Young People in Care</p>

		(VOYPIC), Network for Youth, NI Council for Integrated Education, Playboard NI, Playwork Education & Training Council for NI, Altram (Irish Medium Early Years Care) and Family Mediation NI.
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STAGE 2: CONTEXT AND COLLABORATION

Question 5: Which Programme for Government outcomes does this policy aim to impact on?

This new PfG is intended to impact positively on a wide range of policy areas, and upon equality issues and matters. The Programme is intended to have fairness and inclusion of all citizens at its core and therefore, this includes children and young people.

While an outcomes-based approach has framed draft programmes and draft Outcomes Frameworks in recent years, these were not finalised by Ministers in previous Executives. Until now, there has not been a PfG since 2011-15. Previous work on outcomes has helped to inform a Wellbeing Framework which has been published alongside the PfG. It will help us to analyse wellbeing and target future interventions using data and insight. There are around 47 indicators spread across ten domains (including for example, Thriving Children) contained within the Wellbeing Framework.

Question 6: Which Children and Young People's Strategy outcomes does this policy aim to impact on? Resource: Children and Young People Survey

Children's Strategy Outcome	Way in which the policy will have an impact
<p>The Programme aims, and is likely to have, an impact on most, if not all of the outcomes in the NI Executive's <u>Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030</u>, and certainly the outcomes below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people learn and achieve Children and young people live in safety and stability Children and young people are physically and mentally healthy Children and young people make a positive contribution to society Children and young people live in a society which respects their rights Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted 	<p>It is the aim of the Programme that the policies within it will have a positive impact either generally upon the population including children, or upon all children, or upon certain groups of children, for example to better support children and young people with special educational needs, or to end violence against women and girls.</p>

Question 7: What opportunities are there to promote joined up outcomes for children? Resource: Children's Services Co-operation Act		
Department and policy area	Shared outcome / cross cutting issue	How will you engage with them? (e.g. joint working, keep informed, consultation, etc)
<p>It will be for all Executive Ministers and all NICS departments to consider where policies may intersect and join up. As this is an Executive Programme, it relies on cross departmental engagement.</p> <p>The aim is to identify cross-cutting issues and promote joined-up government, as required by the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 (CSCA).</p>	<p>Investment in SEN and in early intervention is expected to have positive effects on a range of services.</p> <p>All programmes and policies are required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity for all citizens, including CYP.</p>	<p>Please refer to Section 7 of the EQIA which comments upon monitoring arrangements including a Wellbeing Framework as well as delivery and impact monitoring.</p> <p>Many of the policies and programmes will rely upon partnerships with other NICS departments as well as councils and VCOs and we have engaged with these partners during the consultation stage and hope to continue this engagement into implementation and delivery.</p> <p>As mentioned in the response to Q3, consultation events were held online and in-person with the Youth Assembly and the NI Youth Forum respectively and hope to continue to engage in the future.</p>

STAGE 3: EVIDENCE GATHERING

Question 8: What quantitative evidence have you used to inform your assessment? What does it tell you?		
Evidence collected	Evidence source	Explanation of the importance
<p>As part of the statutory EQIA process a range of sources were used; with direct and indirect relevance to CYP. The list of sources used are listed in Section 2 of the EQIA and include the below: 2021 Census and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency statistics; Impact assessments for relevant policies where available and Departmental budget impact assessments.</p> <p>Specific sources used for this CRIA include CRIAs conducted for departmental budget impact assessments and for relevant policy areas (e.g. the Draft Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls and Draft Foundational Action Plan).</p> <p>Many policies in the Programme are universal in nature and provide benefit to all citizens across Northern Ireland. We will seek to gather further information on potential impacts through consultation.</p>	As opposite.	<p>The EQIA lists a range of inequalities including by age, and highlights some key information, for example that 20% of the population were aged 0-15 in 2021, that 31% of the Northern Ireland population live in households with dependent children, that demand is increasing for children's health and social care services, that younger people require improved mental health support services, and that actions are needed to support young carers, looked after children, and those within the juvenile justice system, that certain groups of women and girls are more 'at risk' of abuse and harm, and that poverty can disproportionately impact upon children.</p> <p>The CRIA for the Draft Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls and Draft Foundational Action Plan contains various key findings on harassment, education and attitudes, and abuse.</p> <p>The CRIA for the Strategy for Looked After Children, (DE, 2021) refers to the 'Lighting up young brains' paper from Save the Children and notes how, 'a child's environment and experiences play a crucial role in their early learning, with access to the highest-quality childcare crucial to support their early development'.</p>

		It will be for individual policy areas to conduct the necessary impact assessments as policies develop.
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Question 9: What qualitative evidence have you used to inform your assessment? What does it tell you?		
Evidence collected	Evidence source	Explanation of the importance
See Question 8. A mixture of quantitative and qualitative data sources was used.	See Question 8. A mixture of quantitative and qualitative data sources was used.	<p>See Question 8. A mixture of quantitative and qualitative data sources has been used in formulating the PfG and associated impact assessments. Consultation events of various types continued to provide a valuable opportunity to collate qualitative evidence to support further assessment of impacts, including face-to-face and online meetings with groups and individuals.</p> <p>There is potential for positive impacts on children and young people where funding is maintained or increased and adverse impact where this is not the case, particularly in policies relevant to deprived communities e.g. in Good Relations funding.</p> <p>Many of the policies and programmes will rely upon partnerships with other NICS Departments as well as councils and VCOs who we have engaged with during the consultation stage and hope to continue this engagement into implementation and delivery.</p> <p>As mentioned in the response to Q3, consultation events were held online and in-person with the Youth Assembly and the NI Youth Forum respectively and hope to continue to engage in the future.</p> <p>As part of the consultation process a list of stakeholders were contacted, these included the following stakeholders which would be specific to both Children and Young People: Youth Assembly, Youth Justice Agency, NICCY, CBI Youth, Include Youth, NI Youth Forum, Youth Action, Children's Law Centre, M-Power Youth Project-YMCA, National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS), Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC), Network for Youth, NI Council for Integrated Education, Playboard NI, Playwork Education & Training Council for NI, Altram (Irish Medium Early Years Care) and Family Mediation NI.</p>

		We note that deprivation and other challenges such as discrimination and inequality, mean certain groups of people including children and young people are more vulnerable and most likely to be differentially impacted. This includes people with disabilities, particularly learning disabilities; looked after children; people from a range of minority ethnic groups; including newcomer children; LGBT+ people; people with caring responsibilities.
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Question 10: What key missing information / evidence would have been beneficial to your analysis?

This CRIA forms an initial step and has been updated following consultation. The Programme is a high-level document and some of the commitments within it are at an early stage. Impact assessments, including CRIA, will be taken forward as appropriate by individual policy areas as policy development progresses.

Question 11: What existing evidence on children and young people views has been considered in the development of the proposal or measure?

Group of children	Source of Information	Please provide a brief description of process	What were the findings?
Children and Young People generally	See Questions 8 and 10. While some conclusions were drawn from other sources, the necessary engagement with all relevant stakeholders, with regards this draft CRIA, other draft Impact Assessments, and the draft Programme itself was taken forward during the consultation phase. The consultation report, the three revised impact assessments and the revised PfG can be found at	As opposite.	As opposite.

	https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfg . The consultation report deliberately combines the findings from responses to the draft PfG itself, and responses to the draft impact assessments. There were fewer responses dedicated to the impact assessments but there were overlapping findings including an appetite from stakeholders for the rights and perspectives of children and young people to be adequately reflected.		
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Question 12: What groups of children and young people have been directly involved in developing the proposal or measure?			
Groups involved		How were they involved?	What were the findings?
As mentioned in the response to Q3, consultation events were held online and in-person with the Youth Assembly and the NI Youth Forum respectively and we hope to continue to engage in the future.		<p>Child-friendly/easy-read versions were made available.</p> <p>The perspectives of children and young people were invited via an in-person meeting (attended by officials) with the NI Youth Forum, and via an online session (attended by officials and Junior Ministers) with the Youth Assembly</p>	<p>As in Q11, the consultation report, the three revised impact assessments and the revised PfG can be found at https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfg.</p>

Question 13: What stakeholder groups have been engaged in developing/reviewing the proposal or measure?		
Stakeholder group	How were they involved?	What were the findings?

<p>A full list of stakeholder events is provided in a separate document and all written consultation responses will be published once a redaction process is complete - this is to avoid putting any personal information into the public domain.</p>	<p>A full list of stakeholder events is provided in a separate document and all written consultation responses will be published once a redaction process is complete - this is to avoid putting any personal information into the public domain.</p>	<p>As in Q11, the consultation report, the three revised impact assessments and the revised PfG can be found at https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfg.</p>
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STAGE 4: ASSESSING THE IMPACT

Complete questions 14-16 for each option being considered.

Question 14: What impact will (or does) the proposal or measure have on children and young people's rights?		
Type of impact <i>[please highlight]</i>	Justification for Argument	likely or actual short/medium/long-term outcomes
Positive / neutral	<p>It is not envisaged that any of the policy areas contained within the Programme are likely to contravene or violate child rights but instead are more likely to promote and protect these rights. However, we are aware children's best interests must be a primary consideration and it will be for individual policy areas to consider that the best interests of children will continue to be prioritised during development and impact assessment.</p> <p>The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 requires "co-operation among certain public authorities and other persons to contribute to the wellbeing of children and young persons". The most recent report, for the period June 2020 to December 2022, recommends proactively identifying opportunities to co-operate and adopting different approaches rather than one size fits all.</p> <p>The delivery of an agreed PfG which outlines the shared priorities of the whole Executive will help ensure co-operation on cross-cutting issues and contribute to the wellbeing of children and young persons.</p>	Medium

Question 15: Will there be (or are there) different impacts on different groups of children and young people?		
Group of children affected	Initial analysis of the positive impact on rights	Initial analysis of the negative impact on rights
<p>See Questions 3 and 9: It is anticipated that some of the policies will impact directly upon children and young people – for example girls who are at risk of violence, early years children (with regards childcare) and school-age children with special educational needs (with regards better provision), and upon people with dependants. These impacts are anticipated to be positive for the targeted groups and for equality.</p> <p>Policy areas will be taking forward relevant impact assessments as required with an expectation that they will result in positive impacts and that if adverse impacts are identified these will be mitigated or alternative options considered.</p> <p>There is also a monitoring process in place to assess the impacts at the strategic level.</p> <p>We note that deprivation and other challenges such as unfair discrimination and inequality, mean certain groups of people including children and young people are more vulnerable and more likely to be differentially impacted, including people with disabilities, particularly learning disabilities; looked after children; people from a range of minority ethnic groups, including newcomer children; LGBT+ people; and people with caring responsibilities.</p>	As opposite.	As opposite.

Question 16: If a negative impact is identified for any area of rights or any group of children and young people, what options are there to modify the proposal or measure to mitigate the impact?

Negative impact	What options are there to modify the measure(s) or mitigate the impact?
<p>The Programme is intended to have a positive impact.</p>	<p>Comments from the impact assessment survey on ways to reduce potential negative impacts included the provision of youth facilities and services, such as youth clubs or wellbeing arts initiatives for example. Engagement and communication with young people were also suggested.</p> <p>Decisions at individual policy level on how to progress delivery will need to be made with due regard and consideration given to the best interests of children and young people.</p> <p>Please also refer to Section 7 of the EQIA which comments upon monitoring arrangements including a Wellbeing Framework, as well as delivery and impact monitoring. In brief, the Programme is intended to be iterative, agreed each year and reviewed as needed. Therefore, where there is an opportunity to change direction to better promote positive impacts or protect against and avoid adverse impacts, this advice will be put to Ministers during the year, and at that annual iteration stage.</p> <p>Following consultation, the 'Happier Children' wellbeing domain has been renamed 'Thriving Children' to better reflect our ambition, and we are working to strengthen the indicators around Children and Young People across the Wellbeing Framework.</p> <p>Many of the policies and programmes will rely upon partnerships with other NICS Departments as well as local councils and VCOs who we have engaged with during the consultation stage and hope to continue this engagement into implementation and delivery.</p> <p>The Programme is clear that collaborative working is necessary for effective delivery.</p>

STAGE 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Question 17: In summary, what are your key findings on the impact of the measure or proposal on children and young people's rights?

As above, CYP will be impacted by various elements of the PfG, but it is expected that impacts will be positive.

Among written responses there was support for inclusion of some child-specific issues. Other comments included a desire to see:

- Implementation of and reference to the Children's Services Co-operation Act
- urgent actions around safeguarding and protection of children and young people
- a children's wellbeing priority and dataset
- consideration of vulnerable groups such as young carers, newcomer children, care leavers, and those with special educational needs and disabilities
- reframing of several priorities to better reflect the needs and rights of children
- objectives to address child poverty, cut health waiting lists for children, improve education and increase mental health services for young people
- support for organisations delivering youth services
- ongoing engagement with young people and consideration of children's rights in policy making
- acknowledgment of the community, voluntary and social enterprise sector

The Programme for Government consultation report, and where applicable more detail from responses, will continue to inform decision making. As policy development and implementation is taken forward, individual policy areas will be appraised of potential impacts. Furthermore, individual impact assessments will more comprehensively set out potential impacts for specific policies.