
SAVING CHILDHOOD

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS REFERENDUM

NOT SOMETIME.
NOW!


Barnardos


CARI

children's
RIGHTS ALLIANCE


IAYPIC
Irish Association of Young People's Care

ISPCC


One in Four


RAPE CRISIS
NETWORK
IRELAND


RCC

Overview

The Saving Childhood Group (Barnardos, CARI, Children's Rights Alliance, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Irish Association of Young People in Care, ISPCC, One in Four and Rape Crisis Network Ireland) commissioned Behaviour and Attitudes to conduct research into public attitudes towards the children's rights referendum. The findings of the research indicate that overwhelming numbers of Irish people support a referendum on children's rights. It is clear that Ireland is ready to go to the ballot box and stand up for children now.

Introduction

The Irish Constitution was adopted in 1937 and as the most important document in the Irish legal system is central to the administration of Government and the relationship between the State and its citizens. Fundamentally, the Constitution recognises the personal rights of the citizen and sets limits on what the State can do and how it can do it.

Although it contains strong protection for the family, the Constitution is virtually silent on children's rights. In practice this has made the protection and promotion of children's rights difficult. It is widely accepted by those working with children that some change is required to address this situation at a constitutional level.

The Saving Childhood Group began our collaborative work in response to the publication of the Ryan Report. We are continuing to work together to call for the holding of a referendum on children's rights as promised by the Government in 2006.

Childhood is a precious time; children must be protected and their rights promoted to ensure that they are consistently treated with the respect and dignity they deserve. We have a plethora of reports highlighting the neglect, abuse and exploitation that happens when children's voices are silenced and their best interests ignored. As a society we have failed to prioritise children in any meaningful way. Children in Ireland have played second fiddle to the agendas of individuals, institutions and policies for too long. It is time to redress the balance. Children's rights must take their rightful place in the legal foundation of our State. The time for empty promises is long past, the debate for children long overdue; Government must set a date for the referendum on children's rights. Now is the time for Ireland to stand up for children.

Methodology

Saving Childhood added a series of questions on children's rights to the Behaviour and Attitudes Barometer survey. The survey was conducted between 26th March and 8th April 2010, through face to face interviews with 877 adults eligible to vote in referenda, in 63 sampling locations across the country. Barometer is a nationally representative survey, quota controlled by gender, age, social class and region. The interviews were conducted by fully trained and supervised interviewers. The results can be viewed by age, gender, social class, region and whether respondents had children or not.

Findings from the Saving Childhood Poll

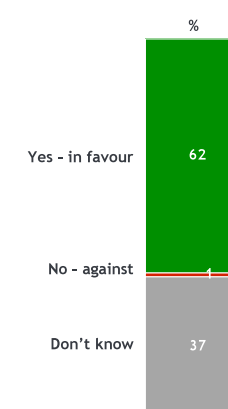
In the survey, respondents were asked specific questions regarding their awareness of the promised referendum, their likely voting intentions as well as general statements on children's rights. The responses show that only 29% of respondents are aware that a referendum on children's rights is likely to be held later this year or in early 2011. However, 83% indicate that they are likely to vote in such a referendum.

Table 1 shows that when asked their likelihood of voting in favour or against the insertion of children's rights into the Constitution, 62% of adults would vote in favour, 1% would be against such a move with 37% saying they did not know how they would vote.

The breakdown of results show that there is little variance when responses are segregated by age, gender and whether they have children or not. However, there is stronger support for this constitutional change among higher socio-economic backgrounds than those among a farming background. Also those living in Dublin are more likely to vote in favour than those living in Connaught/Ulster.

Likelihood Of Voting Yes In Favour Of Or Voting No, Against The Inclusion Of Specific Rights For Children In The Referendum?

All eligible to vote: 877



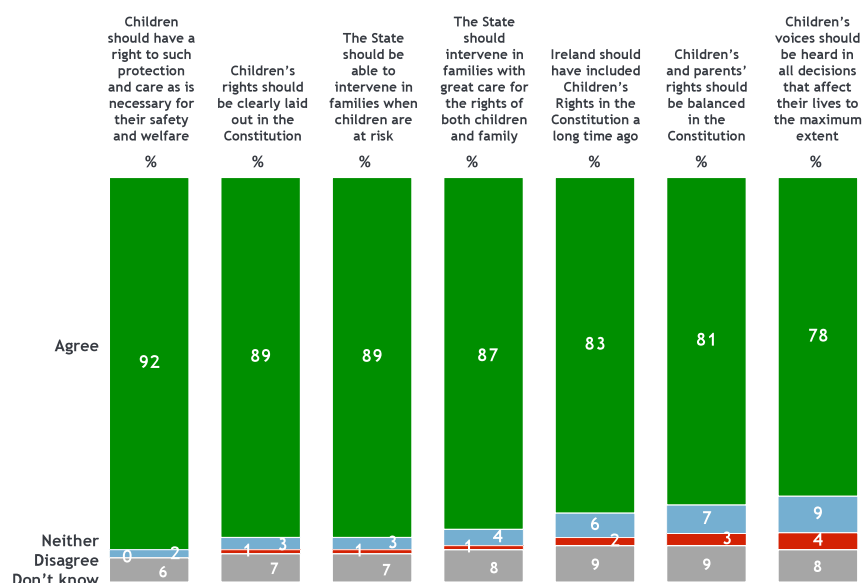
Very significant majority in favour at this stage.

The respondents were asked their opinion on seven statements regarding children's rights in the Constitution, the balance between children's and parent's rights and the responsibility of the state in this regard. Overall there was very strong agreement with these statements:

- 92% agree that children should have a right to such protection and care as is necessary for their safety and welfare.
- 89% agree that children's rights should be clearly laid out in the Constitution.
- 89% agree that the State should be able to intervene in families where children are at risk.
- 87% agree that the State should intervene in families with great care for the rights of both children and family.
- 81% agree that children's and parent's rights should be balanced in the Constitution.

Statements Regarding Children’s Rights Referendum

All eligible to vote: 877



The breakdown of responses show there is very little differences between men and women. There was also very little difference between parents and those people without children. The differences are more prevalent according to age and location. In all cases, agreement was stronger among adults under 25 years and those living in Dublin with the rest of Leinster showing weaker agreement.

Clearly, there is a significant level of support among the Irish public for the strengthening of children’s rights in the Constitution. Ireland is ready to stand up for children – the date for referendum must be set now.

Conclusion

Those working with, and for children, agree that constitutional change is required to ensure that children are fully protected in society and that their rights are taken into account in decisions made about their lives. The Constitution represents the bedrock of the social and legal mores of our society; it is the document that should represent the core principles that we as a nation stand for. The conspicuous absence of distinct children’s rights in the Irish Constitution represents the ongoing failure of our society to adequately prioritise children. It is time to change this: we must stand up for children. Government must fulfil the promise it made in 2006 and set a date for a referendum to make sure children’s rights are included at the heart of Irish law.