

FOREWORD

As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, it is my great pleasure to launch the report *State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2008*. This is the second in a biennial series of reports prepared by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, in association with the Central Statistics Office and the Health Promotion Research Centre of the National University of Ireland, Galway. It fulfils a commitment made in the National Children's Strategy to publish key indicators of children's well-being on a regular basis.

As with the first report in 2006, readers will find an accessible compendium of indicators illustrative of childhood in Ireland today, using data drawn from the most recent and most reliable administrative, survey and Census sources.

This 2008 report presents key indicators on important aspects of children's lives, including outcomes on their education, health and social, emotional and behavioural well-being; their relationships with their parents and their friends; and the services available to and accessed by them. The report also presents data on contextual indicators, describing changes in the demographic characteristics of the population, as well as in children's family settings and living arrangements.

Information is updated and, while maintaining comparability with the 2006 report, incorporates several improvements. Most notably, improvements have been made to strengthen some indicators and to close critical data gaps, particularly in the middle childhood period. In addition, the indicators reporting on educational attainment, which were included as a special feature of the 2006 report, are now incorporated as regular indicators in this and future reports.

The *State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2008* report is an important resource for all those who seek to understand the experience of childhood in Ireland. As such, it will help us in our task of making Ireland a better place for children.

Barry Andrews, TD

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

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