Updating *Aistear*

Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals

This template is intended to help you (and your colleagues) develop a written submission in

relation to Updating *Aistear*. Please e-mail your completed submission to

aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie

Organisation submission details

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Position	
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Date	
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Do you consent to this submission being posted online including your name and organisation*?

Yes   x   No

Please provide some brief background information on your organisation.

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre is a national NGO committed to the realisation of human rights for Irish Travellers and Roma in Ireland. Established in 1985, the aim of Pavee Point is to contribute to the improvement in quality of life and living circumstances for Travellers and Roma by working for social justice, solidarity and human rights. Pavee Point has a dedicated Education Programme which builds on, reinforces and supports Traveller and Roma education rights and ambition, and works to address discrimination and marginalisation. The Programme provides a Traveller and Roma analysis of education rights and issues with the aim of transforming Traveller and Roma education from access to outcomes.

The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on *Aistear*: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. Section 2 is structured according to the Principles, Themes and Guidelines for Good Practice. Each section is briefly summarised as a support for working on the submission.

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Section 1

Please outline your overall comments and observations on updating *Aistear*: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

Pavee Point welcomes the opportunity to feed into the process of updating Aistear, and thanks the NCCA for initiating this process. As an important framework for the Early Childhood Education and Care sector, updating the framework is timely particularly in the context of growing diversity of the Irish population, the formal recognition of Irish Travellers as an ethnic group in 2017, and of the persistent social exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination of Travellers, Roma and other groups/individuals which contribute to inequality in access, participation and outcomes in ECEC settings.

Ireland has specific obligations towards Traveller and Roma children under the EU Roma Inclusion Framework 2020-2030, UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, amongst others. It is important these are reflected in the framework for the early childhood curriculum framework. The legislative, regulatory and policy framework, when thoroughly incorporated, will both strengthen Aistear's vision and principles, and oblige all partners in the sector to implement them (a list of relevant legislation and policies are further down in this section).

Specifically, human rights, equality, anti-racism and anti-discrimination are crucial values, principles and approaches to be incorporated into the next iteration of the Framework. Children learn and absorb attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices from their environment at an early age, including in ECEC settings, and can be exposed to stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and racism by other children and/or educators.[1]

As a result, and in an effort to ensure equal access, participation and outcomes, and to challenge discrimination for all children in ECEC settings, it is crucial that the Aistear sets a clear framework for educators within the sector. The Framework needs to acknowledge and address the structural nature and levels of inequality and discrimination (including racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism) in Irish society and their impact, acknowledging and addressing the specific barriers for Traveller, Roma and other minority children and parents/guardians seeking to access and participate in ECEC settings.

Traveller and Roma parents/guardians often have low levels of information about services and supports, literacy and/or English language skills, and trust in mainstream service

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[1] The term "educator" in this submission includes all adults involved at all levels in developing and delivering ECEC. The principles informing Aistear set the overarching framework. Delivery of Aistear will be weakened if educators at any level of the ECEC system are not informed by its vision.

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provision. In addition to this, historic and persistent experiences of discrimination and racism contribute to low levels of trust and engagement in mainstream services, including in education settings. This shows in the significant and stark inequalities among Traveller and Roma children and learners of all ages. The following data are specifically relevant to ECEC provision:

- According to Census 2016, there were an estimated 4,317 Travellers aged 0-4 years. However, the 2017/2018 Pobal Early Years Sector Profile figures shows only 2,633 Traveller children enrolled in early years services (Department of Children & Youth Affairs, Young Travellers in Ireland, 2020)
- Census 2016 also found that 48.2% of Traveller mothers whose youngest child was between 0-5 years old had had no formal or primary education (Department of Children & Youth Affairs, Young Travellers in Ireland, 2020)

This highlights the particular need to ensure that the Framework, in its principles, themes and approaches, works to bridge the gap to information, participation and outcomes in ECEC settings, and to transform the experiences among Travellers and Roma as they transition from early years onwards. Special measures are needed to build trust, relationships and partnerships between Traveller and Roma parents/guardians and educators in order to ensure Traveller and Roma children have access to and positive outcomes in ECEC settings.

The revised Aistear should set a framework:

- for children to learn in a non-discriminatory environment where equality, diversity and multiple and intersecting identities and ethnic/cultural backgrounds are actively promoted and protected in the practices and curriculum of the ECEC settings
- for children to learn in an environment where stereotypes, prejudice, identity based-bullying, racism and discrimination are not tolerated and are actively addressed/prevented in the ECEC practices, curriculum and materials
- for undertaking special measures to enhance communication and build stronger relations and engagement with parents/guardians who have low literacy and/or English language skills and who may face additional barriers to engage with services
- for practice to be informed by various stakeholders, disciplines and professions, and where interdisciplinary work is encouraged

Our overall observations and recommendations for the revision include the following:

- Include a clear vision, mission, values, objectives, approach and timeframe for the next Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

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- Incorporate a human rights-based perspective into the Framework and reflect this in the language used. The Framework needs to move beyond children's 'needs' to 'rights', reflecting Ireland's commitments under national and international policy and human rights standards. A human rights-based approach allows for the sector to move towards aligning itself with international human rights standards and operationally promote and protect human rights. This ensures that the framework does not leave behind those children who are most marginalised, excluded or discriminated against, and leads to measures that analyse and address discrimination, power imbalances and gender norms, crucial for ensuring that measures reach those most marginalised
- Incorporate relevant policy, legislation and international human rights treaties Ireland has in place and is committed to within the Framework. These are key for educators to understand in order to be able to reflect on good practice and ensure a rights-based approach to early childhood framework. In particular, the Framework needs to take note of the following:
  - At international level:
    - UN Conventions - UNCRC, UNCERD, UNCEDAW, UNCESCR, UNCRPD
    - EU Child Guarantee and the forthcoming National Action Plan to implement the Guarantee
  - At national level:
    - National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy
    - National Strategy for Women and Girls
    - forthcoming National Action Plan against Racism
    - Sustainable Development Goals
    - Children First Act 2015
    - Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016
    - Diversity Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines (DCYA, 2016)
    - First Five (DCYA, 2018) A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families
    - Code of Professional Responsibilities and Code of Ethics for Early Years Educators (DCYA, 2020)
    - National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making (DCEDIY, 2021)
- Acknowledge the status of Traveller children in line with the formal recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group in 2017. In keeping with this, include Traveller culture, identity and heritage within the framework, curriculum and materials
- Incorporate and integrate the language and practices of an anti-bias, anti-racism and anti-discrimination approach within Aistear so educators can further develop understanding, knowledge and skills within a holistic, rights-based framework. Update the vocabulary list accordingly
- Replace the word 'adult' with 'educator' (see footnote above)

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- Where references are made to 'parents' include 'guardians' (i.e parents/ guardians)
- Consider how clear links can be made through the Aistear Framework to the DEI Charter and Guidelines (DCYA, 2016) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Embed anti-racism, anti-discrimination and anti-bias approach/education within the themes of the Framework, as goals for educators and children, and incorporate the same within any initial and ongoing professional training for educators. Make such training mandatory for educators
- Explicitly name groups in need of targeted special measures and supports, including Travellers and Roma
- Recognise intersectionality within all aspects of the Framework - the varying, intersecting and evolving identities and the intersectional discrimination experienced by many children and their parents/guardians on grounds of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability and so forth
- Revise and/or create worksheets, tasks and other materials in light of the updated Aistear - ensure all materials promote the critical reflection and practical skills of educators, enabling them to promote anti-racism, anti-discrimination, anti-bias and equality

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Section 2

Principles of *Aistear*

Aistear is based on 12 Principles of early learning and development. Each principle is presented using a short statement. This is followed by an explanation of the Principle from the child's perspective. This explanation highlights the adult's role in supporting children's early learning and development. The Principles can be accessed here.

Please give your feedback in relation to updating the Principles of *Aistear*. Please indicate what is working well with the principles and what might need to be enhanced or updated.

The current Framework shows great awareness of the issues for children, their parents/guardians and educators, and of good responses embedded in the exemplars. However, the principles need to fully and thoroughly include, be responsive and accountable to the wider legislative and policy framework the sector operates in, as well as the human rights standards Ireland has committed to achieving. These standards and frameworks need to be implemented through this Framework, and training provided for educators regarding their implementation.

Proposed new principles:
In line with a human rights-based framework name the following as key principles guiding the Framework and incorporate the principles within all aspects of the revised Framework:

- children as rights holders
- participation
- accountability
- non-discrimination (inclusive of anti-racism and anti-bias)
- equality
- empowerment

Revision of current principles:
- Consider amending the principle **'child's uniqueness'** – child's uniqueness is not only about her/his 'experiences' or 'life-story'. Revise this to '**Child's identity**' to reflect the various and intersecting identity grounds children and their families may identify with. Name the various identity grounds in line with the Equal Status Acts that include ethnicity (including membership of the Traveller community), gender, marital status, family status, age disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, along with any other identity/ies one may identify with
- **'Equality and diversity'** - revise the definitions of these terms.

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Section 3

Themes of *Aistear*

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework presents children's learning and development using four Themes. These are:

1. Well-being
2. Identity and Belonging
3. Communicating
4. Exploring and Thinking.

The themes describe what children learn—the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding. Each theme begins with a short overview of its importance for children as young learners. The theme is then presented using four aims. Each aim is divided into six learning goals. Aistear's Themes can be accessed [here](#)

Please give your overall feedback in relation to the themes of *Aistear*. Please indicate what is working well with the themes and what might need to be enhanced or updated.

● include a critical reflection section under each theme

Communication:

● there is a significant deficit regarding promoting adult literacy in the context of parents/guardians supporting their children's participation in ECEC. The Framework needs to acknowledge this and set guidelines for educators to engage with parents/guardians through partnership working
● Traveller and Roma parents/guardians may not have good or any IT skills or access to broadband, mobile phones or other IT equipment. Reliance on technology and digital communication can be challenge for parents/guardians and for their children. Using text messages as a way of communication is not ideal for parents with low literacy levels and/or IT skills, nor those who do not have mobile phones.

Materials:

● All materials e.g. Exploring and Thinking materials, such as welcome packs should be literacy friendly and use visual communication methods as much as possible to accommodate parents/guardians with low literacy levels and/or English language skills. Other methods should also be considered in order for parents/guardians to be guided through materials in person

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- Revise materials in relation to 'identity and belonging' to ensure the materials go beyond 'celebrating', 'valuing' or 'respecting' diversity and actively promote anti-bias, anti-racism and anti-discrimination
- Training: ensure educators have training in supporting and promoting the identity and belonging of children. Ensure this includes anti-bias, intercultural, anti-racism and discrimination training and practical tips on how to address identity-based bullying, racial stereotypes and so forth. For example, hurtful words about where a child lives or how they live can be a huge problem to Traveller and Roma children's confidence
- Ensure diversity is reflected in formal and informal curriculum - such as portraying pictures and having toys and learning materials that represent a wide variety of identity and cultural backgrounds, including majority and minority groups/identities

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Section 4

Guidelines for Good Practice

Aistear has four sets of guidelines, focusing on different aspects of practice:

1. Building partnerships between parents and practitioners
2. Learning and developing through interactions
3. Learning and developing through play
4. Supporting learning and development through assessment
5.

These describe how the adult can support children's learning and development across *Aistear's* principles and themes. *Aistear's* Guidelines for Good Practice can be accessed [here](#)

Please give your overall feedback in relation to updating *Aistear's* Guidelines for Good Practice. Please indicate what is working well with the guidelines and what might need to be enhanced or updated.

- Add an inclusion, diversity and equality section which incorporates anti-racism, anti-discrimination aspects and makes these explicit across the guidelines
- A reflective stance on observation and assessment within the Guidelines for Good Practice is required where educators are supported to critically reflect on their own prejudices and stereotypes
- Learning and developing through interactions provides an opportunity to engage with children and parents/guardians. Educators should welcome and foster practice and curriculum being led by children and parents/guardians who use the services

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