

Child Right Impact Assessment - ENOC Template

This template is provided to help ENOC Members get started on undertaking a CRIA. Please remember that you can modify it to suit your local context. As you work through each stage of the template you may find it helpful to refer to the information provided in Part 2 of ENOC's Common Framework of Reference for carrying out CRIAs.

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Date to be reviewed: N/A

Reviewed by: Stefani Millar, Interim Head of Looked After Children and Adoption Policy Unit

STAGE 1: SCREENING

Question 1: Name the measure / proposal and briefly describe its overall aim
<p>The Department of Health (DoH) has developed Northern Ireland Fostering Services Minimum Standards, which together with the Foster Placement and Fostering Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025, will form the basis of the assessment framework for the conduct of all fostering services, for the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors, in Northern Ireland and are the minimum provisions below which no provider is expected to deliver.</p> <p>The Minimum Standards have been designed to be applicable to the wide variety of different types of fostering service</p>

ensuring a parity of accountability and inspection. They will be used by providers to set a benchmark of quality care and by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) in registering, assessing and/or inspecting fostering services. The Minimum Standards will apply to all services registered with RQIA as a fostering agency under the regulations. The RQIA will also use the Minimum Standards to assess the quality of HSC Trust fostering services. This means that all fostering services will be consistently providing high quality care to children and young people, and foster parents, irrespective of the status of their organisation and will use the Minimum Standards to do accomplish this.

The Minimum Standards have been designed to reflect the Northern Ireland Framework for Integrated Therapeutic Care (NIFITC), which introduces a single regional approach to the provision of trauma informed and rights-based care to care experienced children in all settings across Northern Ireland.

Question 2: What children's rights does it impact upon?

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 has five key principles, one of which, is that the child's welfare is paramount. These provisions ensure that the child's welfare is taken into consideration in all decisions relating to foster care and the Minimum Standards for Fostering Services in Northern Ireland are underpinned by this principle. The general principles of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) that underpin all specific rights within the UNCRC are also relevant to the Minimum Standards:

- **Article 2 – Non-discrimination** – Children should not be discriminated against in the enjoyment of their rights. No child should be discriminated against because of the situation or status of their parent/carer(s).

- **Article 3 – Best Interests of the Child** – Every decision and action relating to a child must be in their best interest. Governments must take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures to ensure that children have the protection and care necessary for their wellbeing – and that the institutions, services, and facilities responsible for their care and protection conform with established standards.
- **Article 6 – Life, survival and development** – Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential.
- **Article 12 – Respect for the views of the child** – Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes and have them given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Children should be provided with the opportunity to be heard, either directly or through a representative or appropriate body.

In addition, the Standards are intended to have a positive impact on a child's rights under UNCRC

- **Article 9 - Separation from parents** - Children must not be separated from their parents against their will unless it is in their best interests. Children whose parents have separated have the right to stay in contact with both parents, unless this could cause them harm.
- **Article 19 - Protection from violence, abuse and neglect** - Every child and young person must be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parents, legal guardians or any other person who has care of the child.
- **Article 20 - Children unable to live with their family** – where a child cannot live with their family, we must provide protection, assistance and alternative care.

- **Article 23 - Children with a disability** - a child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community. We must do all we can to support disabled children and their families.
- **Article 25 - Review of treatment in care** - if a child has been placed away from home for the purpose of care or protection (for example, with a foster family or in hospital), they have the right to a regular review of their treatment, the way they are cared for and their wider circumstances.
- **Article 39 - Recovery from trauma and reintegration** - children who have experienced neglect, abuse, exploitation, torture or who are victims of war must receive special support to help them recover their health, dignity, self-respect and social life.

Question 3: What children and young people will be affected?

Children currently living with foster carers, children in care for whom a foster placement is considered the most appropriate option to meet their needs, and children who may require to be placed with foster carers in future. Young people who have left foster care will also be affected as they will be enabled to remain in contact and receive support from their former foster parents as they transition through the leaving care process.

Question 4: What is the likely impact of the proposal / measure on children?

The introduction of the Minimum Standards will positively impact on foster parents, children and young people in care, and

those preparing to leave foster care, by ensuring the continued rigorous assessment of fostering services in Northern Ireland. It is widely recognised that foster parents make a vital contribution to our care system, by providing safe, stable and nurturing homes for children. Through positive and supportive day to day interactions underpinned by the trusted relationships they form, foster parents help children understand their past, experience normal family life and develop the skills and knowledge that they need to live independently as young adults. Foster Care is a way of providing a caring, safe and nurturing home environment for a child or young person when they are unable to live with their birth family. It can offer stability and permanence, improving outcomes for children and enabling them to achieve their full potential. Fostering continues to be the preferred placement option for children in care, with 50% placed in kinship care placements and 33% in non-kinship or independent foster care placements at 31 March 2024.

The proposed Minimum Standards have been developed and designed to incorporate the relevant articles of the UNHRC which relate to children and young people in care, and are structured to reflect the Northern Ireland Framework for Integrated Therapeutic Care which has at its core the provision of individualized, trauma-informed, rights based care which meets the assessed needs of each child. In the best interests of children, the focus on achievable outcomes for each child will have a positive impact on their lives by securing their welfare, health and education needs are met and reducing the risk to their welfare and safety. The introduction of registration and assessment of fostering services will assist in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children placed with foster parents approved by a Fostering Agency and will apply to all fostering service providers, in the statutory, and voluntary and community sectors.

Question 5: Is a full child rights impact assessment required? Explain your reasons

No. It is envisaged that the new Northern Ireland Fostering Services Minimum Standards will have a positive impact on children in foster care.

The proposed Minimum Standards will focus on achievable outcomes for children, securing positive welfare, health, and education outcomes for children, and reducing risks to their welfare and safety. The introduction of registration and assessment of fostering services will assist in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children placed with foster parents approved by a Fostering Agency and will apply to all fostering service providers, in the statutory, and voluntary and community sectors.

The Minimum Standards have been designed to reflect the Northern Ireland Framework for Integrated Therapeutic Care (NIFITC), which introduces a single regional approach to the provision of trauma informed and rights-based care to care experienced children in all settings across Northern Ireland.

Foster Care is a way of providing a caring, safe and nurturing home environment for a child or young person when they are unable to live with their birth family. It can offer stability and permanence, improving outcomes for children and enabling them to achieve their full potential.

If a full child rights impact assessment is required proceed to stage 2

STAGE 2: SCOPING (Background and Rights Framework)

Question 6: Name the measure / proposal being assessed and describe the overall aim

Not applicable.

Question 7: Which human rights instruments and articles are relevant to the measure / proposal?

Human Rights Instrument	Article	Further analysis on the expected / actual effect
Not applicable.		

STAGE 3: EVIDENCE

Question 8a: What quantitative evidence have you used to inform your assessment? What does it tell you?

Evidence collected	Evidence source	Explanation of the importance	What are the data gaps, if any?
At 31 March 2024, there were 3,999 children in care in Northern Ireland, 54%	Children's social care	The Department of Health recognises the invaluable service that foster parents provide and	Not applicable

<p>male and 46% female.</p> <p>46% were Roman Catholic, 33% were Protestant and other Christian, 7% were other, 6% had no religion and 8% were unknown.</p> <p>14% of children were recorded as having a disability. 54% had autism and/or ADHD recorded as their main disability, while a further 30% had a learning disability as their main disability.</p> <p>83% of the children in care were in foster care placements - 50% placed in kinship care (where a child is living with a close relative or family friend) and 33% placed in non-kinship or independent foster care placements.</p>	<p>statistics for Northern Ireland 2023/24</p>	<p>how they act as a protective factor for children in care, providing them with care in a stable family environment. The Department is also aware of the need to ensure that both our fostering legislation and Minimum Standards supports both foster parents and children in foster placements.</p> <p>The data shows that the numbers of children in care is continuing to rise, and there are significant numbers of children in care who have a disability. As the vast majority of children in care live in a foster placement, it is vital that there are sufficient foster placements available to provide them with caring, loving homes, and that they can meet the needs of the children within them.</p> <p>The new The Foster Placement and Fostering Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 and accompanying Minimum Standards will help</p>
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<p>At 31 March 2024, there were 2,639 HSC Trust recruited foster carers (including kinship foster carers) and a further 254 Independent sector foster carers.</p> <p>During 2023/24, 840 initial home visits were carried out by HSC Trusts and 451 fostering assessments were completed. During 2023/24, some 398 foster carers recruited by the HSC Trusts de-registered as carers. 42% of all foster carer de-registrations were down to the carers no longer wishing to foster, 21% were due to the retirement of the carer or the placement being phased out, and a further 23% were because the carer had adopted or been granted a Residence Order. A small number of de-registrations took place due to concerns or</p>		<p>to ensure that the process for assessing and approving prospective foster parents is as seamless as possible. Greater consistency across Northern Ireland and clarity on, and recognition for, their role will also help to attract more foster carers and ensure that placements are available for those who need them.</p> <p>The best interests of the child remain at the forefront of decision making, and this is reflected throughout the Standards. All providers and staff of fostering services should aim to provide the best care possible for the children for whom they are responsible. Observing the Minimum Standards is an essential part, but only a part, of the overall responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of each individual child in foster care. That is why it is vitally important for Northern Ireland to have a set of Minimum</p>	
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allegations, accounting for 7% of all de-registrations		Standards below which no provider is expected to deliver.	
Of those children in care who sat GCSE's in 2022/23, 43% achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* - C including GCSE English and Maths compared to 76% of the school leaver population.	Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2022/23	Through improving educational attainment for children in care, they will have greater choice in their future life once they leave care. Within the Minimum Standards, Standard 2 relates to ' <i>The needs of each child in foster care are understood and met</i> ' and has several key areas. Key Area 2.3, ' <i>Children access high quality education and training</i> ', details the actions to promote a positive education experience. The Minimum Standards will focus on achievable outcomes for children, securing positive welfare, health, and education outcomes for children, and reducing risks to their welfare and safety.	
The Fostering Network 'The State of the Nations' Foster Care Full Report 2024' The survey found that the foster care sector is calling for urgent change and more	state-of-the-nations-foster-care-2024-full-report.pdf	The 2024 State of the Nations' Foster Care report captures the lived experiences of foster carers across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Over 100,000 children in the UK are	

<p>investment. In particular, it highlights that foster carers report experiencing high levels of burnout and poor wellbeing, and that social worker turnover and service pressures were impacting on delivery. The report states that these challenges are resulting in higher rates of unplanned moves for children and young people in their care. Other main points to note in the survey are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over half (58%) of foster carers have experienced burnout or poor wellbeing because of their fostering role. • The number of foster carers who would recommend fostering to others has decreased. Less than half (48%) of foster carers said they would recommend fostering to others who may be considering it, down from 54% in 2021. 		<p>looked after away from home, and around three quarters of these are in foster care.</p> <p>Every three years The Fostering Network undertakes a survey of all foster carers in their membership across the UK which provides a unique and comprehensive insight into fostering in the UK. This year's 'State of the Nations' survey provides a picture of the state of foster care across the UK, gathering evidence on what is working and what needs to change. It is the largest independent survey of the UK's fostering sector; the 2024 survey was completed by over 3,000 current and former foster carers and 114 fostering services.</p> <p>The data from the Report shows many reasons why there is an insufficiency of foster parents, with fewer applications to become foster parents</p>	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The top motivation for fostering (selected by 89% of respondents in 2024) remains “to make a difference to the lives of children in care”, yet 60% of foster carers surveyed have considered resigning from the role. The main reasons for this are: a lack of support from their fostering service (54%); a lack of respect from other professionals (54%); burnout or poor wellbeing related to fostering (53%). • Only a quarter of foster carers said they feel their fee is sufficient to cover their essential living costs, for example bills, rent or mortgage, and food (not for the children they foster). • Foster carers rated support from their supervising social workers the most highly of all forms of support; 74% rated it as excellent or good, yet only 35% rated out of 		<p>and rising numbers of de-registrations. The Minimum Standards are designed to ensure that all fostering services across Northern Ireland provide consistent, high quality and equitable support to foster parents in their area, from initial enquiry through the assessment and approval, and to annual reviews.</p> <p>Assessing these issues is key in order to attract and retain foster parents, and ultimately to have sufficient foster placements available for all children who need them.</p>	
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<p>hours support in this way.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two thirds (64%) of foster carers who experienced a child moving on in the past 24 months said this included an unplanned ending – a concerning increase from 45% in 2021. Two in five (39%) foster carers are fostering a child who needs mental health support but isn't getting it, up from a third in 2021 (33%). 			
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Question 8b: What key missing information / evidence would have been beneficial to your analysis?
Not applicable.

Question 9a: What qualitative evidence have you used to inform your assessment? What does it tell you?		
Evidence collected	Evidence source	Explanation of the importance

Feedback from children and young people via VOYPIC on The Foster Placement & Fostering Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) consultation	Consultation response to The Foster Placement & Fostering Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland)	To ensure the voices of care experienced children and young people were considered, the Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) undertook, on behalf of the Department, an online survey specifically drafted for children and young people, used their message platform to send text messages with the link to the survey to 120 children and young people, and also sent the link to VOYPIC's database of current foster parents to ask for their help to encourage children and young people to participate in the consultation on the Fostering Regulations. They also liaised with youth rights workers to seek their feedback. The views received from children and young people were then also considered and included in the development of the proposed Minimum Standards. VOYPIC will also engage with children and young people as part of the consultation on the Minimum Standards which will inform further considerations before the draft Standards can be finalised.
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Question 9b: What key missing information / evidence would have been beneficial to your analysis?
Not applicable.

STAGE 4: SCRUTINISING CHILDREN'S INVOLVEMENT

Question 10: Has evidence from third party consultations with children and young people been considered in the development of the proposal or measure?			
Groups consulted	Source of Information	Please provide a brief description of process	What were the findings?
Care experienced Children and Young People.	Department of Health and The Fostering Network	The Minimum Standards have been prepared in response to extensive consultation which included a working group established comprising representation from all key stakeholders, including those representing care experienced children and young people and foster parents (The Fostering Network and VOYPIC). The Department also undertook engagement with wider groups of foster parents and foster children during the development of the standards; this was facilitated by The Fostering Network through in-person consultation events (attended by	The key findings were that inequity exists across fostering teams and organisations which has led to significantly different experiences for the children and young people in foster care. They also shared encouraging and positive examples of good practice as well as helpful ideas, which the Department has fully considered in drafting the Minimum Standards to ensure that fostering services are assessed and are applicable to the wide variety of

		Departmental officials), workshops, online video calls and by circulating and collating responses to a survey to foster parents and care experienced children and young people.	different types of fostering service ensuring a parity of accountability and inspection.
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Question 11: What groups of children and young people have been directly involved in developing the proposal or measure?			
Groups involved [✓ if those affected by the proposal]	✓	How were they involved	What were the findings
Care experienced children and young people	✓	As part of the wider consultation on the development of the Minimum Standards, The Fostering Network facilitated, on behalf of the Department, various consultation events with care experienced children and young people which also included foster carers. This included a total of 17 foster carers and with children and young people. A total of	The key findings were that inequity exists across fostering teams and organisations which has led to significantly different experiences for the children and young people in foster care. They also shared encouraging and positive examples of good practice as well as helpful ideas, which the Department has fully considered in drafting the Minimum Standards to ensure that fostering services are

		<p>9 children and young people provided feedback in person and 7 provided feedback through a facilitated online video call. A total therefore of 33 responses were heard in detail through in person and online facilitated sessions. In addition to these, a survey was circulated which received 91 responses. The survey provided information in keeping with the facilitated sessions and sought feedback using the same questions and themes. A total of 124 people provided feedback within this consultation process.</p>	<p>assessed and are applicable to the wide variety of different types of fostering service ensuring a parity of accountability and inspection.</p>
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STAGE 5: ASSESSING THE IMPACT

Question 12: 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	<i>likely or actual short/medium/long-term outcomes</i>
Positive	<p>The proposed Minimum Standards have been developed and designed to incorporate the relevant articles of the UNHRC which relate to children and young people in care.</p> <p>Article 2 – Non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 3 – Best Interests of the child</p> <p>Article 6 – Life, survival and development</p> <p>Article 9 - Separation from parents -</p> <p>Article 12 – Respect for the views of the child</p> <p>Article 19 - protection from violence, abuse and neglect</p> <p>Article 20 - Children unable to live with their family</p> <p>Article 23 - Children with a disability</p> <p>Article 25 - Review of treatment in care</p> <p>Article 39 - Recovery from trauma and reintegration</p> <p>It is intended that the Minimum Standards will be used, both</p>	<p>The Minimum Standards will focus on achievable outcomes for children, securing positive welfare, health, and education outcomes for children, and reducing risks to their welfare and safety.</p> <p>In their assessments of fostering services, RQIA will consider whether they are fully meeting the requirements of the Minimum Standards, and ensuring that children receive care which is in line with the relevant provisions of</p>

	<p>by fostering service providers and by RQIA, to focus on securing positive welfare, health, and education outcomes for children, and reducing risks to their welfare and safety. All providers and staff of fostering services should aim to provide the best care possible for the children for whom they are responsible. Observing the standards is an essential part, but only a part, of the overall responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of each individual child in foster care</p>	<p>the UNCRC.</p> <p>Improved outcomes for young people in foster care will be measured through improved educational outcomes as reported in future 'Children in Care' statistical bullets published by the Department of Health.</p>
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Question 13: 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
Children currently living with foster carers, children in care for whom a foster placement is considered the most	The introduction of the Minimum Standards will positively impact on foster parents and children and young people in care, by ensuring the continued rigorous assessment	None.

appropriate option to meet their needs, and children who may require to be placed with foster carers in future.	of fostering services in Northern Ireland. The introduction of registration and assessment of fostering services will assist in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children placed with foster parents approved by a fostering agency and will apply to all fostering service providers, in the statutory, and voluntary and community sectors.	
Young People who have left care	Young people who have left Foster Care will be enabled to remain in contact with their former foster parents and foster parents will be enabled to continue to support their former fostered children as they go through the leaving care process.	None.

Question 14: 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?

Not applicable.	
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STAGE 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Question 15: In summary, what are your key findings on the impact of the measure or proposal on children and young people's rights?

It is intended that the Minimum Standards will be used, both by fostering service providers and by RQIA, to focus on securing positive welfare, health, and education outcomes for children, and reducing risks to their welfare and safety. All providers and staff of fostering services should aim to provide the best care possible for the children for whom they are responsible. Observing the standards is an essential part, but only a part, of the overall responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of each individual child in foster care.

STAGE 7: PUBLISH CRIA

Question 16: Should the full assessment or a summary be published? Will a child-friendly version be produced?

The assessment will be published on the DoH website as part of the consultation on the proposed Fostering Service Minimum Standards.

STAGE 8: MONITOR & REVIEW

Question 17: Have the recommendations made in Stage 6 been acted upon?

No recommendations were made in Stage 6 however it is intended that the Minimum Standards will be used, both by fostering service providers and by RQIA, to focus on securing positive welfare, health, and education outcomes for children, and reducing risks to their welfare and safety. All providers and staff of fostering services should aim to provide the best care possible for the children for whom they are responsible. Observing the standards is an essential part, but only a part, of the overall responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of each individual child in foster care.

It is intended that the Minimum Standards will be reviewed within three years of being introduced, and at least every five years thereafter. The first review will consider the impact of any legislative changes planned or introduced as part of the implementation of the Adoption and Children Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, including regulations and guidance relating to short breaks, the 'Going the Extra Mile' scheme, and the operation of Fostering Panels.

Question 18: Where recommendations have not been acted upon, is further action required?

None at present