

# 1



## How many children and young people speak Irish in the north?

10.4% of the population of the north of Ireland have knowledge of the Irish language. The 2001 Census shows that people aged between 12 to 15 years are the most likely to have knowledge of Irish (23.8%), followed by people aged 16 to 24 years (16%). The 1999 Life and Times survey also found that generally, the younger the age group, the higher the proportion of Irish speakers.

## How many schools?

There are 79 Irish medium schools in the north of Ireland. At current growth rates, there will be 10,000 children in Irish medium schools by 2010

## What are rights?

There are different kinds of rights. A right is any basic freedom that all human beings should be able to have. Rights like these might include the right to life and to freedom, and the right to be treated equally.

Sometimes a right is set out in a law or group of laws. This can happen because the community has shown that this protection is needed to give them equality. It can also happen because a government wants to help or to change something to make it better than it was in the past

# 2



## What are Language Rights?

Language Acts and Language Laws are found in many other places, such as Wales, the south of Ireland, in Catalonia, the Basque Country and Canada. In these places, Language Acts have helped people to get services and rights in their own language that others who speak majority or dominant languages take for granted. Language Laws can also help to strengthen languages that have been weakened and help them to live on so that people can carry on using their own language and so that we keep our diversity and differences even as we work together.

## Children's rights worldwide are protected under

*The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*

This is a list of 42 promises made by almost all countries in the world to children and young people. They include the right to education, the right to have an opinion and the right to be treated equally.

[www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/unrcr](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/unrcr)

## Children, like adults, are also protected under the *Human Rights Act 1998*

In this Act, it says, among other things that everyone has the right to be protected by the law; that everyone has the right to education and to express themselves; that no-one should be a slave; no-one should be tortured; everyone has the right to a fair trial; and everyone has the right to be free.

For Irish speaking children and young people, Article 14 is important because it mentions language. It says that everyone should be able to have the same protection under the Act, no matter what their sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, where they come from or whether they are rich or poor.

[www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/80042--d.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/80042--d.htm)

# 3



## What rights do young Irish speakers have now?

As well as being protected in the same way that other young people are, Irish speaking young people also have some rights that are about using our own language and getting services in Irish.

For example,

- Irish Medium Education is mentioned in *The Education (NI) Order 2000*
- *The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* also provides some rights for children and young people who speak Irish [www.minorityrights.org/admin/Download/Pdf/FrameConv.pdf](http://www.minorityrights.org/admin/Download/Pdf/FrameConv.pdf)
- The British government has made promises in *The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* to provide services in Irish to adults and children in education, training, television and radio, the courts and in public services from the Assembly or local councils.

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_Charter\\_for\\_Regional\\_or\\_Minority\\_Languages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Charter_for_Regional_or_Minority_Languages)

## Under the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, you, or any adult, can:

- write letters in Irish to government departments, to the Assembly, to local councils and to health and education trusts, the Arts Council, the Sports Council and some other bodies, and fill in forms in Irish
- speak to them or phone them in Irish
- ask for a translator to be at meetings with government and public bodies
- get some official documents and information in Irish
- use the Irish form of your name
- use traditional place names in Irish

But the *European Charter* and *the Framework Convention* are international agreements, and this means that if your rights are not met, you cannot go to court to get help. You have to depend on good will.

# 4



## Can our rights be strengthened?

### The Bill of Rights NI

At the moment, the NI Human Rights Commission is working on a Bill of Rights for NI. A Bill of Rights is a list of basic rights that everyone who lives here would have. It could include language rights for Irish speaking adults and children. If your rights were not met, you could go to court to get help. When people were asked a few years ago what they thought should go into a Bill of Rights, 21% of answers were about the need for language rights, and 76% of these wanted stronger protections for the Irish language.\* POBAL thinks that the Bill of Rights should recognise Irish as an Official Language in the north and support the enactment of a detailed, rights-based Irish language Act.

### The Irish language Act

In 2006, POBAL held lots of meetings with Irish speakers and with experts on language rights. Together, we agreed on what was needed in The Irish Language Act and we started to work to get support from political parties, human rights organisations and others.

In October 2006, the British Government gave a commitment in the St. Andrew's Agreement to enact legislation for the Irish language in the north.

### POBAL wants an Irish language Act that will:

1. Make Irish an Official language in the north
2. Take a rights-based approach, and create a large number and range of guaranteed rights for Irish speakers in the Assembly, in local councils, in the courts, in schools, colleges and universities and in radio, television and the newspapers
3. Say what Irish language services government and public bodies must provide and when
4. Set up the Irish Language Commissioner NI and the Bord um Chearta agus Phleanáil na Gaeilge to help people get services and their rights under the Act in the best way

In the north of Ireland, the Bill of Rights and the Irish Language Act will help all Irish speakers, including children and young people too.

[www.pobal.org](http://www.pobal.org)

\* *Summary of Submissions on a Bill of Rights*, NICH, 2003