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**HSE to lose child protection role:**



**Minister for Children  
Frances Fitzgerald said the  
HSE had experienced major  
problems in providing child  
welfare services**

**JAMIE SMYTH, Social Affairs Correspondent:**

The Government plans to remove child protection and welfare services from the responsibility of the Health Service Executive and hold a referendum on children's rights, Minister for Children Frances Fitzgerald has said.

She said the HSE had experienced major problems in providing child welfare services and a new dedicated child protection agency would be set up.

"Clearly there have been major problems; we have had report after report and indeed more reports to come that highlight the inadequacies in our childcare services. We believe that there should be a new way of delivering those services, and we need to have new criteria about transparency and the work that actually being done, about the outcomes, and to avoid having the sort of tragedies that we have had in the past," Ms Fitzgerald told RTÉ's *Morning Ireland* .

She said holding a referendum to enshrine children's rights within the Constitution was a priority of the Government and she hoped this could take place this year.

Ms Fitzgerald said she would look at the wording for the referendum proposed by the past government and a different wording proposed by an all-party Oireachtas committee. She said she hoped it would be possible to get all-party agreement on the wording.

In a radio interview this morning Ms Fitzgerald also expressed disappointment at the low number of women appointed to the Cabinet.

"I've been disappointed at the low numbers of women appointed to the cabinet . . . I won't be happy until there are 50 per cent," said Ms Fitzgerald, who is one of two women appointed to the Cabinet this week.

Labour's Joan Burton is the other woman in the Cabinet. She was appointed to the position of Minister for Social Protection - a move that has caused controversy as she had been expected to get one of the two posts in the ministry of finance.

Ms Fitzgerald said Joan Burton's job should not be underestimated as she was tasked with getting the 450,000 people on the dole back to work.