International Reporting

# Civil Society Guide to Reporting under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

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The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission was established under statute on 1 November 2014 to protect and promote human rights and equality in Ireland, to promote a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding, to promote understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights and equality, and to work towards the elimination of human rights abuses and discrimination.

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## Introduction

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is Ireland’s independent National Human Rights Institution and National Equality Body. We protect and promote human rights and equality in Ireland. Our [Strategy Statement 2025-2027](https://www.ihrec.ie/documents/strategy-statement-2025-2027/) commits us to monitor and report on the State’s compliance with the full range of human rights and equality treaties to which it is bound, and to work to support the conditions that enable a vibrant civil society that has the space, supports and resources to advocate and take action to protect and promote human rights and equality, and hold the State to account.

This Guide intends to support civil society in reporting under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. This Guide gives a brief introduction to the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women) (CEDAW), to which Ireland has signed up to. The [UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw) monitors the application of CEDAW at national level. Ireland is required to report regularly on its implementation of CEDAW to the Committee. This reporting process is explained below, as is the importance of civil society engagement with it to provide its perspective on the extent to which Ireland is meeting its obligations under CEDAW to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas of life.

## International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CEDAW was adopted in 1979 and entered into force in 1981. 189 countries have [ratified CEDAW](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?Treaty=CEDAW).

Ireland acceded to CEDAW on 23 December 1985. As a party to CEDAW, Ireland has formally agreed to take action by all appropriate means and without delay to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls, and to pursue gender equality in all aspects of life.

The key provisions of CEDAW include:

* Definition of discrimination against women (Article 1);
* Positive duty on States to eliminate discrimination (Article 2);
* States to take appropriate measures to guarantee women the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis (Article 3);
* Adoption of temporary special measures to progress gender equality (Article 4);
* Gender stereotyping and prejudices (Article 5);
* Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution (Article 6);
* Political and public life (Article 7);
* Participation at international level (Article 8);
* Nationality (Article 9);
* Education (Article 10);
* Employment (Article 11);
* Health (Article 12);
* Economic and social life (Article 13);
* Measures to address the problems of rural women (Article 14);
* Equality before the law and freedom of movement (Article 15);
* Marriage and family life (Article 16).

## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

The implementation of CEDAW is monitored by the [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/membership) (‘the Committee’). The Committee consists of 23 independent human rights experts, elected for four-year terms.

As part of the [periodic reporting function](https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/reporting-guidelines), all State parties, including Ireland, must submit regular reports with updates on specific steps taken to implement CEDAW. The Committee examines each report at a public interactive dialogue with the State, which takes place in Geneva. Based on this constructive dialogue, the Committee publishes its concerns and recommendations to the State, referred to as ‘Concluding Observations’. These observations set out the Committee’s concerns regarding the implementation of CEDAW and make recommendations on steps to be taken to eliminate discrimination against women and girls. Civil society reports and recommendations are taken into account by the Committee in developing these observations.

Ireland ratified the [Optional Protocol](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/optional-protocol-convention-elimination-all-forms) to CEDAW in 2000, which means the Committee can receive and consider [communications](https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/individual-communications) from individuals who believe their rights under CEDAW have been violated. The Committee can also initiate [inquiries](https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/inquiry-procedure) into situations of grave or systematic violations of women’s rights.

The Committee also organises [days of general discussion](https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/days-general-discussion) and formulates [general recommendations](https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/general-recommendations); these are suggestions and clarifications directed to States that concern articles or themes in CEDAW.

## Why report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

The Committee has recognised the importance of cooperation with [civil society](https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/guidelines-civil-society-ngos-and-nhris) in promoting the effective implementation of CEDAW. The [Committee encourages civil society](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/Statements/NGO.pdf) to provide country-specific inputs and briefings for the Committee’s dialogue with the State. Parallel reports provide an independent perspective on Ireland’s compliance with CEDAW, and may also raise issues omitted by the State, or which have arisen since the State report was completed. Civil society’s participation in the Committee’s activities provides a comprehensive picture of the human rights situation in Ireland, and of the way Ireland is implementing each of the rights and obligations enshrined in CEDAW.

Reporting to the Committee is a valuable way to achieve national and international impact. By highlighting rights infringements experienced by under-represented groups, civil society reports provide the Committee with a more complete picture of women’s and girls’ rights in Ireland. This plays an important role in holding the State to account. Civil society reporting has been demonstrated to have a direct influence on the Concluding Observations of UN Committees. As Concluding Observations are given significant weight by States, engagement with UN Committees can advance ongoing policy and advocacy work, and create the pressure and support needed to progress issues at the national level. There is the opportunity to bring national laws, policies and practices into line with CEDAW. By monitoring national commitments and advocating for implementation, civil society can ensure CEDAW obligations translate into real change.

While civil society engagement requires planning and the use of limited resources, organisations can use, build on and adapt existing research, policy and advocacy work for the CEDAW reporting process. Reporting can therefore be integrated into a broader strategy and work-plan to reduce the additional capacity required, while also enabling organisations to promote their work internationally. Effective engagement with CEDAW’s reporting process provides an important opportunity to harness the power of the international human rights system to reinforce advocacy messages and affect change for the advancement of women’s rights.

## International reporting procedure

The State has opted to use [the Simplified Reporting Procedure](https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/reporting-guidelines) for this cycle. The steps in the Simplified Reporting Procedure are as follows:

* Civil society and National Human Rights Institutions send materials to the Committee in advance of the Committee’s List of Issues Prior to Reporting. Submissions may be published online or kept confidential.
* The stakeholder inputs are considered by the Committee during a Pre-Sessional Working Group (PSWG) meeting. During the PSWG, the Committee adopts a List of Issues for the State under review, which sets out the main areas of concern in relation to the implementation of CEDAW. It publishes the List of Issues and sends it to the State in question, requesting further information
* The State responds to the List of Issues, addressing the areas of concern highlighted by the Committee, and outlining the measures taken to implement CEDAW and how effective these measures have been.
* The State is scheduled for a review during one of the Committee’s sessions. The Committee meets in Geneva and normally holds three three-week sessions per year. The review will be listed on the Committee’s [sessions](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/SessionsList.aspx?Treaty=CEDAW) webpage.
* Civil society and National Human Rights Institutions send parallel reports to the Committee (see guidelines below). These submissions are due approximately four weeks before the review. The deadline is indicated on the Committee’s webpage for the relevant session. Submissions may be published online or kept confidential.
* The State review takes place in Geneva during one of the Committee’s scheduled sessions. The review will consist of a dialogue between the Committee and the State, usually taking place over two public meetings (one meeting for three hours and the other meeting for two hours). The dialogue is structured around the four substantive parts of CEDAW, namely part I: articles 1 to 6; part II: articles 7 to 9; part III: articles 10 to 14; and part IV: articles 15 to 16.

## Ireland’s eighth periodic review under CEDAW

Ireland’s eighth periodic review began in 2023, when the Committee adopted its [List of Issues Prior to Reporting](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FIRL%2FQPR%2F8&Lang=en) for Ireland during its Pre-Sessional Working Group meeting in October-November. Prior to the meeting, the Committee received submissions from Disabled Women Ireland, Irish Penal Reform Trust, National Women’s Council, Plan Ireland and Plan International, and a coalition of Traveller and Roma organisations. IHREC also made a [submission](https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2023/10/Ireland-and-the-Convention-on-the-Elimination-of-All-Forms-of-Discrimination-against-Women-LOIPR-web.pdf) to inform the List of Issues in September 2023.

The State submitted its [Reply to the List of Issues](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=ICEDAW%2FC%2FIRL%2F8&Lang=en) on 1 November 2024. Ireland is scheduled for review during the [Committee’s 91st Session](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2813&Lang=en) in Geneva from 16 June to 4 July 2025. Parallel reports may be submitted up to four weeks before the session starts (mid-May). The [session](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2813&Lang=en) webpage includes specific information regarding guidance for civil society, deadlines, accreditation and the Committee’s programme of work for the session. Ireland’s review will be broadcast on [UN Web TV](https://webtv.un.org/en).

## General guidelines for the preparation of parallel reports

Civil society are encouraged to provide written contributions that contain:

* Information on the implementation of some or all of the substantive articles (articles 1 to 16) of CEDAW;
* Comments on the State’s replies to the List of Issues;
* Information on the implementation by the State of previous Concluding Observations of the Committee;
* Information highlighting priority concerns and suggesting country-specific recommendations to facilitate the work of the Committee; and
* Information on the impact of measures taken by the States parties concerned in relation to the COVID-19 crisis on women's rights and gender equality and the integration of a gender perspective in COVID-19 recovery plans.

The Committee advise that written submissions by individual civil society organisations should not exceed 3,300 words. The word limit for submissions by a coalition of civil society organisations is 6,600 words. Footnotes are counted for the word limit.

The Committee’s [List of Issues](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FIRL%2FQPR%2F8&Lang=en) will be a key document in the preparation of parallel reports and should guide civil society reporting. The Committee’s [Concluding Observations](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FIRL%2FCO%2F6-7&Lang=en) from Ireland’s last review in 2017 should also inform civil society reporting.

## Submission details

The submission should be submitted in Word format by the deadline. Organisations should create an account on the [OHCHR online CEDAW submissions system](https://events.ohchr.org/). To create an account, organisational details must be registered on the system via an online form. The account will not be active until the Submissions System team administrator confirms your registration (you will be notified by email).

## Participation in the review

Civil society may attend the review in-person. Details on the registration process will be available on the [session webpage](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2813&Lang=en).

Civil society can register and attend an informal public meeting with the Committee during the review. Civil society can participate in these meetings in-person or submit a pre-recorded video statement. The meeting takes place on the Monday of the week of the review of the State. These meetings in general last ninety minutes and include civil society representatives from other States who are under review by the Committee during that week of the session. On average, a maximum of 10 minutes will be available per State to be shared by all civil society organisations who wish to contribute. Time is reserved for questions from the Committee members. The public meeting will be broadcast on [UN Web TV](https://webtv.un.org/en).

The Committee also organises a private one-hour lunchtime briefing with civil society on the day prior to the Committee’s dialogue with the State. The Committee encourages civil society to use this time to provide responses to the Committee member’s questions raised during the informal public meeting. If the Committee’s dialogue with the State is on a Tuesday, the private lunchtime briefing takes place on a Monday before the informal public briefing. In this circumstance, the Committee requests that the responses to the Committee members’ questions asked during the informal public briefing are provided in writing ahead of dialogue.

Civil society should inform the Committee when submitting their report through the CEDAW online submission system about participating in the informal public and/or private lunchtime briefings.

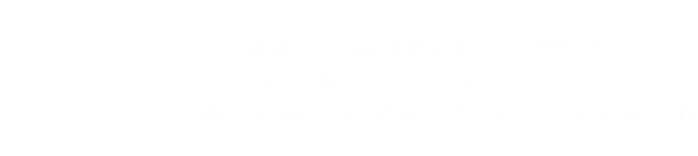
The Committee encourages civil society to contact the [International Women’s Rights Action Watch (IWRAW) Asia Pacific](https://www.iwraw-ap.org/) for support to submit their written information electronically through the CEDAW online submission system, to request to make an intervention during the informal public meetings of the Committee and/or to participate in the private lunchtime briefing for Committee members on the day before the consideration of the State party concerned. The contact email is: [iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org](mailto:iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org)

## Further resources

* Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Guidelines for civil society, NGOs and NHRIs](https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/guidelines-civil-society-ngos-and-nhris)
* Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Rules of procedure and working methods](https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/rules-procedure-and-working-methods)
* Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [List of issues and questions prior to the submission of the eighth periodic report of Ireland](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FIRL%2FQPR%2F8&Lang=en) (2023)
* Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/IRL/CO/6-7&Lang=En) (2017)
* Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Human Rights Recommendations to Ireland](https://uhri.ohchr.org/en/search-human-rights-recommendations?countries=1c35dfd9-40bc-4bb5-be89-aaea7230aa42)
* IHREC, [Ireland and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for the List of Issues Prior to Reporting on Ireland’s 8th periodic cycle](https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2023/10/Ireland-and-the-Convention-on-the-Elimination-of-All-Forms-of-Discrimination-against-Women-LOIPR-web.pdf) (2023)
* IHREC, [Ireland and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women: Submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women on Ireland’s combined sixth and seventh periodic reports](https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2022/08/Ireland-and-the-Convention-on-the-Elimation-of-All-Forms-of-Discrimination-Against-Women.pdf) (2017)

Contact details

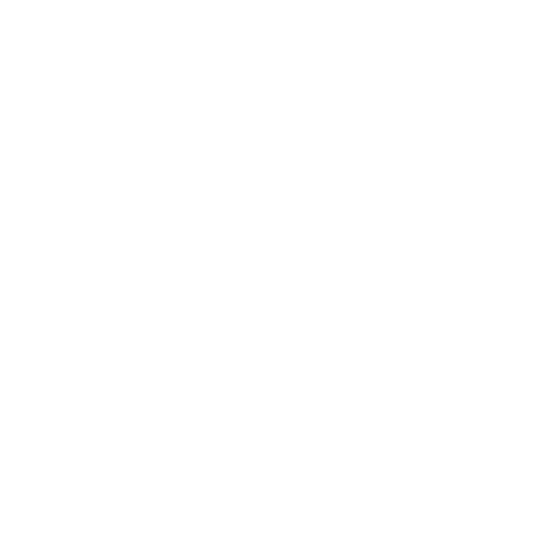
* Secretariat: [ohchr-cedaw@un.org](mailto:ohchr-cedaw@un.org)
* International Women’s Rights Action Watch (IWRAW) Asia Pacific: [iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org](mailto:iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org)



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