

Minutes
IHREC 56th Ordinary Meeting
21 April 2022
10:00am – 3:15pm
Online

Present:

- Sinéad Gibney, Chief Commissioner (SG)
- Heydi Foster Breslin (HFB)
- Jim Clarken (JC)
- Prof Caroline Fennell (CF)
- Michael Finucane (MF)
- Tony Geoghegan (TG)
- Adam Harris (AH)) will join from 11am
- Prof Kathleen Lynch (KL)
- Dr Rosaleen McDonagh (RMcD)
- Sunniva McDonagh (SMcD)
- Dr Lucy Michael (LM)
- Prof Ray Murphy (RM)
- Colm O'Dwyer SC (COD)

Apologies:

- Dr Salome Mbugua (SM)
- Dr Frank Conaty (FC)

In attendance:

- Laurence Bond (LB), Director
- Dr Iris Elliott, Head of Policy and Research – Items 3.1, 7.1, 8.1
- Maria Mullan, Senior Policy and Research Officer – Items 3.1, 8.1
- Kieran Timmons, Policy and Research Officer – Items 3.1, 8.1
- Barry Price, Office of the Director – Item 5.1
- Naomi Kennan, Senior Policy and Research Officer – Item 7.1
- Dr Nusha Yonkova , Head of Anti-Trafficking Unit– Item 4.1
- Dr Hayley Mulligan, Anti- Trafficking Unit – Item 4.1
- Michael O' Neill, Head of Legal – Item 9.1
- Muireann Ní Thuairisg, Minute Taker

The 56th Ordinary Plenary Meeting of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission took place between 10:00am – 3:15pm on 21 April by video conference.

1.1 Apologies, Quorum and Declaration of Interest

Apologies were noted from FC and SM. There were no declarations of interest and the meeting was quorate.

SG reminded members that it was planned to hold the Commission meeting of June 2nd in person in Green Street. It was also planned to have some engagement with the staff on that day.

1.2 Closed session for Members

The Chief Commissioner provided a number of updates, there were no actions from this session.

1.3 Minutes of Previous Meetings

The draft minutes of the ordinary Commission meeting of 10 March were approved, proposed by HFB and seconded by RM.

1.4 Matters arising, not otherwise dealt with on the Agenda

It was agreed that the Commission postpone the discussion under [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] The Commission agreed to instead discuss the conflict in Ukraine at this item.

1.5 Director's Report, Finance Report, Appropriation Accounts and Workplan

The Director's Report, Finance Report, Appropriation Accounts and the revised Workplan were taken as read.

The 2021 Appropriation Accounts have been submitted to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General the C&AG audit is in progress.

The Human Rights and Equality Grant Scheme 2022 was recently launched. Members noted the importance of ensuring appropriate research standards are met by prospective applicants where relevant. LB agreed to remind the staff dealing with the grant scheme of this matter.

The HAP research report will be published shortly.

[REDACTED]

On the draft workplan it was clarified that this was a one year work programme setting out the first actions to be undertaken to address the requirements of the new Strategy Statement. It was noted again that the work programme is a living document, that the care issue will also be reflected in actions on gender equality and that further actions on care will be brought forward as the year progressed. Members noted that work in many of the SP areas is already being undertaken by other actors and it was clarified that this will be taken account of in identifying where IHREC can bring added value. Taking account of the above members approved the 2022 work plan.

Members discussed the possibility of establishing a dedicated group focussing on economic equality to ensure they are fulfilling this strategic priority. SG agreed that the Strategy Statement and the work of the Committees will be discussed during the Commission’s review process, which is planned to commence shortly, and she confirmed that she will incorporate a strategy discussion into the June plenary. JC noted that the Commission also needed to consider strategic risks in the context of the new Strategy Statement and the remaining items from the previous cycle.

1.6 Chief Commissioner Update

The Chief Commissioner Report was taken as read.

SG and SM are meeting shortly with the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to discuss the current status of the Programme of Action for the International Decade for People of African Descent.

CF noted that IHREC’s term as ENNHRI chair has ended and thanked her colleagues for their support during her time as Chair.

2.1 Committee Updates

(a) Audit and Risk

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(b) Casework

Updates on the Casework Committee meetings of 4 March, 28 March and 11 April were taken as read.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



(c) FELAC – Future of Equality Law Legislation

An update note on the FELAC meeting of 14 March was taken as read. A draft programme of work has been prepared and circulated to members in advance of the next meeting, scheduled to take place on 29 April.

3.1 Draft Observations on the General Scheme of the Garda Síochána (Powers) Bill

The draft Observations on the General Scheme of the Garda Síochána (Powers) Bill was taken as read.

Members welcomed the draft and suggested a number of amendments and additions for incorporation. It was agreed the submission would be made as soon as possible.

It was also agreed that the future formatting of legislative observations would be reviewed.

4.1 Anti-Trafficking Update

NY made a presentation on the objectives for IHREC's role as National Rapporteur for the period 2022-24 and set out specific goals for 2022 and the associated actions planned by the Anti Trafficking team.

In the subsequent discussion the members strongly welcomed and endorsed the plans presented and thanked NY and her team for their work to date.

In response to queries NY outlined the issues that have arising to date in regarding to trafficking risks arising from the Ukraine war and agreed to consider any possible implications for trafficking in Ireland of the recent UK Government decision on holding asylum seekers in Rwanda.

Members also discussed the interaction between sex-work/prostitution and trafficking. On the proposal of SG it was agreed that the Review of the Operation of Part 4 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 would be tabled for discussion at a future plenary meeting.

5.1 Ukraine

A note on the meeting of the Ukraine Sub group held on 22 April was taken as read.

It was agreed the key issues arising from the conflict in Ukraine will be dealt with at Commission meetings as required.

It was agreed to explore the possibility of IHREC convening a roundtable with key NGOs and others providing services to persons fleeing from Ukraine in order to deepen our understanding of the issues arising and the response required, and the issues and implications arising for refugee reception policy and practice more generally. It was noted that IHREC should frame any actions in this area in the context of refugee reception generally.

6.1 Worker Employer Advisory Committee Update

TG gave an overview of the need to revise the terms of reference and the key changes being recommended including increasing the number of employer and employee representatives from four to five and committing the WEAC to structured engagement with relevant stakeholders including civil society organisations and rights-holder groups, in advancing its work

The revised Terms of Reference were approved.

7.1 Draft Policy Statement on the Incorporation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights into the Irish Constitution

As requested by the Commission the draft policy statement on the Incorporation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights into the Irish Constitution was again considered at the Policy and Research Committee meeting of 22 February 2022. Members welcomed the revised and approved the revised draft.

8.1 Draft Submission on the General Scheme of the Mental Health (Amendment) Bill

Members discussed the draft submission on the General Scheme of the Mental Health (Amendment) Bill This will be finalised to take account of a small number of comments made by members and will be submitted to the Joint Sub-Committee on Mental Health as soon as possible.

9.1

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

10.1 AOB

[REDACTED]

The meeting closed at 3:15pm.