



Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

Ireland and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 2025



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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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Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AROP	At Risk of Poverty
ASAI	Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland
B4BB	Balance for Better Business
BIC	Best Interests of the Child
CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSDDD	Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CSRD	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
DAC	Disability Advisory Committee
DSGBV	Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
ECEC	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ECNI	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
ESA	Equal Status Acts
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EU	European Union
GANHRI	Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
HAP	Housing Assistance Payment
HIQA	Health Information and Quality Authority
HRC	Habitual Residence Condition

HSE	Health Service Executive
IHREC	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPU	International Parliamentary Union
ISEQ 20	Ireland Overall Stock Exchange Index
ISL	Irish Sign Language
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LCDC	Local Community Development Committees
LPET	The Legal Practitioners Education and Training Committee
LRC	Law Reform Commission
LSRA	The Legal Services Regulator Authority
MESL	Minimum Essential Standard of Living
NAP	National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking 2023-2027
NEB	National Equality Body
NGEU	Next Generation EU
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
NIHRC	Northern Irish Human Rights Commission
NIRP	National Independent Review Panel
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plan
NTRIS	National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy
NSWG	National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020
NWC	National Women's Council

ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights
OPCAT	Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PA	Personal Assistance
PBO	Parliamentary Budget Office
PPSN	Personal Public Service Number
PSEHRD	Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty
PSPR	Public Service Performance Report
REV	Revised Estimates Volume for the Public Services
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
RTÉ	Raidió Teilifís Éireann
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
SILC	Survey on Income and Living Conditions
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
SUSI	Student Universal Support Ireland
TWSS	Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme
UNCRPD	United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
VOT	Victims of Trafficking

Recommendations

National Human Rights Institution and National Equality Body

The Commission recommends that:

- the State, as part of its full and ambitious transposition of the EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies, engages in multi-annual budgetary planning and allocation at a level that ensures the effective discharge of all of IHREC's statutory functions, and that new mandates are accompanied by adequate and transparently costed funding.
- the State, as part of its full and ambitious transposition of the EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies, engages with IHREC to ensure procedures are established, on a statutory basis, to facilitate proactive consultation between the Government / public bodies and IHREC on legislation, policies, and practices related to all of our statutory mandates. The State should ensure, by way of legislative provision, that the Government and public bodies are required to follow the consultation procedures and that IHREC has the power to publish recommendations and to request follow-up to these recommendations in relation to all of our statutory mandates.

Civil Society

The Commission recommends that:

- core, multi-annual, ring-fenced and autonomous funding is made available to women's and girls' civil society organisations, including community development, rural and grassroots organisations, which ensures decent work and adequate wages for staff and builds capacity to meet increasing need for advocacy and services.

- the State conducts an independent evaluation of civil society space – including legislative, policy and funding measures – to ensure a more inclusive and enabling environment for the active and informed participation of women’s and girls’ civil society organisations. The State should directly resource and support their participation in stakeholder mechanisms, at a level that matches the rising costs of engagement and includes funding for reasonable accommodations, and to cover child and adult care costs.

General observations on the implementation of CEDAW

Reservations

The Commission recommends that:

- the State constructively engages with the Committee on the removal of reservations to Articles 11(1), 13(a), 16(1)(d) and 16(1)(f).
- the State should conduct an independent and comprehensive baseline study of Irish legislation with the view to designing and adopting all measures necessary to facilitate the full transposition of the Convention into the domestic legal order.

Data collection

The Commission recommends that:

- the State prioritises the publication, promotion and implementation of its National Equality Data Strategy and investment in the national equality data infrastructure. Government Departments and public bodies should be adequately resourced to deliver on its strategic approach and actions must be put in place to improve the collection, use and dissemination of disaggregated equality data.

- the development of the Equality Data Hub is prioritised, and acts as a systematic, comprehensive, robust, centralised system for equality data, including data on women's and girls' rights.
- the State strengthens the legislative basis on the collection of disaggregated equality data.
- the State ambitiously transposes the EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies Article on 'Data collection and access to equality data'.

Constitutional reform

The Commission recommends that:

- the State undertakes and publishes an independent evaluation of the referendums on family and care to understand the factors in the referendums not passing. The State should ensure the findings and recommendations of the evaluation inform future Constitutional reform concerning gender equality, and equality and human rights more broadly.
- the State publishes a plan to implement the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly and the Joint Committee on Gender Equality, including ambitious and resourced legislative and policy measures to ensure substantive gender equality as guaranteed under the Convention.

Equality legislation

The Commission recommends that:

- the State prioritises the reform and modernisation of Ireland's equality legislation, including by repealing section 14 of the Equal Status Acts and providing for intersectional discrimination in the Equality Acts.

- the State publishes an analysis of the relevance to Irish law of the Court of Justice of the European Union judgment in Deldits and any required legislative and policy changes.

Island of Ireland

The Commission recommends that:

- the State works with the Northern Ireland Executive and UK Government to enhance and harmonise equality and human rights protections on the island of Ireland, in a manner aligned to their respective remits. The State should make a clear commitment to working towards ensuring North-South equivalence of rights on the island of Ireland so as to strengthen protections.

COVID-19

The Commission recommends that:

- the Covid-19 Evaluation ensures equal and meaningful participation of women and girls, adopts human rights and equality-based guidance and commits to a gender equality impact assessment.
- the State identifies gender-specific measures to mitigate impacts of future emergencies and embeds gender equality and the equal meaningful participation of women and girls in all crisis preparedness planning.

National machinery for the advancement of women

National policies

The Commission recommends that:

- the State should ensure the new national strategy for women and girls and its associated action plan are underpinned by resourced implementation and accountability structures, including independent oversight of delivery. Actions must be adequately costed and assessed for tangible impacts on women and girls.
- the State ensures a coordinated approach to the implementation of the new national strategy for women and girls and the equality strategies covering disabled people, LGBTQIA+ people, migrants, and Travellers and Roma.
- the State actively reviews and revises the new national strategy for women and girls and its action plan to implement the Committee's concluding observations from this Review.

Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

The Commission recommends that:

- the State should issue a formal communication, in the form of a circular, to public bodies to advance compliance with the Public Sector Duty, in line with the Commission's guidance with the aim to embed gender equality in policy planning, budgeting, service delivery frameworks and to recommend the use of Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments with transparent publication of findings in Annual Reports.
- the new national strategy for women and girls includes specific reference to obligations under Section 42 of the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014* with particular attention to Section 42(1). The Public Sector Equality and Human

Rights Duty should be integrated into the Strategy as a framework for public bodies to assess and address the intersectionality of gender-based discrimination.

- where relevant, public bodies carry out an assessment of gender equality and women's rights issues with respect to their functions in consultation with civil society, with specific attention to intersectionality and report on progress in compliance with their obligations under section 42 of the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014*. This process should be facilitated by the creation of participatory structures within public bodies to enable the input and monitoring of services by women, including structurally vulnerable groups of women and girls.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes in family and society

The Commission recommends that:

- the State ensures that the new national strategy for women and girls includes targeted actions to combat discriminatory stereotypes on the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society. The implementation of the actions should have an effective monitoring mechanism which regularly reports on and assesses progress in eliminating discriminatory stereotypes and gender norms.

Stereotypes in education

The Commission recommends that:

- the State takes active measures to address gender norms and stereotypes in schools, further and higher education, in line with the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly and the Joint Committee on Gender Equality.
- the State establishes clear policies and supports for transgender and non-binary students.

- the State should commit to addressing gender norms and stereotypes in the forthcoming national convention on education.

Stereotypes in media

The Commission recommends that:

- further legislation and policy measures should be introduced to regulate advertising to prevent gender stereotyping.
- the Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland introduce best practice standards and guidance for gender representation.
- the State ensures full implementation of the *Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022* to create a statutory system for holding technology and social media companies accountable for online content.
- the Media Commission (Coimisiún na Meán) publishes regular reports by media outlets on compliance with gender equality and inclusion measures.

Hate-speech targeted towards women and girls

The Commission recommends that:

- the State prioritises reform of the *Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989* to align with international human rights standards and expand its grounds with those protected under Irish equality legislation, with further consideration to include the grounds of socio-economic status, actual or perceived sex characteristics, gender identity and gender expression.
- the *Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989* be amended to make explicit reference to its application to online incitement to hatred.

- the State ensures timely collection and publication of accurate and reliable disaggregated data on hate offences and incitement to hatred offences on an annual basis.
- initial and ongoing mandatory training on hate offences and incitement to hatred offences is provided to the legal profession, An Garda Síochána and the judiciary.

Access to justice

Violations of women's rights

The Commission recommends that:

- the State overhauls its approach to investigations and reparations of so-called 'historical' abuse to ensure independent, survivor-centred, timely investigations and effective remedies for victims and survivors, including through schemes based on the right to truth, justice, reparation, non-recurrence and memory processes.
- the State urgently prioritises a review of the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme and commits to amend the Scheme, in line with Ireland's human rights obligations, to widen the eligibility criteria to ensure victims and survivors can access a full and effective remedy.
- the State fully implements the *O'Keeffe v Ireland* judgment by immediately establishing a new comprehensive, fair and non-discriminatory redress scheme to ensure access to an effective remedy for survivors and victims of child sexual abuse in primary and post primary schools before 1991/1992. The redress scheme should recognise the responsibility of the State to survivors, avoid re-traumatising survivors, and not include unreasonable or arbitrary eligibility criteria.

Women's rights in the justice system

The Commission recommends that:

- the Review of the Civil Legal Aid Scheme is progressed as a matter of priority, and access to civil legal aid is broadened to quasi-judicial tribunals and bodies including the Workplace Relations Commission.
- the measures to address barriers to diversity in the legal profession are gender and equality proofed, and progressed as a matter of priority.
- the State ensures 50-50 gender parity in the judiciary and ensures that the judiciary reflects the diversity of Irish society.

Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence

Policy and legal framework

The Commission recommends that:

- consideration be given to strengthening the independence of Cuan from the State to ensure its effectiveness in evaluating the State's domestic, sexual and gender-based violence policies and measures.
- the State urgently prioritises implementing the recommendations from the GREVIO baseline evaluation through the implementation of the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual & Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026, and in the development of actions in the new Strategy from 2026-2030.
- the State ensures adequate, inclusive provision of specialist support services for all victims and survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence through appropriate training of service providers.

- the State ensures a wrap-around system of both court and non-court supports to address the unique and complex needs of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence victims and survivors. High quality training on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence for members of the judiciary and their support staff should include trauma-informed care and coercive control, the specific and complex needs of women that are victims and survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, and unconscious bias.
- the State significantly scales up the provision of culturally appropriate, universally designed refuge accommodation units; provides guidance to local authorities on supporting victims and survivors seeking emergency accommodation and social housing; and amends the *Domestic Violence Act 2018* to expand the circumstances where victims and survivors can remain in the home.

Data

The Commission recommends that:

- the Department of Justice and Cuan prioritise the collection and use of disaggregated and intersectional equality data on violence against women and girls. Any national survey and supplementary data collection exercises including qualitative work should document incidences of violence against structurally vulnerable women, including their experiences in accessing supports and services, and accessing justice.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

Policy and legal framework

The Commission recommends that:

- the State ensures the Operational Guidelines under the new National Referral Mechanism are sufficiently robust to ensure the mechanism is compliant with Ireland's anti-trafficking obligations.

- child-specific identification and assistance should be detailed in the Operational Guidelines.

Investigations, prosecutions, and redress

The Commission recommends that:

- the Third National Action Plan to Combat and Prevent Human Trafficking 2023-2027 is amended to include detailed actions to expand, support, and enhance the development and knowledge of An Garda Síochána and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to fully integrate technological solutions to better investigate and prosecute trafficking offences.
- victims' rights and their experiences be at the centre of all efforts – both legal and policy – to combat trafficking, and that every potential victim be appointed a Garda Liaison Officer from the beginning of the investigation.
- a specific statutory defence for victims of trafficking where they have committed crimes as a direct consequence of them being trafficked.
- an effective response to combating trafficking for sexual exploitation requires that offences are categorised as sexual offences, with associated protections.
- the Review of Civil Legal Aid must prioritise survivors' legal needs and must consider the legislative reforms needed to expand the remit of the Legal Aid Board to offer advice, assistance and where necessary, representation to victims of trafficking in all relevant matters including criminal matters; the Legal Aid Board and independent law centres should be sufficiently resourced; and legal services be expanded, considering the new National Referral Mechanism.
- the State should ensure the specific needs of victims of trafficking are considered in the reform of compensation.

Support services and accommodation

The Commission recommends that:

- the State should ensure that assistance and supports for victims of trafficking be detailed in the National Referral Mechanism Operational Guidelines.
- the State provides sustainable funding to specialist civil society organisations providing services for victims of trafficking.
- the pilot gender-specific shelter be evaluated and scaled-up in sufficient numbers.
- the State urgently investigates and takes action to address the co-ordinated grooming of children, especially girls, under the care of Tusla.

Human trafficking data

The Commission recommends that:

- the State mandates all State agencies and bodies involved in the response to human trafficking to take steps to ensure that their respective data systems capture disaggregated data on human trafficking.

Addressing trafficking for sexual exploitation

The Commission recommends that:

- the State proactively implements the relevant provisions of the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017*, and increase supports and exit pathways for victims of trafficking.

Expungement of criminal records

The Commission recommends that:

- the State ensures the wider application of retrospective expungement of victims' criminal records, when forced to commit such crimes as a direct result of them having been trafficked.

Participation in political and public life

Participation in politics

The Commission recommends that:

- the State amends the *Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012* to mandate a 50% legislative gender quota on political party candidate selection for General Elections. The legislative gender quota should be extended to Local and Seanad elections.
- the State ensures sufficient remuneration for Local Councillors to remove barriers to the recruitment and retention of women.
- the State prioritises the early and full implementation of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life's recommendations.
- the Electoral Commission (An Coimisiún Toghcháin) be mandated with specific obligations to address discriminatory rhetoric and hate speech in political discourse during candidate selection processes, elections and referendums. Codes of conduct for public representatives and election candidates should be developed which clearly prohibit the use or endorsement of misogynistic hate speech.

Participation in public and private leadership

The Commission recommends that:

- the State fully transposes the EU Directive on Gender Balance on Corporate Boards, and introduces legislative quotas of 40% for corporate and State boards and that public funding is contingent on compliance. Quotas should be complemented by policy commitments to promote women's leadership in the new national strategy for women and girls.
- the Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Local Community Development Committees be amended to include a mandatory gender balance requirement on each Committee.
- the State undertakes research on gender inequality in senior Public Service positions and on State boards, and commits to implement the recommendations.

Education

Access to and participation in education

The Commission recommends that:

- the State examines and progresses the policy measures required to improve educational participation rates and outcomes for structurally vulnerable groups of women and girls, including through the resourcing of community education programmes.
- the State conducts a rights-based examination of the impact of the restrictions during the response to the Covid-19 pandemic on access to, and participation in education, to inform the protective measures required to mitigate the disproportionate impact of future crises on the right to education for women and girls.

Education for ethnic minority women and girls

The Commission recommends that:

- the State amends the legislation on schools' admissions to prohibit the use of the past pupil criterion and to ensure access to education for all girls, including to define what is required to maintain the 'ethos' of a school.
- the State embeds mandatory antiracism programmes at all levels of the education system as well as in initial teacher training and continuous professional development programmes that combat racism and promote intercultural understanding, including content tailored to different groups' experiences.
- the implementation of the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024-2030 is coordinated with the new national strategy for women and girls, to provide targeted supports to address educational disadvantage experienced by Traveller and Roma women and girls.
- the State progresses additional integrated supports for structurally vulnerable women and girls to increase access to further and higher education, including through the resourcing of community education programmes.

Relationships and Sexuality Education

The Commission recommends that:

- the State ensures a focus in primary and secondary curricula on toxic masculinity and misogyny and their impact on female students, women teachers, and girls and women in Irish society.
- the State further develop the Secondary Level Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum to reinforce knowledge on LGBTQIA+ relationships, contraceptive use, and reproductive health.

- the State increases funding and supports in ongoing teacher professional development in Relationships and Sexuality Education.
- the State ensures the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education is grounded in the principles of gender equality, equal access and intersectionality, including independent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are in place.

Employment

Access to decent work

The Commission recommends that:

- the State proactively addresses institutional discrimination and structural barriers impacting women's labour market access, including for older women seeking to re/join the labour market; recognition of international qualifications; language requirements; the prevalence of zero-hour contracts among ethnic minority, asylum seeking and refugee women; and the tokenistic rather than meaningful employment of disabled women.
- the State amends the *Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018* and the *Employment Equality Acts 1998* to strengthen the employment protections for migrant women.
- the new employment strategy recognises women as a distinct group who need supports to enter the workforce. The strategy must be aligned with the strategies for women and girls, disabled people, LGBTQIA+ people, migrants, and Travellers and Roma.
- the State recommits to introducing a living wage by 2026 and adopts the Minimum Essential Standard of Living method for determining a living wage as the foundation of all calculations, informed by the active participation of women.

- the State provides for a statutory right to collective bargaining to support women in challenging employment inequalities and structural discrimination.

Gender pay and pension gaps

The Commission recommends that:

- gender pay gap reporting is extended through ambitious transposition of the EU Pay Transparency Directive to increase the scope of organisations covered and mandate the collection and reporting of data across the grounds of discrimination in the *Employment Equality Acts*. In ambitiously transposing the legislation, the State should exceed the EU Directive on Gender Pay Transparency's minimum requirements particularly on intersectional discrimination.
- the State urgently addresses pension inequality in Ireland, including through the introduction of a Universal State Pension system.

Sexual harassment in the workplace

The Commission recommends that:

- our Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment and Harassment at Work should inform the development and implementation of policies and procedures that establish working environments free of harassment in which the dignity of everyone is respected.
- the operation of the Defence Forces Tribunal should ensure an effective, human rights and equality-based inquiry, with the involvement of rights holders and their representative organisations.

Pregnancy related discrimination

The Commission recommends that:

- the Code of Conduct for Interactions Between Members of the Defence Forces be amended to include safeguards against pregnancy-related discrimination.

Childcare and parental leave

The Commission recommends that:

- the State creates a detailed, ambitious and adequately resourced roadmap on transitioning to a public model of Early Childhood Education and Care by 2030.
- provision is made for parental leave schemes which are adequate both in terms of length and payment; apply equally to children in lone-parent families; are non-transferable to encourage sharing of responsibilities; and are coordinated with Early Childhood Education and Care to eliminate periods where neither paid leave nor affordable childcare is available.
- the State undertakes an awareness campaign promoting the uptake of parental leave and paternity leave by men.

Health

Access to healthcare

The Commission recommends that:

- State urgently prioritises implementation of the transformation to a universal healthcare service, Sláintecare, including through significantly increasing public spending on women's and girls' health to meet the required levels for long-term reconfiguration of the healthcare system and to end disproportionate reliance on private healthcare services.

- the State develops a new Women's Health Action Plan, which includes targeted measures to address health inequalities experienced by structurally vulnerable groups of women. The Action Plan must be aligned with the strategies for women and girls, disabled people, LGBTQIA+ people, migrants, and Travellers and Roma. The Plan should commit to further resource specialist women's health services especially gynaecology; and remove age-based, weight-based and partnership-based discrimination from free fertility treatment.
- the State develops and adequately resources rights-based, evidence-based healthcare for transgender children, young people and adults, as a matter of urgency.

Abortion services

The Commission recommends that:

- the State prioritises the full implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Review of the *Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018* to ensure that women have equitable and accessible abortion services in Ireland.

Maternal health

The Commission recommends that:

- the State provides secular, safe maternal healthcare for all women and girls.
- the new National Maternity Strategy includes targeted measures for ensuring equal access to maternal healthcare across Ireland for structurally vulnerable groups including investment in the prevention of maternal mortality and morbidity amongst ethnic minority women.

Mental health

The Commission recommends that:

- the State comprehensively reviews mental health legislation and develops protection of liberty safeguards legislation, aligning to international standards, particularly the UNCRPD, in consultation with disabled people, and provides for the establishment of an independent complaints' mechanism.
- the State immediately progresses its plans to develop a toolkit for embedding women's mental health in policy-making, in consultation with disabled women, including those with lived experience of mental health services.
- the State includes priority and intersectional targets and indicators on improving the mental health of structurally vulnerable women and girls across all relevant national equality and health strategies, accompanied by investment in specifically tailored, accessible, affordable and quality community mental health services.

Data

The Commission recommends that:

- the State routinely publishes information on the proportion of the overall health budget spent on women's and girls' health, including disaggregated data on public spending on sexual health, maternal health, fertility, menopause, gender-based violence, and mental health.

Economic empowerment

Equality budgeting

The Commission recommends that:

- the State places equality budgeting on a statutory footing, with a strong focus on gender, and ensures that all Government Departments and public bodies are required to actively demonstrate application of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty in their budgets.
- the State ensures enhanced public participation of women and girls in all budgetary processes, with the direct and active involvement of structurally vulnerable women and girls and their representative organisations, in line with international best practice.
- the State human rights and equality proofs the new Medium-Term Fiscal and Structural Plan, the Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate, Nature Fund and publishes a statement on how they protect and advance women's and girls' rights.

Business and human rights

The Commission recommends that:

- the development, implementation and monitoring of the second National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights is informed by input from women and girls, international obligations on women's and girl's rights, best practice in other countries, and island of Ireland considerations.
- the State ensures through the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights that Irish-domiciled or State-owned enterprises are required to protect and advance the rights of women and girls who are working in businesses and connected to their supply chains.

- in transposing the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, the State should go beyond the minimum requirements in the Directive and ensure that robust and mandatory human rights due diligence legislation is introduced, that includes the full value chain of all companies and environmental protections within its scope, prioritises transparency in reporting, and ensures effective sanctions and enforcement.

Taxation

The Commission recommends that:

- cliff-edges in the Irish tax and social welfare systems which impact women should be removed and replaced by more gradual or tapered thresholds.
- the State gender proofs the taxation system and commits to a phased move towards a fully individualised tax system.

Access to social protection

The Commission recommends that:

- the State formally adopts Welfare Indexation across social protection policy development and reform, as a matter of priority, in line with the guiding principles of poverty reduction and the protection of living standards.
- all developments, reforms and new policies relating to social protection provision be gender, equality and poverty proofed and assessed for their fiscal and distributional impact on structurally vulnerable groups.
- the State reviews and gender and equality proofs all administrative social protection criteria, application procedures, and the appeals process to ensure they are not impeding access to social protection for structurally vulnerable groups.

- the State should co-design with disabled women, and their representative organisations, a programme of targeted and long-term measures required to address the cost of disability.
- all staff engaged in the administration of social protection receive training on their obligations and duties under the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

Poverty and social exclusion

The Commission recommends that:

- the State develops a human rights, equality and gender proofed multidimensional national action plan to eradicate poverty addressing root causes; and ensuring the inclusion of clear and measurable targets, the allocation of adequate resources for its implementation, and effective mechanisms for coordination among national and local governments. Targeted long-term supports must be in place for lone women parents and low-income households, headed by women, to ensure their right to an adequate standard of living.
- strategic approaches to poverty alleviation are gender proofed and consider the effects of the social protection system; low-paid and precarious work; financial exclusion; the digital divide, and socio-economic discrimination in obstructing the right to an adequate standard of living, and include actions to dismantle these and other poverty traps.
- the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) be amended to include women, particularly women who may experience multiple discrimination, as a target group in order to ensure that gender equality projects are supported.

Housing

The Commission recommends that:

- the State significantly scales up its supply of and investment in social, affordable and cost-rental housing to match current and future need, in line with the recommendations of the Housing Commission. The State should ensure its housing policies and strategies are gender proofed.
- the State develops a robust and costed action plan to end homelessness by 2030. In the interim, the State should gender proof its response to homelessness to ensure gender-sensitive prevention, support and housing services are available and appropriately resourced.

Child maintenance

The Commission recommends that:

- the State ensures the expertise and experience of lone parent families, and their representative organisations, are central to the development and implementation of child maintenance guidelines, including by ensuring that child maintenance provides for an adequate standard of living for the lone parent and their children.
- the State prioritises the implementation of reforms to the system of enforcement of child maintenance orders and in the wider family court system. The State should commit to independently reviewing the implementation of the measures, which should include consideration of the establishment of Statutory Child Maintenance Agency.

Climate change and disaster risk reduction

The Commission recommends that:

- all climate action and adaptation measures are poverty and equality proofed throughout the design, development and implementation stages, to assess and reduce the impact on women and girls, including those from structurally vulnerable groups. The State should ensure the inclusion of women and girls in decision-making processes on climate action. The State should leverage all available resources, including domestic and EU financing mechanisms, to ensure transformative mitigation and adaptation actions in response to climate change and biodiversity loss.
- the State develops measures to ensure the availability and accessibility of refuge accommodation and support services to survivors and victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in preparation for climate-related disasters, through the inclusion of the response to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in the development of national climate strategies and action plans.

Disadvantaged groups of women

Rural women

The Commission recommends that:

- the State prioritises implementing the National Women in Agriculture Action Plan including promoting women succession and addressing taxation barriers to participation.
- the State undertakes research into the barriers to women's land ownership and develops and implements recommendations that are complementary with the findings.

- the State ensures the integration and mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all rural development policies, strategies, plans and programmes, particularly in Our Rural Future 2025–2030, to ensure equal access and benefits for rural women.
- the State must provide adequate investment in rural public transport and undertake a review of the gender-differentiated demands for transport services in rural areas in order to ensure that policy reflects the mobility needs of rural women and provide them with safe, affordable and accessible means of transport.

Traveller and Roma women

The Commission recommends that:

- the State mainstreams intersectionality and gender equality in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028 by ensuring a coordinated approach to the implementation of the Strategy and the new national strategy for women and girls.
- the State ensures a robust and resourced implementation and monitoring framework is embedded in the lifecycle of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028, and that the actions are adequately costed and assessed for tangible impacts on Traveller and Roma women and girls.
- the State reviews and revises the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028 and its action plan to implement the recommendations related to the most prevalent structural issues faced by Traveller and Roma women and girls by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and the Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

Women in detention

The Commission recommends that:

- the State proceeds with the immediate ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.
- the State prioritises the use of alternative non-custodial measures for women such that imprisonment is used as a last resort.
- the State urgently addresses persistent overcrowding in women's prisons and prioritises timely, gender-sensitive provision of mental health and addiction supports.
- the State uses immigration detention for women only in exceptional circumstances, for the shortest possible time. The Commission recommends that any legislative measures introduced to transpose the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum do not expand the use of immigration detention and embed adequate safeguards for women seeking protection.
- the State prioritises the commencement of rights-based mental health and protection of liberty legislation, along with systemic reform to progress de-institutionalisation.

Disabled women and girls

The Commission recommends that:

- the State actively supports and resources disabled women to live independently, including delivery of person-centred financial supports, a legal right to personal assistance, and seamless and flexible services across the life cycle. The right of disabled women and girls to direct and choose the support services to meet their needs must also be recognised.
- the principles of universal design, community living and participation are embedded, including through procurement processes, in the development of new facilities,

products, technologies and services and in the removal of existing barriers to independent living for disabled women and girls.

- the State takes action to address the systemic factors enabling violence and neglect of disabled women and girls in institutional and community settings, including steps taken to ensure professional and organisational accountability, oversight and inter-agency coordination, and addressing failures in the criminal justice system, inspection bodies and the care system.
- State mainstreams intersectionality and gender equality in the new National Disability Strategy by ensuring a coordinated approach to the implementation of the Strategy and the new national strategy for women and girls.

Introduction

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission ('IHREC') is both the 'A' status National Human Rights Institution ('NHRI') and the National Equality Body ('NEB') for Ireland.¹ Since our last reporting cycle, we have been designated the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for Ireland under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ('UNCRPD');² the independent National Rapporteur on the Trafficking of Human Beings;³ and will be assigned the role of the Co-ordinating National Preventive Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture ('OPCAT'), pending ratification.⁴ Alongside Northern Ireland's national human rights and equality bodies, we have a mandate to consider and report on equality and rights issues with an island of Ireland dimension.⁵ We also have legal powers under the *Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021*,⁶ and a role in relation to the EU Artificial Intelligence Act.⁷

In our Strategy Statement 2025-2027, we have prioritised the following aims within the context of our work: Developing robust responses to current and emerging threats to human rights and equality; Enhancing accountability mechanisms; Strengthening the human rights and equality infrastructure in the State; Fulfilling our international role as part of a global network of National Human Rights Institutions and National Equality Bodies; and Operating as a model organisation for implementing human rights and equality in practice.⁸

¹ Established under the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014*.

² Section 103 of the *Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Act 2022* amends section 10(2) of the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014* to provide that one of our functions is to promote and monitor the implementation in the State of the UNCRPD.

³ IHREC, [Commission Takes on New Role as Ireland's National Rapporteur on the Trafficking of Human Beings](#) (2020).

⁴ To be provided under the *Inspection of Places of Detention Bill*, when enacted.

⁵ We work with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission ('NIHRC') in the Joint Committee, as set out in the Belfast Good Friday Agreement. Following the UK's withdrawal from the EU, we, along with the NIHRC and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland ('ECNI') comprise the Article 2(1) Working Group of the Dedicated Mechanism. This group is mandated to provide oversight of, and report on, rights and equality issues falling within the scope of the Article 2 [Windsor Framework] commitment that have an island of Ireland dimension.

⁶ *Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021*.

⁷ We have been included in a list of nine national public authorities responsible for protecting fundamental rights ('Article 77 bodies') under the EU Artificial Intelligence Act. Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, [Minister Calleary announces key milestone in the implementation of the EU regulation on AI](#) (31 October 2024).

⁸ IHREC, [Strategy Statement 2025-2027](#) (2025).

We welcome the opportunity to provide this additional submission⁹ to our parallel report to inform the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women's ('the Committee') review of Ireland's compliance with and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ('CEDAW'). The previous examination of Ireland by the Committee in 2017 provided a valuable expert assessment of the State's compliance with CEDAW and influenced some welcome national reform.¹⁰ Eight years on, we are providing these submissions to update the Committee on the measures needed to improve the lives of women and girls in Irish society in advance of the forthcoming eighth periodic examination of Ireland in June-July 2025. These submissions complement and build upon our 2023 submission to the Committee to inform its List of Issues.¹¹ We note that many of the structural, systemic and persistent issues we raised in that submission remain unaddressed in Ireland.

While the State's report is welcome,¹² there are significant limitations to its approach, which focuses on policy and legislative outputs, rather than measuring outcomes and capturing the lived experience of individuals and communities. Ireland is 'policy rich, implementation poor'. Despite the library of policy documents, narrative of commitment to gender equality and multiplicity of initiatives, Ireland has invested little of its considerable wealth on women's and girls' rights. There is a disconnect between Ireland's global leadership on gender equality and its weak domestic alignment with international standards. Failures to collect and report disaggregated equality data and implement systemic measures such as gender budgeting have perpetuated evidence gaps required to demonstrate how State actions are impacting the wide diversity of women and girls in Ireland. Evidence-informed policy-making with a gender

⁹⁹ This submission provides further detail on the issues raised in our parallel report.

¹⁰ Directly aligned to the Committee's 2017 concluding observations, as noted later in this report, there has been progress in legislative and policy reform including on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence; the introduction of reporting on the gender pay gap; and constitutional reform to introduce access to abortion services.

¹¹ 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](#) (2023).

¹² Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Eighth periodic report submitted by Ireland under article 18 of the Convention](#), CEDAW/C/IRL/8 (12 November 2024).

lens needs to be central to how the State implements CEDAW and the recommendations of the Committee.

There has been insufficient progress in implementing the Committee's 2017 concluding observations.¹³ We provided the State with a list of recommendations from United Nations treaty monitoring mechanisms and Council of Europe bodies related to the rights of women and girls in Ireland;¹⁴ however, there has been no engagement with us on how the State is implementing these recommendations. To put in place structural and ambitious reforms, the State must prioritise domestic implementation of concluding observations; and establish and resource the necessary mechanisms to support implementation.¹⁵

This review is happening at an opportune time with a new Government in place, with a new policy agenda for the next five years (Programme for Government 2025).¹⁶ Further, the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality delivered an evidence-informed, authoritative agenda to realise gender equality in Ireland.¹⁷ Gender equality is at a critical juncture in Ireland, and this review is an opportunity for the State to adopt the measures needed to strengthen the protection of rights and the realisation of equality in Ireland. However, this review is taking place in the context where there has been no national strategy for women and girls in place for several years;¹⁸ and where intersectionality has been undermined by delayed and limited

¹³ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland](#), CEDAW/C/IRL/CO/6-7 (9 March 2017).

¹⁴ IHREC, [United Nations and Council of Europe recommendations on issues affecting women and girls in Ireland: Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to inform the development of the new National Strategy on Women and Girls](#) (2024).

¹⁵ This emphasises the importance of the establishment in Ireland of a permanent National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-Up: OHCHR, [National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up](#). Our 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: IHREC, [Strategy Statement 2025-2027](#) (2025) p. 16.

¹⁶ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025).

¹⁷ The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality was established by Oireachtas resolution in July 2019. The membership of the Assembly consisted of 100 persons – a Chairperson and 99 citizens entitled to vote at a referendum, recruited at national level and randomly selected so as to be broadly representative of Irish society. In 2021, the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality published 45 priority recommendations to advance gender equality in Ireland, which included calls for constitutional reform. See Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, [Final Report](#) (2021) p. 12. We appeared before the Citizens' Assembly and made written contribution to inform the discussions of the Citizens' Assembly. See IHREC, [Submission to the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality](#) (2020).

¹⁸ The National Strategy for Women and Girls covered the period 2017-2020, and was extended to 2021.

national equality strategies on Travellers and Roma,¹⁹ LGBTQIA+,²⁰ disability,²¹ and migrants²². As highlighted throughout this report, in many areas of Irish life there is a failure to adequately address and improve the circumstances of many women and girls, including those from structurally vulnerable²³ groups. The State's response to these widespread inequalities and rights violations has been inadequate.

While the State may have many laws, policies, strategies and action plans in place, they do not adequately improve the circumstances of individuals and communities in practice, due to weak implementation and monitoring of the agreed commitments. Despite enduring 'crises' in health, housing, standard of living, and climate, emergency and temporary measures are being put in place in the absence of long-term, forward-looking, innovative, and sustainable solutions that address the root causes. Many of the challenges faced by women and girls are exacerbated at a rural and regional level. A paradigm shift is needed based on an equality and human rights model, including through transformative investment by the State to eradicate poverty, combat misinformation, disinformation, and hate; mitigate climate impacts; build up our public service provision; and respond to the needs of structurally vulnerable women and girls.

This review is timely as across Europe and internationally, the principles of gender equality and the protection of women's and girls' human rights are increasingly under attack.²⁴ We are

¹⁹ The first National Traveller and Roma Strategy (2017-2021) was succeeded by NTRIS II (2024-2028). See our concerns on the limitations of NTRIS II: IHREC, [Observations on the draft National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024–2028 and draft Action Plan 2024–2028](#) (2024).

²⁰ The LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy covered the period 2019-2021.

²¹ The National Disability Inclusion Strategy covered the period 2017-2021.

²² The Migrant Integration Strategy covered the period 2017-2020, extended to 2021.

²³ For the purpose of this report, we define a structurally vulnerable person as someone who is particularly vulnerable to violations of their rights due to political, economic, social and cultural structures. Instead of focusing on the personal characteristics of individuals and groups and viewing them as lacking agency, 'structural vulnerability' refers to the structures in place which render certain sectors of the population particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses.

²⁴ The Committee has noted that "women's political representation and civic space are increasingly under attack through restrictions on the activities of women's organizations, growing attacks on and intimidation of women politicians, journalists and human rights defenders, and challenges to and reversals of generational gains made in relation to women's and girls' human rights": Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [General recommendation No. 40 \(2024\) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems](#), CEDAW/C/GC/40 (25 October 2024) para. 6.

seeing the adoption of regressive policies on gender equality, which erode the hard-won achievements of this Committee, the UN, States, NHRIs, NEBs, and civil society. Anti-rights and anti-gender movements are undermining and dismantling the rule of law and international human rights law, including obligations under CEDAW. The State needs to play a leadership role in protecting and promoting the rights of women and girls in domestic, European, and international forums.²⁵

Misogyny, sexism and discrimination take many different forms. Online spaces are becoming increasingly hostile to women and girls, particularly those who have long faced persistent systemic discrimination. The State has a responsibility to lead and regulate due to the location of major digital media companies in Ireland.

At this time of geo-political and geo-economic volatility, the State must respond to security and trade concerns at a national and global level by embedding the principles of gender equality and fundamental human rights in its words and deeds. An ambitious, comprehensive and regulatory approach to business and human rights is required to reflect Ireland's strategic location in the European and global economy. The State should prioritise publication of its next Business and Human Rights National Action Plan.²⁶

The State should leverage its international commitments, including CEDAW, to push for stronger legislation and policy in Ireland, Europe and globally on women's and girls' rights. The review is taking place in the context of the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,²⁷ the continued implementation of the Sustainable

²⁵ The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions ('GANHRI') have called for States to show leadership in addressing women's and girls' rights by fully implementing their commitments and legal obligations related to gender equality: GANHRI, [GANHRI Annual Conference 2025 Outcome statement](#) (2025).

²⁶ The Business and Human Rights National Action Plan covered the period 2017-2020. There is no reference to a successor in the 2025 Programme for Government.

²⁷ UN Women, [CSW69 / Beijing+30](#) (2025). See also United Nations Secretary-General, [Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly](#) (2024); UN Women, [Women's Rights in Review 30 Years After Beijing](#) (2025). In March 2025, IHREC and the National Women's Council held an event to reflect on Beijing+30 and assess the progress and challenges in advancing women's rights across the island of Ireland: National Women's Council, [30 years after Beijing, progress on women's rights and equality is under threat](#) (18 March 2025).

Development Goals,²⁸ and the forthcoming Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union (July-December 2026).

In preparing our report, we have drawn on the expertise and on-the-ground insights of a wide range of rights-holders and civil society actors, including through holding a Civil Society Forum,²⁹ holding bilateral engagements, reviewing civil society evidence and analysis, and engaging with our Disability Advisory Committee³⁰. We have developed guidance to support civil society in reporting to and engaging with the Committee during this review process.³¹ We have repeatedly raised with the State the importance of funding civil society engagement with the review through correspondence and meetings. We note the continued pressures faced by women's and girls' human rights defenders and civil society organisations, including funding and resourcing constraints and a shrinking civil society space for advocacy, promotion, and leadership. Ireland needs a robust and independent civil society to advocate for the structural, systemic, sustainable and transformative change required to improve the lives of women and girls.

The report follows the structure of the List of Issues adopted by the Committee in 2023, as well as the order of the substantive provisions within CEDAW. Throughout this report, we detail significant updates since Ireland's previous examination in 2017, and provide information in response to the Committee's List of Issues.

Throughout this report, we focus on highlighting the systemic human rights and equality issues being experienced by women and girls across Ireland. Reflecting our approach, which seeks to identify structural solutions against all forms of discrimination against women and girls, we reject any narrative that seeks to create hierarchies between different groups or create division.

²⁸ In particular Sustainable Development Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, [SDG Goal 5](#). See also UN Women, [Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot](#) (2024).

²⁹ We held a consultation on CEDAW in April 2025, which was attended by a wide representation of national and local civil society organisations, trade union representatives and representatives of Irish businesses.

³⁰ IHREC, [Disability Advisory Committee](#).

³¹ IHREC, [Civil Society Guide to Reporting under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (April 2025).

In line with the Committee's position that the discrimination of women based on sex and gender is inextricably linked with other factors that affect women,³² and that the discrimination on the basis of sex or gender may affect women belonging to such groups to a different degree or in different ways to men,³³ we consider the intersectional inequalities experienced by structurally vulnerable groups in every section.

We look forward to continued engagement throughout the review and in the follow-up stages to further progress the protection of women's and girls' equality and rights in Ireland. We urge the State to comprehensively assess and consider the recommendations in this report, and to proactively engage with the Committee during the review and in the implementation of the concluding observations.

National Human Rights Institution and National Equality Body

Since the last review, we have a significantly expanded mandate³⁴ which has not been matched by annual budgetary increases to adequately resource their delivery.³⁵ We have experienced delayed engagement with us by the State on proposed mandates, including a lack of clarity on whether we would be adequately resourced to undertake the role.³⁶ There is

³² The Committee has emphasised that women and girls experience varying and intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors such as race, ethnicity, indigenous or minority status, colour, religion or belief, disability, health, socio-economic status, age, political opinion, parental and / or marital status, urban or rural location, migration status, deprivation of liberty, and sexual orientation and gender identity.

³³ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [General Recommendation No. 28 on the Core Obligations of States Parties under Article 2](#) (2010).

³⁴ These include our role as National Rapporteur on the Trafficking of Human Beings, Independent Monitoring Mechanism under the UNCRPD, the proposed co-ordinating National Preventive Mechanism body in relation to OPCAT, and as a designated Article 77 body under the EU Artificial Intelligence Act.

³⁵ Despite receiving an overall increase of 13% in our Budget for 2025, we still do not have the level of funding required to meet our mandate in full on behalf of the State. While it is normal for a budgetary negotiation process to result in an allocation of a lower amount than requested, we received significantly less budget than was sought to adequately carry out the full breadth of our mandate. For 2026, we will be making the case again that we are not adequately funded, with potential implications on the future delivery of mandates. We have previously corresponded with the State that our budget allocation has not been increased to provide for the development and staffing of our expanding functions, in a way that would give meaningful effect to new mandates. See IHREC, [Correspondence to An Taoiseach on the adoption of EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies](#) (25 June 2024). See also IHREC, [Correspondence to the Minister for Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth re. budgetary allocation](#) (6 July 2022).

³⁶ We do not want to be in a position whereby we have to refuse taking on new mandates, but this risk is growing as it becomes increasingly unfeasible to continue to deliver our work in the context of the lack of funding.

a reputational risk for IHREC, the Government and the State if we cannot accept new mandates, or deliver to the necessary standards on our current mandates.³⁷ We need to be adequately resourced to carry out our mandate independently, without impacting on our ability to carry out our existing statutory functions.³⁸

We emphasise the importance of the EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies (the Directives),³⁹ to be transposed by June 2026, which have introduced a legal requirement on EU Member States to provide multi-mandate bodies⁴⁰ with adequate human, technical and financial resources to perform their tasks and competencies effectively.⁴¹ Our budgetary allocation should be stable and multi-annual, to facilitate covering unanticipated costs;⁴²

³⁷ The European Commission in its 2024 Rule of Law country chapter on Ireland noted that IHREC is facing resource issues, and we are being tasked with new responsibilities and mandates, while some of our existing statutory powers have not yet been deployed due to resource issues. European Commission, [2024 Rule of Law Report Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Ireland](#) (2024) pp. 1, 28.

³⁸ In line with the essential requirements of the Paris Principles on adequate funding for NHRIs: [Paris Principle B.2](#) and [General Observation 1.10](#). In our Strategy Statement 2025-2027, we commit to maintain our 'A' status accreditation as a National Human Rights Institution and ensure our operations fully align with the requirements of the EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies: IHREC, [Strategy Statement 2025-2027](#) (2025) p. 19. See also IHREC, [Letter on the Programme for Government](#) (17 December 2024).

³⁹ On 7 May 2024, the Council of the European Union formally adopted the EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies in the field of equal treatment and equal opportunities. Member States will have two years to adapt their national legislation to the provisions of the Directives, which lay down standards for equality bodies to ensure that people enjoy a common minimum level of protection against discrimination. The Directives cover the mandate, independence, resources, tasks and powers of equality bodies to (1) engage in the prevention of discrimination and awareness raising activities and (2) deal with cases of discrimination/assist victims. The Directives will strengthen the implementation and enforcement of EU and Irish equality legislation. See European Union, [Standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment and equal opportunities](#). See also Equinet, [Standards for Equality Bodies](#).

⁴⁰ Such as a National Equality Body and a National Human Rights Institution.

⁴¹ Where new mandates are given to equality bodies, they should receive the financial and other resources to effectively exercise their mandates. Recital 20 of the [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1500 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment and equal opportunities between women and men in matters of employment and occupation, and amending Directives 2006/54/EC and 2010/41/EU](#); and Recital 21 of the [Council Directive \(EU\) 2024/1499 of 7 May 2024 on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment between persons irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin, equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation between persons irrespective of their religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, equal treatment between women and men in matters of social security and in the access to and supply of goods and services, and amending Directives 2000/43/EC and 2004/113/EC](#).

⁴² Recital 21 of the [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1500 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment and equal opportunities between women and men in matters of employment and occupation, and amending Directives 2006/54/EC and 2010/41/EU](#); and Recital 22 of the [Council Directive \(EU\) 2024/1499 of 7 May 2024 on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment between persons irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin, equal treatment in matters of](#)

linked to the rising costs of inflation; account for public sector pay agreements and salary increments; and, allow a margin of budgetary contingency for responding to emerging equality and human rights issues.⁴³ As a key part of the accountability structure in the State, the Directives will significantly strengthen our mandate through requirements on the State including with regard to consultation, data, monitoring and reporting, and resources.⁴⁴ However, it is important to note that there was no reference to the transposition of the Directives in the 2025 Programme for Government.⁴⁵

We have observed a gradual undermining of our role in the policy and legislative process,⁴⁶ with a lack of meaningful engagement by the State with our expert advice and recommendations.⁴⁷ Given the significant resources, financial, technical and human, which we have invested to work pro-actively and positively with the State, it is concerning when our advice and recommendations are not responded to or implemented.⁴⁸ We have also noted rule of law concerns with the State's approach to the legislative process⁴⁹ which impacts on

[employment and occupation between persons irrespective of their religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, equal treatment between women and men in matters of social security and in the access to and supply of goods and services, and amending Directives 2000/43/EC and 2004/113/EC.](#)

⁴³ IHREC, [Mid-Term Report to the UN Human Rights Council for the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of Ireland](#) (2024) p. 2.

⁴⁴ Requirements that will be central to ensuring oversight and accountability of the State's domestic, European and international equality obligations include the collection of and access to data (Article 16), the publication of monitoring reports on the state of equal treatment and discrimination (Article 17(c)), and consultation between IHREC and the State (Article 15). See [EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies](#).

⁴⁵ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (January 2025).

⁴⁶ We have communicated this to the European Commission as part of their Rule of Law mechanism.

⁴⁷ We are not being provided with adequate access to information and access to officials in the policy and legislative process. We have had non-responses to requests for information and meetings from across different Government officials.

⁴⁸ For example, we invested significant resources into our engagement with the State's review of the Equality Acts including two substantial submissions, the establishment of the Future of Equality Legislation Advisory Committee (comprising legal, academic, and civil society experts on equality law), a policy statement on socio-economic status as a discriminatory ground, and engagement with Departmental officials. However, a considerable amount of our advice and recommendations remain unaddressed, See IHREC, [Letter to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on the General Scheme of the Equality \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Bill 2024](#) (20 January 2025).

⁴⁹ We were highly critical of the Government's plans to amend legislation to revoke Irish citizenship via the *Courts, Civil Law, Criminal Law and Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2024* without proper scrutiny. In July 2024, the Commission wrote to the Minister for Justice Helen McEntee on three occasions to express our significant concerns with the unacceptable haste, right before the summer recess of the Irish Parliament, with which it was proposed to enact the legislation, including the severe limit on the time available for appropriate pre-legislative scrutiny of the proposed amending legislation to ensure that constitutionally

our ability to engage in the development of legislation with profound human rights and equality implications.⁵⁰ We note again the importance of the transposition of the Directives, including the requirement that States must ensure they proactively consult with equality bodies on legislation and policy concerning the rights and obligations under EU Equality Directives.⁵¹ The Directives provide that we have the right to make and publish recommendations on these issues, and request follow-up from the State on the recommendations.⁵² We are of the view that this right to make recommendations and request follow-up should extend to all of our mandates⁵³ to ensure our expert advice and recommendations, including in relation to gender equality, are meaningfully engaged with by the State.⁵⁴

compliant safeguards are built into it. We expressed concern in April 2025 when the Act was commenced. See IHREC, [Commission voices grave concerns as Minister O’Callaghan commences law on revocation of naturalised Irish citizenship](#) (10 April 2025).

⁵⁰ We have statutory mandate to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice in the State (Section 10(2)(c) of the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014*). Before the passage of the *Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act 2024* we wrote to the Minister for Justice calling for adequate time and opportunity for appropriate scrutiny of this legislation due to introduction of amendments to the legislation. We also requested confirmation that our previous recommendations on the legislation had been incorporated. We received no substantive response to our recommendations and correspondence: See IHREC, [Correspondence to the Minister for Justice, regarding An Taoiseach’s comments on the Criminal Justice \(Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences\) Bill 2022](#) (3 September 2024).

⁵¹ Article 15 of the [EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies](#) requires Member States to put in place procedures to ensure that the government and relevant public authorities consult equality bodies on legislation, policy, procedure and programmes related to the rights and obligations derived from EU Equality Directives. Member States shall ensure that equality bodies have the right to make recommendations on those matters, to publish the recommendations and to request follow-up regarding such recommendations.

⁵² We will have discretion on which law policy, procedure and practice we engage with and make recommendations on, as we will not have the capacity to engage with every law, policy, procedure and practice. See Equinet, [Understanding the New EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies: Legal Digest on Standards for Equality Bodies](#) (2024) pp. 62-66.

⁵³ Including our mandates as the National Rapporteur on the Trafficking of Human Beings, Independent Monitoring Mechanism under the UNCRPD, and the proposed co-ordinating National Preventive Mechanism body in relation to OPCAT.

⁵⁴ GANHRI have called for States to work with NHRIs to realise gender equality and women’s and girls’ right as NHRIs monitor and provide credible data and advice on the human rights situation faced by women and girls. NHRIs are well-placed to advise on compliance of laws, policy and practices with universal norms and standards, due to our expertise in international human rights law. NHRIs also work with civil society and human rights defenders to raise the voices of all women and girls, including the most structurally vulnerable. See GANHRI, [GANHRI Annual Conference 2025 Outcome statement](#) (2025).

In relation to the implementation of the Subcommittee on Accreditation's 2021 recommendations on IHREC,⁵⁵ we note that we are scheduled for re-accreditation in 2026.⁵⁶ Although the *IHREC Act 2014* does not explicitly mandate us to encourage ratification or accession to international human rights instruments,⁵⁷ we have in practice called for the State to ratify international human rights instruments including our long-standing advocacy on the ratification of OPCAT. While the process of selection and appointment of Commission members is independently carried out by Public Jobs,⁵⁸ we have emphasised to Public Jobs and the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality the crucial importance of ensuring diverse representation on the Commission and we have recommended measures be taken to ensure the recruitment competition be advertised in a way that reaches diverse audiences of potential applicants.

The Commission recommends that the State, as part of its full and ambitious transposition of the EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies, engages in multi-annual budgetary planning and allocation at a level that ensures the effective discharge of all of IHREC's statutory functions, and that new mandates are accompanied by adequate and transparently costed funding.

The Commission recommends that the State, as part of its full and ambitious transposition of the EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies, engages with IHREC to ensure procedures are established, on a statutory basis, to facilitate proactive consultation between the Government / public bodies and IHREC on legislation, policies, and practices related to all of our statutory mandates. The State should ensure, by way of legislative provision, that the Government and public bodies are required to follow the consultation procedures and that

⁵⁵ GANHRI Sub-Committee on Accreditation, [Report and Recommendations – June 2021 session](#) (2021) pp. 15-18.

⁵⁶ We are scheduled for re-accreditation during the Sub-Committee on Accreditation's 47th Session from 20 April to 1 May 2026: GANHRI Sub-Committee on Accreditation, [Upcoming accreditation sessions](#).

⁵⁷ The Sub-Committee on Accreditation recommended for changes to the *IHREC Act 2014* to mandate IHREC with explicit responsibility to encourage ratification or accession to international instruments. GANHRI Sub-Committee on Accreditation, [Report and Recommendations – June 2021 session](#) (2021) p. 16.

⁵⁸ Section 13(6) of the *IHREC Act 2014* provides that the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality shall agree with Public Jobs on the selection criteria and process to be implemented in respect of the filling of any vacancy on the Commission.

IHREC has the power to publish recommendations and to request follow-up to these recommendations in relation to all of our statutory mandates.

Civil society

Ireland has shown strong political leadership at an international level in recognising the critical role of civil society.⁵⁹ The State needs to match these commitments with action at the national level to support and resource the participation, advocacy, and leadership of civil society. It is concerning that there is no explicit reference to civil society or civil society space in the Programme for Government 2025.⁶⁰

Women's and girls' organisations have been key drivers of gender equality and social progress in Ireland.⁶¹ However, we continue to have concerns around the persistent underfunding of civil society organisations working on women's and girls' rights and equality; and the conditionality of funding.⁶² Insufficient pay and conditions impact on the ability of civil society to recruit and retain staff.⁶³ The underfunding and insecure conditions have a particular

⁵⁹ Ireland has led the drafting and negotiations on resolutions on civil society space, including most recently in 2023: Human Rights Council, [Resolution A/HRC/RES/53/13](#) (2023).

⁶⁰ We note there is a section on Supporting Communities but there is no mention of the protection of civil society space: Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) pp. 109-110.

⁶¹ National Women's Council, [Programme for Government: National Women's Council Recommendations](#) (2024) p. 6; National Women's Council, [Pre-Budget Submission 2025](#) (2024).

⁶² Representatives of civil society organisations at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum repeatedly emphasised the impacts of underfunding on the delivery of services. A lack of multi-annual funding means that civil society cannot put proper long-term structures and plans in place for services and advocacy. The cost of living is impacting civil society organisations as well as the communities they represent and serve. Due to resourcing issues, civil society has to be reactive rather than proactive in responding to emerging issues. See previous concerns raised in 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](#) (2023) pp. 23-24. See also Tasc, [Civil Society Under Duress: Assessing the Impact of Political, Financial, and Governance Pressures on CSOs](#) (2024); Women's Collective Ireland, [Pre-Budget Submission 2025](#) (2024) p. 5; Tasc and the Wheel, [Service Delivery by the Community & Voluntary Sector](#) (2023).

⁶³ Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum highlighted that key issues include increasing demand for services; lack of funding for permanent rather than temporary positions; inadequate pay; pay stagnation; lack of parity with public sector pay scales; insufficient pension contributions; inadequate paid sick leave and paid maternity leave; staff burnout; and lack of access to continuous professional development. Civil society struggles to compete with the public sector in terms of pay and conditions which impacts staff recruitment and retention. See The Wheel, [General Election 2024: A manifesto for the community and voluntary sector](#) (2024) p.

gendered impact, as women represent 75% of the staff in the community, voluntary and charities sector.⁶⁴ Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum raised concerns that funding programmes and models lead to competition for limited resources between civil society which is contrary to their collaborative approach to advocacy. Further, civil society's work is limited by funding conditions to deliver State-specified programmes and services rather than the provision of flexible resources that address women's and girls' priorities.⁶⁵ Without increased funding and changes in funding arrangements, civil society organisations will have to limit their advocacy, reduce the level of service and may be forced to close.⁶⁶

We note with concern that participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum suggested that the receipt of State funding can have a chilling effect on civil society organisations' advocacy and campaigning.⁶⁷ Women and girls' civil society organisations remain committed to advocacy

7; The Wheel, [A Pre-Budget Submission for the community & voluntary sector](#) (2024) pp. 10-11, 25; The Wheel, [Members' Policy Survey](#) (2024); The Wheel, [Pay and Benefits in the Community & Voluntary Sector](#) (2024); Women's Collective Ireland, [Pre-Budget Submission 2025](#) (2024) pp. 5-7; Tasc and the Wheel, [Service Delivery by the Community & Voluntary Sector](#) (2023) pp. 17-35.

⁶⁴ In The Wheel's National Guide to Pay and Benefits in Community, Voluntary, and Charitable Organisations 2022, women represented 75% of the workforce overall, compared to 46.8% in employment generally. See The Wheel, [An Exploration of the Gender Pay Gap in Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations](#) (2023) p. 12.

⁶⁵ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁶⁶ Our consultations with civil society highlight the State's unwillingness to engage on these issues, in addition to capacity issues to meet governance requirements and prescriptive project-based funding. The majority of available funding is project-based rather than core funding, which means there are precise rules about what has to be covered. Additionally, project-based funding often has a thematic focus, meaning that projects have to be designed ad hoc to fall within the remit of grants. This is detrimental to the development of long-term projects and programmes. Civil society organisations have expressed concerns that these funding streams indicate a lack of trust in them to determine the most pressing issues in the community and use the available funding accordingly. See IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 16-17; 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](#) (2023) pp. 23-24. See also Tasc and the Wheel, [Service Delivery by the Community & Voluntary Sector](#) (2023) pp. 36-47.

⁶⁷ There are explicit (as part of contracts and funding agreements) and implicit restrictions on funding. The views of participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum support the findings of research by the Irish Council of Civil Liberties which found that almost two-fifths (37%) of the research participants from the community and voluntary sector report that they have curtailed their advocacy, campaigning or communications efforts for fear of impacting their funding. This rises to almost half (48%) amongst organisations working in homelessness and addiction, which are particularly likely to be involved in frontline service delivery and therefore to be in receipt of State funding. See Irish Council for Civil Liberties, ["That's not your role" State funding and advocacy in the Irish community voluntary and non-profit sector](#) (2024) pp. 12-13, 32-36. See also Tasc, [Civil Society Under Duress: Assessing the Impact of Political, Financial, and Governance Pressures on CSOs](#) (2024).

work and influencing public policy.⁶⁸ However, despite the wealth of expertise in the sector and close contact with structurally vulnerable groups, consultations between civil society and the State are irregular, unpaid, inaccessible and do not effectively inform long-term change.⁶⁹

The work of women's and girls' civil society organisations and their sources of funding should continue to be clearly regulated and subject to high standards of scrutiny, transparency and accountability.⁷⁰ Such regulatory measures should avoid placing undue restrictions on wider civil society activity engaging in advocacy aiming to influence political decision-making and policy-making, including with regard to human rights and equality issues.⁷¹ We acknowledge that the advocacy work of civil society is taking place in the context of anti-gender and anti-rights discourse and the hate directed at civil society advocating on gender equality. This is leading to a silencing of critical civil society voices.⁷² In line with the Committee's General Recommendation No. 40,⁷³ there is a need for a more inclusive and enabling environment for civil society actors to participate in the design, implementation and monitoring of legislation

⁶⁸ OECD, [Strengthening Policy Development in the Public Sector in Ireland](#) (2023) p. 66.

⁶⁹ Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum raised fatigue at State consultation processes due to repeatedly raising the same issues and providing concrete and tangible recommendations for change which are not addressed. Participants noted that consultations can be inaccessible for disabled women due to the failure to provide consultation documents in accessible formats in advance of the consultation or provide Irish Sign Language interpreters at consultation events. Participants also raised that the timing and location of in-person consultations is an obstacle to rural women and can be perceived as a sign that the State does not want to hear from rural women. Participants raised that there is a lack of accountability over these consultation processes. See previous concerns raised in IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p. 15. See also Irish Council for Civil Liberties, ["That's not your role" State funding and advocacy in the Irish community voluntary and non-profit sector](#) (2024) p. 13.

⁷⁰ It was raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum that regulatory processes can be inaccessible for disabled peoples' organisations.

⁷¹ We have noted concerns that compliance and reporting obligations can be overly burdensome for civil society, and that the cost of compliance is not included in funding contracts. See The Wheel, [General Election 2024: A manifesto for the community and voluntary sector](#) (2024) pp. 8-9; The Wheel, [A Pre-Budget Submission for the community & voluntary sector](#) (2024) p. 12.

⁷² Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum have noted that they must restrict their social media engagement to protect staff. There is a reluctance to name staff in relation to a campaign or publication they have worked on in fear of them being targeted.

⁷³ The Committee call for States to ensure safe and independent spaces for women's and girls' rights organisations, including youth-led and youth-focused organisations, and women human rights defenders to contribute directly and meaningfully to policymaking. Particular consideration should be given to the equal participation for women's civil society organisations and women human rights defenders representing women and girls who are subjected to intersectional discrimination. See Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [General recommendation No. 40 \(2024\) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems](#), CEDAW/C/GC/40 (25 October 2024) paras. 41. 51.

and policy; and to ensure participation is an ongoing rather than a once-off process.⁷⁴ The State must adopt models of collaborative governance wherein formal roles exist for civil society to have influence over policy and legislation.⁷⁵ Civil society organisations should be resourced and supported in a way that promotes and values active and sustained engagement in participatory mechanisms.

The Commission recommends that core, multi-annual, ring-fenced and autonomous funding is made available to women's and girls' civil society organisations, including community development, rural and grassroots organisations, which ensures decent work and adequate wages for staff and builds capacity to meet increasing need for advocacy and services.

The Commission recommends that the State conducts an independent evaluation of civil society space – including legislative, policy and funding measures – to ensure a more inclusive and enabling environment for the active and informed participation of women's and girls' civil society organisations. The State should directly resource and support their participation in stakeholder mechanisms, at a level that matches the rising costs of engagement and includes funding for reasonable accommodations, and to cover child and adult care costs.

⁷⁴ We support the recent recommendation of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for Ireland to put in place meaningful and effective participation mechanisms. The Committee recommended that the State develops “meaningful and effective engagement mechanisms and strategies that go beyond information and consultation models to ensure participation by civil society in the implementation and monitoring of policies, programmes and legislation”: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland](#), E/C.12/IRL/CO/4 (20 March 2024) para. 9. The Commission on the Status of Women's Political declaration on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women calls for States to promote and ensure a safe and enabling environment for civil society, and to recognise the importance of having an open, inclusive and transparent engagement with civil society as a contribution to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls: Commission on the Status of Women, [Political declaration on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women](#), E/CN.6/2025/L.1 (6 March 2025) para. 21.

⁷⁵ IHREC, Core components of national equality strategies (forthcoming, 2025), and Community Platform, [Towards a progressive model of collaborative governance](#) (2022).

General observations on the implementation of CEDAW

Reservations

The State maintains its reservations to Articles 11(1), 13(a), 16(1)(d) and 16(1)(f). The State report fails to adequately respond to the Committee's recommendations⁷⁶ and the questions raised in the List of Issues⁷⁷ by justifying the State's reasons for not withdrawing the reservations and explaining why national legislation is being maintained at the expense of the provisions in CEDAW.⁷⁸ We welcome the recent recommendation of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to the State to conduct an independent and comprehensive baseline study of Irish legislation with the view to designing and adopting all measures necessary to facilitate the full transposition of the Covenant into the domestic legal order.⁷⁹ We are of the view that this study should include the measures required for domestic incorporation of other international human rights treaties, including CEDAW.

The Commission recommends that the State constructively engages with the Committee on the removal of reservations to Articles 11(1), 13(a), 16(1)(d) and 16(1)(f).

The Commission recommends that the State should conduct an independent and comprehensive baseline study of Irish legislation with the view to designing and adopting all measures necessary to facilitate the full transposition of the Convention into the domestic legal order.

⁷⁶ See for example, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, [Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland](#), CEDAW/C/IRL/CO/6-7 (9 March 2017) paras. 8-9.

⁷⁷ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [List of issues and questions prior to the submission of the eighth periodic report of Ireland](#), CEDAW/C/IRL/QPR/8 (14 November 2023) para. 3(a).

⁷⁸ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Eighth periodic report submitted by Ireland under article 18 of the Convention](#), CEDAW/C/IRL/8 (12 November 2024) para. 38.

⁷⁹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland](#), E/C.12/IRL/CO/4 (20 March 2024) paras. 4-5.

Data collection

We continue to be concerned regarding the insufficiency of the State's collection and use of disaggregated equality data.⁸⁰ This results in a limited evidence base for the development, implementation and evaluation of policies and legislation concerning women and girls, particularly regarding the intersecting experiences of structurally vulnerable groups of women. It is not possible to have an adequate profile of the status of women's and girls' rights or an assessment of the outcomes of measures without State investment in the national data infrastructure. Accurate and comparable equality data is essential in understanding the nature and extent of discrimination faced by women and girls, and in enabling evidence-informed policy-making and service provision.⁸¹ The National Equality Data Strategy is unpublished and has been subject to numerous delays.⁸²

We emphasise the importance of Article 16 of the EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies which provides that Member States shall ensure that equality bodies collect data on their activities; and that equality bodies are able to access statistics related to the rights and obligations derived from EU Equality Directives, and are allowed to make recommendations on which data is to be collected in relation to the rights and obligations derived from EU

⁸⁰ Equality data refer to all types of disaggregated data used to assess the comparative situation of a specific group at risk of discrimination, to design public policies so that they can contribute to promoting equality and to assess their implementation: European Network Against Racism, [Equality Data](#); IHREC, [Submission to the Department of the Taoiseach on the European Semester 2023 and the National Reform Programme](#) (2023).

⁸¹ In line with the *EU Guidelines on improving the collection and use of equality data*, to ensure comprehensiveness of data, '(d)ata collectors and data users need multiple and complementary sources of equality data to enable evidence-based policy-making, as well as to get a full picture of the reality of equality and non-discrimination on the ground'. Further they should apply quality criteria including: consistency, clarity, timeliness, punctuality, accuracy, continuity, objectivity, relevance, comparability and transparency. European Commission High Level Group on Non-discrimination, Equality and Diversity - Subgroup on Equality Data, [Guidelines on improving the collection and use of equality data](#) (2018). See also European Commission High Level Group on Non-discrimination, Equality and Diversity - Subgroup on Equality Data, [Guidance Note on the National Implementation of the Equality Data Guidelines](#) (2024).

⁸² The National Equality Data Strategy's development was announced in 2022 and was supposed to be published in 2023: Department of Children, Disability and Equality, [Minister O'Gorman announces the development of a National Equality Data Strategy](#) (2022). There is no reference to the National Equality Strategy in the Programme for Government 2025.

Equality Directives to public and private entities including public authorities, the social partners, companies and civil society organisations.⁸³

The Commission recommends the State prioritises the publication, promotion and implementation of its National Equality Data Strategy and investment in the national equality data infrastructure. Government Departments and public bodies should be adequately resourced to deliver on its strategic approach and actions must be put in place to improve the collection, use and dissemination of disaggregated equality data.

The Commission recommends that the development of the Equality Data Hub is prioritised, and acts as a systematic, comprehensive, robust, centralised system for equality data, including data on women's and girls' rights.

The Commission recommends that the State strengthens the legislative basis on the collection of disaggregated equality data.

The Commission recommends that the State ambitiously transposes the EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies Article on 'Data collection and access to equality data'.

Constitutional reform

After substantial delays and repeated recommendations from the Committee,⁸⁴ IHREC,⁸⁵ and others⁸⁶ to tackle gender stereotypes and remove discriminatory and outdated references to

⁸³ See European Union, [Standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment and equal opportunities](#).

⁸⁴ In 2017, the Committee recommended that the State amend Article 41.2 of the Constitution to remove the stereotypical language on the role of women in the home: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland](#), CEDAW/CO/IRL/6-7 (9 March 2017) paras. 10-11.

⁸⁵ See for example, 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](#) (2023) pp. 18-19; IHREC, [Submission to the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality](#) (2020) pp. 6-8; IHREC, [Article 41.2 of the Constitution of Ireland](#) (2018); 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](#) (2017) pp. 33-34, 53-54,

⁸⁶ For example, Human Rights Committee, [Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Ireland](#), CCPR/C/IRL/CO/6 (26 January 2023) paras. 21-22.

women embedded in the Irish Constitution, the State held referendums to reform Ireland's Constitution in March 2024.⁸⁷ This reform was driven by the work of the Citizens' Assembly⁸⁸ and the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Gender Equality.⁸⁹ The proposed amendments to the Constitution were not passed by the public.⁹⁰

The State report contains no discussion or analysis on why the referendums were not passed by the Irish people. This analysis is critical for understanding the results and identifying the next steps to progress gender equality in Ireland.⁹¹ Some factors preliminarily identified include the short timeframe for holding the referendums, which limited the information campaigns on the proposals and led to a lack of clarity on the proposals;⁹² and the

⁸⁷ In December 2023, the Government approved proposals for two referendums to amend the Constitution: amend Article 41 of the Constitution to provide for a wider concept of family 'whether founded on marriage or on other durable relationships'; and delete Article 41.2 of the Constitution to remove text on the role of women in the home, and insert a new Article 42B to recognise 'provision of care, by members of a family to one another by reason of the bonds that exist among them, gives to Society a support without which the common good cannot be achieved, and [the State] shall strive to support such provision.' See Department of the Taoiseach, [Government approves proposals for referendums on family and care](#) (7 December 2023). See also Oireachtas Library & Research Service, [Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution \(The Family\) Bill 2023](#) and [Fortieth Amendment of the Constitution \(Care\) Bill 2023](#) (2023).

⁸⁸ Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, [Final Report](#) (2021).

⁸⁹ The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Gender Equality was established to consider the 45 recommendations contained in the Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality. The Committee on Gender Equality proposed a range of actions to give effect to the Citizens' Assembly recommendations including in relation to Constitutional reform and set out proposed timelines for implementation. See Joint Committee on Gender Equality, [Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality](#) (2022). We appeared before the Joint Committee in March 2022 and made a subsequent submission in November 2022, outlining our recommendations for constitutional reform and possible wording. See Houses of the Oireachtas, [Joint Committee on Gender Equality debate - Thursday, 10 March 2022](#) (2022).

⁹⁰ Referendum Ireland, [Referendum on the Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution \(The Family\) Bill 2023: Result Summary](#) and [Referendum on the Fortieth Amendment of the Constitution \(Care\) Bill 2023: Result Summary](#).

⁹¹ We note that the Ireland's Electoral Commission (An Coimisiún Toghcháin) and the National Election and Democracy Study Management Board conducted a survey of voters to understand how and why the voted in the two referendums: See IPSOS B&A, [Family & Care Referendums Voter Survey: A Review Of Findings](#) (2024). The survey findings showed that of the people who voted no to the family referendum: 27% were dissatisfied with wording/vague; 17% felt there was no need for change/don't agree with proposal; 16% had a lack of information. For those who voted no to the care referendum: 25% had a lack clarity/not enough information; 16% felt there was no need for change; 12% had issues with wording (vague, uncertain, confusing).

⁹² In its post-referendum report to the State, the Electoral Commission (An Coimisiún Toghcháin) made several recommendations to the State in relation to the running of the referendum information campaign including ensuring that it has sufficient time to run an information campaign by publishing the proposed amendment no later than 16 weeks before the proposed polling date (the publication of the family and care referendum proposals only gave the Commission 13 weeks to run an information campaign): Electoral Commission, [Report on the Referendums on Family and Care](#) (2024). We recommended before the referendums that the Irish

inadequate time given to consider the legislation providing for the amendments to the Constitution as pre-legislative scrutiny⁹³ was waived, which meant that parliamentarians, stakeholders and civil society could not effectively examine the proposals.⁹⁴ We consider this approach to the legislative process raises rule of law concerns.

The wording of the amendments differed from the proposals of the Citizens' Assembly and the Committee on Gender Equality.⁹⁵ The referendum proposal did not enshrine the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination in Article 40.1.⁹⁶ The amendment to the definition of family, that family 'may be founded on marriage or other durable relationships',⁹⁷ was not based on the wording of the Citizens' Assembly or the Committee on Gender Equality.⁹⁸

electorate must also be given sufficient time and information to participate effectively in the referendum process in line with international human rights law, including through voter registration: see 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](#) (2023) p. 19.

⁹³ Pre-legislative scrutiny is a process where the general scheme, or draft heads, of a Government Bill undergoes scrutiny by a Parliamentary Committee before the text of the Bill is finalised. The relevant Parliamentary Committee may invite stakeholders to participate by attending meetings to discuss the general scheme or draft heads of the Bill. At the end of the pre-legislative scrutiny, the Committee produces a report and lays it before both houses of the Irish Parliament. The report makes recommendations on the Bill based on the Committee's scrutiny. See Houses of the Oireachtas, [How laws are made](#).

⁹⁴ See FLAC, [FLAC Legal and Human Rights Analysis of the Proposed Family & Care Constitutional Amendments](#) (19 February 2024).

⁹⁵ We note as well the submissions to an Inter-Departmental Group – convened to develop policy recommendations on the wording of the proposed referendums for consideration and approval by Government – which considered the wording of the proposed reforms by the Citizens' Assembly and the Committee on Gender Equality. Several of the submissions made valuable critiques of the proposed language to ensure alignment with national, European and international equality and human rights standards. See submissions: [Interdepartmental Group - Referendum proposals on family and care](#).

⁹⁶ We endorsed the recommendation of the Citizens' Assembly that Article 40.1 of the Constitution should be amended to refer explicitly to gender equality and non-discrimination. See IHREC, [Submission to the Joint Committee on Gender Equality](#) (2022); Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, [Final Report](#) (2021) p. 50. The Committee on Gender Equality recommended that Article 40.1 be amended to ensure explicit constitutional recognition for the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination: "All citizens shall, as human persons without distinction as to sex, be held equal before the law" and "The State shall in its enactments have due regard to the principles of equality and non-discrimination." See Joint Committee on Gender Equality, [Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality](#) (2022) pp. 36-37, 38.

⁹⁷ The proposed change to Article 41.1.1 "The State recognises the Family, whether founded on marriage or on other durable relationships, as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law."

⁹⁸ The Citizens' Assembly recommended that Article 41 of the Constitution should be amended so that it would protect private and family life, with the protection afforded to the family not limited to the marital family. See Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, [Final Report](#) (2021) p. 50. The Committee on Gender Equality recommended that Article 41.3.1 be amended to adopt a broader definition of the 'family' beyond marital family:

Concerns were raised that the State did not adequately explain what the phrase ‘durable relationship’ means, and what would be the practical implications of the phrase for law and policy.⁹⁹

The commitment to support care was narrower than proposed by the Citizens’ Assembly and the Committee on Gender Equality.¹⁰⁰ There were concerns raised that the wording on the provision of care by the family¹⁰¹ framed care as the responsibility of the family and did not impose any enforceable obligations on the State to support the provision of care in the wider community.¹⁰² The exact obligations on the State were not clear due to the perceived weak wording of ‘strive to support’ the provision of care within the family.¹⁰³ The care amendment was regarded as ableist as it would not vindicate the rights of disabled people under UNCPRD to live independently; instead they would be dependent on their family for the provision of care.¹⁰⁴ The proposal would also further embed gender stereotypes in the Constitution as

“The State pledges itself to guard with special care the Family, including but not limited to the marital family.” See Joint Committee on Gender Equality, [Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality](#) (2022) pp. 38, 39.

⁹⁹ See discussion in Linda Connolly, [What Now After the March the 8th Referendums? The Future of Family, Caring and Women’s “Life in the Home”](#) (2025); Deirdre McGowan, [Family and care referendums – a family law perspective](#) (2024); FLAC, [FLAC Legal and Human Rights Analysis of the Proposed Family & Care Constitutional Amendments](#) (19 February 2024).

¹⁰⁰ The Citizens’ Assembly recommended that Article 41.2 of the Constitution should be deleted and replaced with language that is not gender specific and obliges the State to take reasonable measures to support care within the home and wider community. See Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality, [Final Report](#) (2021) p. 53. The Committee on Gender Equality recommended that Article 41.2 should be replaced with non-gender specific language, obliging the State to take reasonable measures to support care within and outside the home and family: “The State recognises that care within and outside the home and Family gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved” and “The State shall, therefore, take reasonable measures to support care within and outside the home and Family”. See Joint Committee on Gender Equality, [Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality](#) (2022) pp. 37-39.

¹⁰¹ The proposed new Article 42B “The State recognises that the provision of care, by members of a family to one another by reason of the bonds that exist among them, gives to Society a support without which the common good cannot be achieved, and shall strive to support such provision.”

¹⁰² There would have unlikely been any enforceable rights for disabled people, older people or carers. See FLAC, [FLAC Legal and Human Rights Analysis of the Proposed Family & Care Constitutional Amendments](#) (19 February 2024); Máiréad Enright, [Women’s Invisible Labour, Kinkeeping and Care: Ireland’s 8 March Constitutional Referendum](#) (2024).

¹⁰³ Linda Connolly, [What Now After the March the 8th Referendums? The Future of Family, Caring and Women’s “Life in the Home”](#) (2025); Sandra Freeman, [Care as a constitutional value](#) (2024) 22 International Journal of Constitutional Law 3, pp. 741-771.

¹⁰⁴ See discussion in FLAC, [FLAC Legal and Human Rights Analysis of the Proposed Family & Care Constitutional Amendments](#) (19 February 2024); Mary Regan, [Disability group calls for ‘no’ vote in care referendum](#) (RTÉ, 21 February 2024); Máiréad Enright, [Women’s Invisible Labour, Kinkeeping and Care: Ireland’s 8 March Constitutional Referendum](#) (2024).

women do most of the unpaid family care work.¹⁰⁵ The wording on care highlights the State's resistance to placing justiciable economic, social and cultural rights on a constitutional footing.¹⁰⁶

The failed constitutional reforms mean that Ireland continues to have a Constitution that symbolically perpetuates gender stereotypes; does not recognise an inclusive understanding of family life in Ireland; has no recognition of the value placed by the State on supporting care work in the home and in wider society; and does not include enforceable rights for carers, disabled people and older people. As highlighted above, there is a lack of clarity and detail from the State on what the next steps are in progressing reform of the Constitution to ensure it reflects Irish society. In the absence of constitutional reform, the State needs to detail the policy and legislative measures to achieve substantive gender equality under CEDAW, including the implementation of the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly and the Committee on Gender Equality.¹⁰⁷ It is discouraging for the people and organisations who contributed expertise, time and resources to develop these recommendations to see no reference to the work of Citizens' Assembly and Committee on Gender Equality in the priority work for the Government's term in office in its Programme for Government 2025.

The Commission recommends that the State undertakes and publishes an independent evaluation of the referendums on family and care to understand the factors in the referendums not passing. The State should ensure the findings and recommendations of the evaluation inform future Constitutional reform concerning gender equality, and equality and human rights more broadly.

The Commission recommends that the State publishes a plan to implement the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly and the Joint Committee on Gender Equality,

¹⁰⁵ See IHREC, [Policy Statement on Care](#) (2023); IHREC/ESRI, [Caring and Unpaid Work in Ireland](#) (2019). See also Linda Connolly, [What Now After the March the 8th Referendums? The Future of Family, Caring and Women's "Life in the Home"](#) (2025); Máiréad Enright, [Women's Invisible Labour, Kinkeeping and Care: Ireland's 8 March Constitutional Referendum](#) (2024).

¹⁰⁶ See IHREC, [The Incorporation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights into the Irish Constitution](#) (2023).

¹⁰⁷ The forthcoming National Strategy for Women and Girls is an opportunity to address the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly and the Committee on Gender Equality.

including ambitious and resourced legislative and policy measures to ensure substantive gender equality as guaranteed under the Convention.

Equality legislation

Irish equality legislation has ‘lost its teeth’ and is not providing adequate equal protection or non-discrimination guarantees to address widespread inequalities within the State.¹⁰⁸ We welcome the State’s commitment to review the Equality Acts,¹⁰⁹ including their functioning and effectiveness in practice¹¹⁰ and the grounds for discrimination.¹¹¹ This represents a significant opportunity to create the next generation of equality legislation, which will have a meaningful impact on the lives of individuals, and on the realisation of a more equal society. However, there is a lack of commitment for review in the 2025 Programme for Government,¹¹² significant delays in reform, and failure to consider many of our recommendations in proposed reforms despite our significant investment of resources and extensive engagement in this area with the State.¹¹³

We welcome the recent publication of the General Scheme of the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2024.¹¹⁴ We acknowledge that the General Scheme represents some progress in advancing Ireland’s equality legislation. However, several outstanding issues have not been

¹⁰⁸ IHREC, [Submission on the Review of the Equality Acts](#) (2023).

¹⁰⁹ Department of Children, Disability and Equality, [The Review of the Equality Acts](#) (2025).

¹¹⁰ Our work providing legal assistance in discrimination cases has revealed a number of practical issues with the operation of the Equality Acts, including strict time limits, inaccessible complaints forms and burdensome notification requirements.

¹¹¹ In June 2021, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth announced a review of the Equality Acts, including the *Equal Status Acts 2000-2018* and the *Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015*. Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government](#) (2020) p. 77.

¹¹² Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025).

¹¹³ Our work providing legal assistance in discrimination cases has revealed a number of practical issues with the operation of the Equality Acts, including strict time limits, inaccessible complaints forms and burdensome notification requirements. We, as the National Equality Body, have invested significant resources into our engagement with the review of the Equality Acts including two substantial submissions, the establishment of the Future of Equality Legislation Advisory Committee, a policy statement on socio-economic status as a discriminatory ground, and engagement with Government Departmental officials. IHREC, [Letter to Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth – General Scheme of the Equality \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Bill 2024](#) (January 2025).

¹¹⁴ Department of Children, Disability and Equality, [General Scheme of the Equality \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Bill 2024](#) (2025).

addressed, including amendments relating to indirect discrimination and the repeal of section 14 of the *Equal Status Act* ('ESA').¹¹⁵

The Committee's 2017 concluding observations recommended that the State amend section 14 of the ESA to ensure that an effective remedy is available for discrimination that has a legislative basis.¹¹⁶ This section should be repealed in its entirety as it is inconsistent with EU law and the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, and should be replaced by positive measures, such as a requirement to equality-proof legislation prior to its adoption.¹¹⁷

Throughout our engagement with the State, we have called for the Equality Acts to provide for intersectional discrimination.¹¹⁸ In the absence of such legislative reform, Ireland's equality framework is not in full compliance with Article 2 of CEDAW, which requires States to 'legally recognise intersecting forms of discrimination and their compounded negative impact on the women concerned and prohibit them.'¹¹⁹

Through our engagement with the review, we have called for socio-economic status and criminal conviction to be added as new protected grounds in the Equality Acts, as well as amending the gender ground to include explicit reference to, and define, sex characteristics, gender identity, and gender expression. In relation to the gender ground, we note the recent

¹¹⁵ IHREC, [Letter to Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth – General Scheme of the Equality \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Bill 2024](#) (January 2025); IHREC, [Submission on the Review of the Equality Acts](#) (2023) pp. 44-46.

¹¹⁶ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland](#), CEDAW/CO/IRL/6-7 (2017) para. 13.

¹¹⁷ IHREC, [Submission on the Review of the Equality Acts](#) (2023) pp. 44-46.

¹¹⁸ Some individuals or groups of individuals face discrimination on more than one of the prohibited grounds, for example women belonging to an ethnic or religious minority. Such cumulative discrimination has a unique and specific impact on individuals and merits particular consideration and remedying: IHREC, [Submission on the Review of the Equality Acts](#) (2023).

¹¹⁹ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [General Recommendation No. 28 on the Core Obligations of States Parties under Article 2](#), CEDAW/C/GC/28 (2010) para. 18.

Court of Justice of the European Union judgment in the case of *Deldits*¹²⁰ which has been recognised as important for protecting the rights of transgender people in the EU.¹²¹

The Commission recommends that the State prioritises the reform and modernisation of Ireland's equality legislation, including by repealing section 14 of the *Equal Status Acts* and providing for intersectional discrimination in the Equality Acts.

The Commission recommends that the State publishes an analysis of the relevance to Irish law of the Court of Justice of the European Union judgment in *Deldits* and any required legislative and policy changes.

Island of Ireland

Research highlights the risk of a divergence in rights, including gender equality rights, on the island of Ireland post Brexit.¹²² Notwithstanding the UK Government's commitment to ensuring no diminution of certain equality rights in Northern Ireland as a result of the UK leaving the EU,¹²³ significant EU law developments that stand to strengthen gender equality

¹²⁰ CJEU, *Deldits, Case C-247/23* (13 March 2025). The case concerned Hungarian authorities not correcting the gender of a transgender refugee on an asylum register as they had not undergone gender reassignment surgery. The case focused on the principle of accuracy and the right to rectification of inaccurate personal data under the General Data Protection Regulation. The Court stated that if the purpose of collecting the data is to identify the data subject, the data should refer to that person's lived gender identity, and not to the identity assigned to them at birth. The Court ruled that a person should not have to produce evidence of gender reassignment surgery in order to rectify inaccurate personal data relating to their gender identity.

¹²¹ ILGA Europe, [Joint statement welcoming EU's top court judgment to correct a trans man's gender identity data in national registry](#) (13 March 2025).

¹²² Dr Sarah Craig, Dr Claire Lougarre, and Prof Rory O'Connell, [EU Developments in Equality and Human Rights: Impact of Brexit on the Divergence of Rights and Best Practice on the Island of Ireland: Update Paper on Developments post January 2022](#) (2024).

¹²³ Under the terms of the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement and its Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland (now referred to as the Windsor Framework), the UK Government committed to ensuring that certain rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity protections in Northern Ireland are not diminished as a result of the UK leaving the EU. This was to recognise that before Brexit, many EU laws were automatically applicable in Northern Ireland and Ireland, which ensured alignment of equality and human rights laws across the island of Ireland in line with the principle of rights equivalence provided for in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. Article 2 of the Windsor Framework aims to maintain alignment in the absence of common EU membership post Brexit. Despite the important commitment in Article 2, a range of EU laws strengthening equality and human rights are outside of its scope, giving rise to the risk of divergence on the island. IHREC and its sister institutions in Northern Ireland oversee and report on Article 2 issues with an island of Ireland dimension. See IHREC, ECNI, NIHR, [Equality and Human Rights on the Island of Ireland after Brexit: Annual joint report of IHREC, ECNI and NIHR on the implementation of Article 2 of the Windsor Framework, October 2023– September 2024](#) (2024).

rights in Ireland are not required to be implemented in Northern Ireland.¹²⁴ We have emphasised that long term equivalence of rights between Ireland and Northern Ireland is important,¹²⁵ for example given the cross-border implications for women who are frontier workers living in Ireland and working in Northern Ireland.

The Commission recommends that the State works with the Northern Ireland Executive and UK Government to enhance and harmonise equality and human rights protections on the island of Ireland, in a manner aligned to their respective remits. The State should make a clear commitment to work towards ensuring North-South equivalence of rights on the island of Ireland so as to strengthen protections.

COVID-19

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated existing gender inequality, particularly for structurally vulnerable groups including disabled women and girls, those experiencing poverty, those residing in care settings, nursing homes and international protection accommodation, and those working in high-risk sectors such as health and social care and food production.¹²⁶ The State's response was not gender proofed. Women faced distressing restrictions in accessing maternity healthcare.¹²⁷ Those returning from maternity leave were initially excluded from the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme.¹²⁸ In the home, women disproportionately took on more unpaid work, re-enforcing gender stereotypes.¹²⁹ While the risk of domestic, sexual and

¹²⁴ These include the Work-Life Balance Directive, the Gender Balance on Boards Directive, and the Violence against Women and Domestic Violence Directive.

¹²⁵ IHREC, ECNI, NIHRC, [Policy Recommendations: European Union Developments in Equality and Human Rights: The Impact of Brexit on the Divergence of Rights and Best Practice on the Island of Ireland](#) (2023).

¹²⁶ See Commission-supported research: Conor Casey, Oran Doyle, David Kenny and Donna Lyons, [Ireland's Emergency Powers During the Covid-19 Pandemic](#) (2021). See also Covid-19 NGO Group, [Marginalised Groups: Promoting Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights in the Covid-19 Crisis](#) (2020).

¹²⁷ Uplift, [Being Pregnant During the Covid-19 Pandemic](#) (2020) pp. 6, 9

¹²⁸ The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme ('TWSS') introduced in March 2020 enabled employers to: give supports directly to their employees, and keep their employees on the payroll throughout the pandemic. We contacted the Minister for Finance to express our concern that the exclusion of women returning from maternity leave from the TWSS may be contrary to Ireland's obligations under EU Law. In May 2020, the Minister for Finance implemented a change to the TWSS to accommodate employees returning to work following maternity or adoptive leave. See IHREC, [Letter on the legality of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme](#) (2020).

¹²⁹ IHREC, [Policy Statement on Care](#) (2023) p. 17.

gender-based violence (‘DSGBV’) in lockdowns soared, the Irish police (‘An Garda Síochána’) were cancelling incidents after emergency calls.¹³⁰ We note with concern the Government’s failure to fully draw down NextGenerationEU funding,¹³¹ the lack of reference to human rights and equality in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (‘NRRP’) and its failure to incorporate gender mainstreaming. The fundamental societal challenges laid bare by the pandemic – systemic inequality, the lack of diversity in political and public leadership, the strains on our social harmony, and the serious gaps in democratic scrutiny and accountability – did not fade away as restrictions were lifted.

We called for an independent inquiry into the State’s Covid-19 response.¹³² Instead, a ‘forward-looking’ Evaluation without a human rights and equality framing was established.¹³³ We note that women, including those from structurally vulnerable groups have not yet been invited to meaningfully participate in the process. The Terms of Reference is silent on gender and there has been inadequate engagement on human rights and equality from the Evaluation to date. A thorough examination of the human rights and equality impacts of the legislative and policy responses to Covid-19 provides an opportunity to futureproof how Ireland will embed the respect, promotion and protection of rights as existing crises intensify and other crises emerge. While the Programme for Government commits to supporting the work of the Covid-19 Evaluation,¹³⁴ it is silent on ensuring public services are adequately prepared for current and future crises including climate-related crises. There are no commitments to gender proof crisis preparedness plans and ensure the participation of women and girls.

¹³⁰ Between 2019 and 2021 thousands of emergency calls were cancelled by the police, hundreds of which were emergency calls relating to DSGBV. An independent review of these cancellations noted that it is not possible to determine whether serious harm occurred in incidents where callers or potential victims were not identified. However, there is the potential that protection orders were not put in place; crimes were not reported or investigated; and some offenders were not brought to justice. Derek Penman, [Final Independent Report for the Policing Authority](#) (2022).

¹³¹ European Parliament, [Next Generation EU \(NGEU\) delivery –How are the Member States doing?](#) (2024).

¹³² We called for the inquiry to be underpinned by human rights standards: IHREC, [Correspondence to the Department of the Taoiseach re: Evaluation of the State’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic](#) (28 March 2024).

¹³³ Department of the Taoiseach, [Government appoints chair and agrees terms of reference for evaluation of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (30 October 2024).

¹³⁴ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland’s Future](#) (2025) p. 89.

The Commission recommends the Covid-19 Evaluation ensures equal and meaningful participation of women and girls, adopts human rights and equality-based guidance and commits to a gender equality impact assessment.

The Commission recommends the State identifies gender-specific measures to mitigate impacts of future emergencies and embeds gender equality and the equal meaningful participation of women and girls in all crisis preparedness planning.

National machinery for the advancement of women

National policies

Ireland has been without a strategy concerning women and girls ('NSWG') since the previous strategy expired in 2021.¹³⁵ While it is intended for a new strategy to be published in June 2025,¹³⁶ this long delay highlights the insufficient priority afforded to gender equality despite evidence of the structural and systemic barriers and inequalities women and girls face in Ireland. Our assessment is that the previous strategy failed to have a tangible impact on improving the lives of women and girls, due in part to weak monitoring and implementation frameworks.¹³⁷ To inform the development of the new NSWG, we provided the State with a detailed list of our recommendations relevant to women and girls and a compilation of recommendations from UN treaty body mechanisms and Council of Europe bodies.¹³⁸ These

¹³⁵ The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 was extended to the end of 2021. In line with its obligations under CEDAW, Ireland is required to develop and implement national strategies specific to women and girls as part of its overarching national machinery infrastructure: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, [General Recommendation No. 6: Effective National Machinery and Publicity](#) (1988) para. 1. The strategy must include comprehensive implementation plans and mechanisms for monitoring and implementation: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, [General recommendation No. 28 on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#), CEDAW/C/GC/28 (2010) para. 24.

¹³⁶ Information provided by the State to stakeholders at a consultation in March 2025 on the new strategy for women and girls.

¹³⁷ There is no evidence in the State report on what was achieved under each objective in the previous strategy.

¹³⁸ IHREC, [IHREC views on issues affecting women and girls in Ireland to inform the development of the new National Strategy on Women and Girls: Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth](#) (2024); IHREC, [United Nations and Council of Europe recommendations on issues](#)

recommendations, which highlight persistent issues facing women and girls in Ireland and which offer concrete solutions, should be reflected in the new strategy. The NSWG should be flexible and dynamic to respond to emerging issues and should be revised to implement the Committee's recommendations arising from this Review.¹³⁹

The evaluation, commissioned by the State, of the implementation processes of the previous NSWG and two other equality strategies, emphasised the clear failings of previous strategies and the need for significant structural changes in the State's development, implementation, and monitoring of national equality strategies.¹⁴⁰ Our expectation, which aligns with the views of this Committee¹⁴¹ and the recommendations of other UN Committees,¹⁴² is that the new NSWG, must have a priority focus on evidence, collaborative governance,¹⁴³ intersectionality,

[affecting women and girls in Ireland: Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to inform the development of the new National Strategy on Women and Girls](#) (2024).

¹³⁹ A criticism of previous strategies was that they were static documents, and it was difficult for the concerned communities to raise new issues to be addressed under the strategies. See Centre for Effective Services, [Realising the promise of national equality policy: An evaluation of the processes of implementation of three national equality strategies](#) (2023) pp. xv, xvii, 151.

¹⁴⁰ In July 2023, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth published a commissioned report to examine and evaluate the effectiveness of the processes for implementation of three equality strategies - the National Strategy for Women and Girls, the Migrant Integration Strategy, and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy - with a view to informing how the Department develops and implements whole-of-government equality policy in the future with a strong outcomes-focused approach. This study conducted by the Centre for Effective Studies focussed on the processes of the strategies rather than the content of the strategies. Common findings across the equality strategies were inadequate implementation and monitoring structures, a lack of Departmental ownership over assigned actions, the need for greater financial resources and administrative support, lack of clear indicators to measure progress, a need for a greater role for civil society throughout the lifecycle of the strategy, and a failure to adequately address intersectionality. The Centre for Effective Services, [Realising the promise of national equality policy: An evaluation of the processes of implementation of three national equality strategies](#) (2023).

¹⁴¹ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, [General recommendation No. 28 on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#), CEDAW/C/GC/28 (2010) para. 28.

¹⁴² See Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland](#), E/C.12/IRL/CO/4 (20 March 2024) para. 23(c); Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland](#), CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6 (28 February 2023) para. 42(a); Human Rights Committee, [Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Ireland](#), CCPR/C/IRL/CO/5 (26 January 2023) paras. 16(a), 40(b); Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, [Concluding observations on the combined fifth to ninth reports of Ireland](#), CERD/C/IRL/CO/5-9 (23 January 2020) paras. 14(d), 32.

¹⁴³ Ensuring the engagement of rights holders and representative groups in the lifecycle of the equality strategy as they have the lived experience and expertise to identify the structural barriers they face, and the measures needed to remove these barriers. See Community Platform, [Towards a progressive model of collaborative governance](#) (2022); Community Platform, [Submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Fourth Periodic Review of Ireland](#) (2024) pp. 8-11.

implementation, and accountability.¹⁴⁴ The NSWG should be aligned with other equality strategies, including those concerning disabled people, Travellers and Roma, migrants, and LGBTQIA+ people.¹⁴⁵

The Commission recommends that the State should ensure the new national strategy for women and girls and its associated action plan are underpinned by resourced implementation and accountability structures, including independent oversight of delivery. Actions must be adequately costed and assessed for tangible impacts on women and girls.

The Commission recommends that the State ensures a coordinated approach to the implementation of the new national strategy for women and girls and the equality strategies covering disabled people, LGBTQIA+ people, migrants, and Travellers and Roma.

The Commission recommends that the State actively reviews and revises the new national strategy for women and girls and its action plan to implement the Committee's concluding observations from this Review.

¹⁴⁴ The strategy and implementation plan must ensure clear targets, performance indicators, impact, metrics, outcomes, timeframes and budget lines. Also, a lifecycle approach to effectively address the needs and experiences of Irish society including children, young people, and older people; a regional and local perspective, and an island of Ireland dimension; whole-of-government approach and leadership; defined roles for civil society throughout the lifecycle of the strategy; and independent, accountable monitoring structures. Further, there should be explicit compliance with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. See IHREC, Core components of national equality strategies (2025, forthcoming).

¹⁴⁵ The State has published the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy and has committed to the development and implementation of new national strategies relating to migrants, disabled people and the LGBTQIA+ community. There should be alignment as well with other policy frameworks including the [National Action Plan Against Racism](#); [Roadmap for Social Inclusion](#); [Pathways to Work Strategy](#); [National Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy](#); [National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking in Ireland](#); [National Traveller Health Action Plan](#); [National Traveller and Roma Education Strategy](#); [Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities](#); [Action Plan for Disability Services](#); [National Housing Strategy for Disabled People](#); [Autism Innovation Strategy](#); [Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People](#); [First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families](#); [Participation of Children and Young People in Decision Making-Action Plan](#); [Climate Action Plan](#); [Sustainable Development Goals](#); [Housing for All](#); [National Development Plan](#); and the [National Business and Human Rights Plan](#).

Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (PSEHRD)

Section 42 of the *IHREC Act 2014* imposes a statutory obligation on all public bodies to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect human rights in carrying out their functions. The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty ('PSEHRD') is the national mechanism under which discrimination, including intersectional discrimination experienced by women and girls in accessing and benefitting from the services of the State can be recognised as an issue and plans put in place to address the issue. Implementation remains inconsistent across the public sector, with a 62% non-compliance rate with reporting obligations.

It is not clear that the intersectional dimensions of gender are being considered, as is required by the PSEHRD, within governmental policies aimed at improving equality and human rights standards for women and girls, including sectoral policies in education, housing, sport, and enterprise.

The PSEHRD promotes consultation with organisations representing rights holders in order to identify the issues relevant to them in advance of development of new services, policies or programmes. Properly implemented, the PSEHRD can assist in identifying the disproportionate impact of unrecognised and unaddressed obstacles in accessing State services faced by women and girls from marginalised backgrounds. Evidence from across the public sector demonstrates persistent intersectional barriers continue and remain unaddressed.

Traveller women remain disproportionately affected by poor accommodation and local authority failures to draw down or allocate ring-fenced Traveller-specific housing budgets.¹⁴⁶ Conditions are allowed to continue that fail to have regard to women's right to safety, privacy, and cultural identity. Similarly, migrant and undocumented women face significant administrative, legal, and linguistic barriers to accessing emergency or gender-based violence

¹⁴⁶ IHREC, [Commission Says Travellers Continue to Experience Egregious Violations of their Right to Adequate Accommodation](#) (13 July 2023).

accommodation.¹⁴⁷ They can also experience difficulties in accessing health services and health-related information, where English is not their first language, due to inconsistent and fragmented provision of interpretation services and inaccessible information.¹⁴⁸

We continue to provide guidance and training to public bodies on implementing the PSEHRD.¹⁴⁹ Training has focused on methodologies to assist public bodies to consider the intersectionality of equality and human rights issues faced by women. Regardless, we have identified gaps in compliance, including failure to conduct effective Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments and a lack of meaningful engagement with affected groups.

The Commission recommends that the State should issue a formal communication, in the form of a circular, to public bodies to advance compliance with the Public Sector Duty, in line with the Commission's guidance with the aim to embed gender equality in policy planning, budgeting, service delivery frameworks and to recommend the use of Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments with transparent publication of findings in Annual Reports.

The Commission recommends that the new national strategy for women and girls includes specific reference to obligations under Section 42 of the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014* with particular attention to Section 42(1). The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty should be integrated into the Strategy as a framework for public bodies to assess and address the intersectionality of gender-based discrimination.

The Commission recommends that, where relevant, public bodies carry out an assessment of gender equality and women's rights issues with respect to their functions in consultation with civil society, with specific attention to intersectionality and report on progress in compliance with their obligations under section 42 of the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014*. This process should be facilitated by the creation of participatory structures within

¹⁴⁷ European Migration Network, [The Integration of non-EU migrant women in Ireland](#) (2022).

¹⁴⁸ HSE, [Second National Intercultural Health Strategy 2018-2023](#).

¹⁴⁹ IHREC, [Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty: Guidance for Public Bodies](#) (2022).

public bodies to enable the input and monitoring of services by women, including structurally vulnerable groups of women and girls.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes in family and society

We acknowledge that the NSWG 2017-2020 included several actions related to challenging stereotypes and promoting positive gender norms.¹⁵⁰ However, as discussed above, the NSWG has been expired since 2021 and a new strategy while expected, has yet to be published. There is a need for the new NSWG to include targeted actions to eliminate discriminatory stereotypes on the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, to strengthen the understanding of the concept of equality between women and men, to address stereotypes propagated through the ‘manosphere’, and for there to be strong monitoring mechanism in place to assess the impact of the measures taken.¹⁵¹ The strategy will need to consider the legislative and policy measures to tackle gender stereotypes in light of the failed reform on removing stereotypical gendered language from the Constitution.¹⁵² Measures will need to consider how to remove the pervasive and long-standing gender norms and stereotypes contributing to gendered provision of unpaid and underpaid care in the family and home.¹⁵³ The stereotypes faced by transgender and non-binary people need also to be considered.

¹⁵⁰ Particularly under Objective 3 on ensuring the visibility in society of women and girls, and their equal and active citizenship: Department of Justice, [National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020](#) (2017).

¹⁵¹ As recommended by the Committee in 2017: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland](#), CEDAW/C/IRL/CO/6-7 (9 March 2017) para. 25. Concerns with stereotypes in caring responsibilities were also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

¹⁵² Guidance on actions to address gender stereotypes and norms can be taken from the work and recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality and the Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality. See Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality, [Report of the Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality](#) (2021) pp. 75-77; Joint Committee on Gender Equality, [Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality](#) (2022).

¹⁵³ IHREC, [Policy Statement on Care](#) (2023) pp. 21-24. In 2023, we launched a national awareness campaign ‘Care About Equality to challenge the entrenched societal attitudes towards the heavily gendered nature of caring, both unpaid and low-paid’. See IHREC, [Care About Equality](#).

The Commission recommends that the State ensures that the new national strategy for women and girls includes targeted actions to combat discriminatory stereotypes on the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society. The implementation of the actions should have an effective monitoring mechanism which regularly reports on and assesses progress in eliminating discriminatory stereotypes and gender norms.

Stereotypes in education

Perpetuation of gender stereotypes in education can be countered by measures to encourage girls into non-traditional fields including Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics ('STEM') and "de-stereotyping study programmes and put in place actions to ensure recruitment and retention of members of the under-represented gender and underrepresented minorities in the career track."¹⁵⁴ Mandatory teacher training in gender equality and diversity and steps to encourage under-represented groups of women into teaching should be adopted.¹⁵⁵ Education and apprenticeships should be accessible and not solely geared towards labour market activation. Supports and policies for girls at higher risk of dropping out from school (pregnant, Traveller, Roma and other ethnic minorities, and transgender) should be adopted. Gender norms and stereotypes in education should be addressed in the new national strategy for women and girls, including consideration of the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly and the Joint Committee on Gender Equality.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, there is a need for policy guidance from the Department of Education to protect

¹⁵⁴ Higher Education Authority, [Report of The Expert Group: 2nd Hea National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions](#) (2022). The report notes "In recognition of the impact of gender and racial stereotypes and biases on educational choices at levels preceding tertiary education, systemic interventions are needed to address the under-representation of women and men in fields stereotyped as feminine and masculine." Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

¹⁵⁵ IHREC-supported research highlights the lack of representation of women of colour across certain sectors due to stereotypes and biases in place, including within education management, teaching and other staff. Centre for Human Rights & Citizenship Education, [Experiences of second-generation ethnic minority young people in Ireland](#) (IHREC: 2022) pp. 41, 49. Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

¹⁵⁶ Both the Citizens' Assembly and Joint Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality have issued a number of recommendations to address these issues, including research on single-sex schooling, appropriate resourcing of schools to facilitate subject choices, training for educators, and the provision of gender-neutral career information and advice. Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, [Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality](#) (2021) pp. 75-77; Joint Committee on Gender Equality, [Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality](#) (2022) pp. 23-25.

the rights of transgender and non-binary students enrolled in single-sex and mixed-sex primary and post primary schools, and to ensure the consistent provision of supports.

We welcome that the Programme for Government commits to holding a national convention on education with all stakeholders in education to inform changes to the provision of education in Ireland.¹⁵⁷ This is an opportunity to further embed equality, human rights and inclusion standards into the education system.

The Commission recommends that the State takes active measures to address gender norms and stereotypes in schools, further and higher education, in line with the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly and the Joint Committee on Gender Equality.

The Commission recommends that the State establishes clear policies and supports for transgender and non-binary students.

The Commission recommend that the State should commit to addressing gender norms and stereotypes in the forthcoming national convention on education.

Stereotypes in media

The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality and the Parliament Committee on Gender Equality issued several strong recommendations in relation to stereotypes in the media and advertising, and we reiterate our call for full implementation of the recommendations in both reports.¹⁵⁸

The portrayal of women in sports media has often been relegated to the margins, framed through stereotypes, and undersold in terms of talent and achievement. Recent research

¹⁵⁷ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) p. 66.

¹⁵⁸ The Citizens' Assembly recommended that Media and advertising, including social media, organisations should: (a) Be more strongly regulated to promote gender equality and avoid gender discrimination and stereotyping and take action where discriminatory behaviours occur. (b) Be obliged to annually publish details of their monitoring of, and compliance with, gender equality and inclusion measures. (c) Make special efforts to improve the visibility of men performing caring roles: Citizens' Assembly, [Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality](#) (2021) pp. 76-77. See also Oireachtas Joint Committee on Gender Equality, [Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality: Final Report](#) (2022) pp. 75-76.

shows that women's sports was covered only in 3% of print and 4% of online Irish media.¹⁵⁹ Further, less than 20% of television coverage in Ireland showed women's sports or mixed-sex sport.¹⁶⁰ In the political media sphere, women are underrepresented, and women sources were framed in relation to domestic topics, often invited as tokenistic representation, while men were more often presented as expert sources and discussed 'hard' topics such as the economy.¹⁶¹ Overall, structurally vulnerable groups of women are severely underrepresented in national media.

The advertising industry is self-regulated in Ireland by the Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland ('ASAI').¹⁶² We welcome ASAI's statement that 'marketing communications should respect the principle of the equality of men and women. They should avoid sex stereotyping and any exploitation or demeaning of men and women.'¹⁶³ This is not sufficient to protect the media from perpetuating negative gender stereotypes.¹⁶⁴ The stereotyping of women is heavily present in Irish advertising, particularly in health marketing. While the UK's Advertising Standards Authority banned advertisements depicting men and women engaged in gender-stereotypical activities in 2019,¹⁶⁵ there is no similar ban in place in Ireland. Since media plays a significant role in shaping gender roles and stereotypes, the media and advertising

¹⁵⁹ The Federation of Irish Sport and Anne O'Brien, [Gender equality in media representation of sport in Ireland](#) (2024) pp. 1, 5, 28.

¹⁶⁰ There should be consideration in following the Swedish media system wherein a 50% gender quota is placed on sports coverage: The Federation of Irish Sport and Anne O'Brien, [Gender equality in media representation of sport in Ireland](#) (2024) pp. 28-29.

¹⁶¹ Women were significantly numerically underrepresented across all three programmes (Raidió Teilifís Éireann's (RTÉ) current affairs series, Prime Time and The Week in Politics and the commercially funded Virgin Media One's, The Tonight Show. Secondly women's voices secure significantly less airtime than men even in relation to their numerical underrepresentation. In presenting men's voices more than women's it suggests that men's views, voices and lives are regarded as more important and legitimate to women's which serves to question women's relevance and active participation in politics: Aoife Quinn Hegarty, [Gendered framing and representation of women in Irish political television programming during the 2020 formation of the government of Ireland](#) (2024) pp. 8, 10, 14.

¹⁶² The ASAI is an independent self-regulatory body set up and financed by the advertising industry.

¹⁶³ ASAI, [Code of Standards for Advertising and Marketing Communications in Ireland](#) (2016) p. 27.

¹⁶⁴ Including the inclusion of measures to promote the visibility of men performing caring roles. We are echoing the recommendations by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Gender Equality: Houses of the Oireachtas, [Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality: Final Report](#) (2022) p. 76.

¹⁶⁵ Advertising Standards Authority, [Harm and Offence: Gender stereotypes](#).

standards must recognise the importance of and take responsibility for improving gender equality.¹⁶⁶

The Commission recommends the introduction of further legislation and policy measures to regulate advertising to prevent gender stereotyping.

The Commission recommends the Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland introduce best practice standards and guidance for gender representation.

The Commission recommends the State ensures full implementation of the *Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022* to create a statutory system for holding technology and social media companies accountable for online content.

The Commission recommends that the Media Commission (Coimisiún na Meán) publishes regular reports by media outlets on compliance with gender equality and inclusion measures.

Hate-speech targeted towards women

We welcome the recent commencement of the *Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act 2024*.¹⁶⁷ However, we note the removal of amendments relating to incitement to hatred from the proposed Bill and the ongoing concerns with the inadequate *Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989*.¹⁶⁸ In light of the new legislation, there is a public need for increased awareness and education regarding the differences between hate crime and hate speech.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Women have been portrayed as young, white, attractive, able-bodied, and, significantly, in traditional or decorative roles. This filtering or diminishing of an audience to fit labels in order to hit the narrative of marketing is part of the reason women's health sits in taboo and stigma as the gender bias is played out in advertising and followed through to clinics. Areas like menopause and periods have for too long been taboo subjects in Ireland: The Irish Times, [Gender bias plays out in advertising - and that follows through to healthcare](#) (2023).

¹⁶⁷ *Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act 2024*; Department of Justice, [New hate crime legislation comes into force](#) (2024).

¹⁶⁸ Houses of the Oireachtas, '[Criminal Justice \(Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences\) Bill 2022: From the Seanad](#)', *Dáil Éireann debate* (23 Oct 2024).

¹⁶⁹ Jennifer Schweppe et al., [Public Understandings of Hate Crime: Ireland, North and South](#) (2024). In 2015, ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 15 identified hate speech as 'the advocacy, promotion or incitement, in any form, of the denigration, hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well as any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatization or threat in respect of such a person or group of

We welcome the State's commitment to 'Introduce amendments to modernise the *Incitement to Hatred Act 1989*' as stated in the 2025 Programme for Government.¹⁷⁰ This is welcome as there has been a low usage of the legislation to address hate speech.¹⁷¹ However, there is a lack of detail on these amendments and how they will differ to the amendments on hate speech excluded from the *Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act 2024*. There is a pressing need for reform considering the European Commission recently sent a reasoned opinion to Ireland on failure to comply with the provisions of Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA on combating racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law.¹⁷²

We note the previous discourse on the legislative proposals on incitement to violence and hatred around the rights to free speech and freedom of expression, and divisive public and political commentary.¹⁷³ Increased leadership is required from public and political representatives to condemn hate speech in all its forms and progress reform of the 1989 legislation, in line with international standards,¹⁷⁴ as a matter of priority. The 1989 Act currently does not include gender, disability, civil status, family status and age as protected grounds. There is an absence of a holistic approach to hate speech in Ireland, lacking action

persons' on the grounds of race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or belief, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristic or status. ECRI recommends that member states: 'support the monitoring of hate speech by civil society, equality bodies and national human rights institutions and promote cooperation in undertaking this task between them and public authorities'; 'support non-governmental organisations, equality bodies and national human rights institutions working to combat hate speech'; and "provide standing for those targeted by hate speech, equality bodies, national human rights institutions and interested non-governmental organisations to bring proceedings that seek to delete hate speech': Equinet, [Extending the Agenda. Equality Bodies addressing Hate Speech](#) (2018).

¹⁷⁰ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) p. 122.

¹⁷¹ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

¹⁷² The European Commission considers that Ireland is still failing to transpose the provisions of the Framework Decision related to criminalising the public incitement to violence or hatred against a group or a member of such group based on certain characteristics, as well as the conducts of condoning, denial, and gross trivialisation of international crimes and the Holocaust. Ireland is required to respond within two months and take the necessary measures to address the concerns. European Commission, [May infringements package: key decisions](#) (7 May 2025).

¹⁷³ See discussion in IHREC, [Ireland and the 6th Monitoring Cycle of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#) (2024) p. 26.

¹⁷⁴ In reforming the legislation, legislators should seek guidance from international expert bodies, including the recommendations of the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. See Human Rights Committee, [Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Ireland](#), CCPR/C/IRL/CO/5 (26 January 2023) para 18; Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, [Concluding observations on the combined fifth to ninth reports of Ireland](#), CERD/C/IRL/CO/5-9 (23 January 2020) paras. 19-22; ECRI, [ECRI Report on Ireland: Fifth Monitoring Cycle](#) (2019).

plans to implement legislation and research to inform the development of prevention measures.¹⁷⁵

Provisions addressing hate crime in the *Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act 2024* are important due to an increase in hate crime and hate related incidents.¹⁷⁶ Low reporting of hate crime however is a significant issue, and people with diverse and intersectional identities may be particularly underestimated in the data.¹⁷⁷ We welcome An Garda Síochána's alternative hate crime reporting mechanism.¹⁷⁸ However, this must be placed on a statutory footing and supplemented by a sustainably funded third-party reporting mechanism.

Given the emergence of a vocal far-right¹⁷⁹ and the rise of misogynistic and other discriminatory hate-speech in the Irish online sphere,¹⁸⁰ there is a lack of alignment of the 1989 Act with the legislative and regulatory measures on online harmful content in the *Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022*.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

¹⁷⁶ The most recent statistics published by An Garda Síochána show there has been a 4% increase in hate crime and hate related incidents reported in Ireland between 2023 and 2024: An Garda Síochána, [2024 Hate Crime Data and Related Discriminatory Motives](#) (2025). Anti-race remains the most prevalent discriminatory motive (39% of all motives) and has increased from (36%) in 2023. In 2024, anti-nationality increased to a quarter of all motives compared to 18% in 2023.

¹⁷⁷ For the State to fulfil its duties as an Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe ('OSCE') participating State: [Hate Crime Report](#).

¹⁷⁸ An Garda Síochána, [Hate Crime Online Reporting](#).

¹⁷⁹ Findings show that the Irish far-right has a strong internal network throughout the country and is linked with far-right networks in North American and various European countries: Europol, [European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report](#) (2020). As of 2025, there is not yet a meaningful gender gap between left and right ideologies in young adults in Ireland, however, the development of a gender gap over time is heterogenous: Richard Nennstiel and Ansgar Hudde, [A growing gender divide among young adults in ideological left-right self-placement? Evidence from 32 European countries](#) (2025) p. 13.

¹⁸⁰ An exploratory study, which analysed 422,156 social media posts across four platforms (1 October 2020 to 30 June 2021), found that Twitter and Telegram played a more facilitatory role than YouTube and 4chan in the proliferation of extreme right-wing content in Ireland. The most frequently mentioned extreme right-wing influencers were Irish, British, and American public figures and social media influencers, and the majority of location mentions referenced the United States, followed by the United Kingdom. This study also shows X (formerly Twitter) containing the most misogynistic sentiments, compared to other social media platforms: Gabriella Fattibene et al., [The Far-Right Ecosystem in Ireland: History and Contemporary Trends](#) (2024) pp. 21, 31. There is a lack of transparency as to what groups are funding far-right media platforms and a lack of counter-measures by the State to disprove misinformation and disinformation: Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

¹⁸¹ Due to the prevalence and normalisation of online hate speech and lack of accountability and regulation measures. Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

This is increasingly concerning given evidence of a regression of attitudes toward gender equality within younger generations and Gen Z's reliance on social media for news.¹⁸² In light of this, there is a pressing need for the State to promote and advance digital literacy for people of all ages to combat prejudicial and discriminatory content and hate speech online.¹⁸³ Especially as online abuse contributes to the silencing of women, with evidence showing that online abuse leads women to self-censor what they post, limit their interactions, and even drives women offline.¹⁸⁴

We reiterate our concern regarding the increasing reliance on artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies and note the State's effort to propose legislation specifically targeting deepfakes and digital impersonations to address the growing threat posed by rapidly advancing AI.¹⁸⁵ These measures must be underscored with compliance with UN, Council of Europe and EU human rights laws and standards.

The Commission recommends that the State prioritises reform of the *Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989* to align with international human rights standards and expand its grounds with those protected under Irish equality legislation, with further consideration to

¹⁸² Findings of a study show that there is an increase in attitudes among Gen Z (those born between 1997-2012) in believing that gender equality has gone far enough and the presence of increased tensions between men and women. Findings also show an increase in Gen Z men agreeing with the statement that 'we have gone so far in promoting women's equality that we are discriminating against men', 'men are being expected to do too much to support equality' and 'a man who stays home with his children is less of a man.' Of the 39% in Ireland that agreed that gender equality has gone far enough, 50% were men and 29% were women. Of the 43% in Ireland that defined themselves as a feminist, 34% were men and 52% were women. Of the 40% in Ireland that agreed that men are expected to do too much to support equality, 50% were men and 30% were women. Of the 42% in Ireland that agreed that we have gone so far in promoting women's equality that we are discriminating against men, 56% were men and 29% were women. Of the 19% in Ireland that agreed that a man who stays home to look after his children is less of a man, 22% were men and 15% were women: Ipsos, [Progress and Polarisation: Global Attitudes Toward Gender Equality in 2025](#) (March 2025) pp. 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, 43, 67-68. Among women and girls in the younger generation, a fewer identify as feminists, this is attributed to the inadequacy of the State to address DSGBV against women resulting in women adopting traditionalist values as a means of protection: Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

¹⁸³ There is a pressing need for the State to hold tech companies accountable for their algorithms which feature misinformation and disinformation to further protect vulnerable groups: Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

¹⁸⁴ Amnesty International, [Toxic Twitter – A Toxic Place for Women](#) (2018). Online abuse of women also includes doxing, especially for those that work in human rights and equality sectors: Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

¹⁸⁵ The Irish Times, [New Bill targets AI 'deepfakes' and identity 'hijacking'](#) (25 March 2025).

include the grounds of socio-economic status, actual or perceived sex characteristics, gender identity and gender expression.

The Commission recommends for the *Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989* to be amended to make explicit reference to its application to online incitement to hatred.

The Commission recommends for timely collection and publication of accurate and reliable disaggregated data on hate offences and incitement to hatred offences on an annual basis.

The Commission recommends that initial and ongoing mandatory training on hate offences and incitement to hatred offences is provided to the legal profession, An Garda Síochána and the judiciary.

Access to justice

Violations of women's rights

The State has continued its pattern of failing to provide adequate, prompt, survivor-centred, and rights-based investigations and reparations to victims and survivors of abuse within Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries, schools, residential institutions and of the practice of symphysiotomy. Arbitrary and discriminatory barriers remain in place for victims and survivors to access the justice due to them by the State. The State's approach subjects them to further trauma through revictimization.¹⁸⁶ While the abuse and violations may have been perpetrated in the past,¹⁸⁷ the State's response can prolong and inflict further violations on women's rights. For many survivors, the abuse is not historical but rather is an ongoing violation which impacts their enjoyment of rights. Therefore, we consider that 'historical' is a misnomer and caution against its use. Until the State provides access to survivor-centred justice, institutional abuse is a current violation. There is a need for a

¹⁸⁶ Re-traumatisation and revictimization can occur through the failure to acknowledge past abuses or the State's role therein, treatment which causes victims to believe that their voices are not being heard, or the absence of appropriate redress.

¹⁸⁷ Such as in Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries, Residential Institutions and the practice of symphysiotomy.

systemic change in the State's attitude and responsibility towards anyone who is a victim or survivor of State wrongdoing.¹⁸⁸

After significant delays, the State has recently published the final report of the Farrelly Commission of Investigation into the case of 'Grace'.¹⁸⁹ We note criticisms of the final report¹⁹⁰ including the failure to provide answers and accountability,¹⁹¹ failure to include or reference the extensive submissions made by 'Grace's' legal team,¹⁹² failure to contact the families and witnesses involved before the publication of the report,¹⁹³ the inaccessibility of the report,¹⁹⁴ and the characterisation of disabled people in media commentary related to the publication. Given that the State has reported that inquiries and tribunals have cost the State a total of €544 million to date, including €13.6m on the 'Grace' case, it is essential that human rights and equality are prioritised in their Terms of Reference and operation.¹⁹⁵ The State has committed to undertake a non-statutory safeguarding exercise to extract learnings from the Farrelly Commission's findings to continue to inform and support developments in

¹⁸⁸ In line with the recommendations of the Human Rights Committee, [Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Ireland](#), CCPR/C/IRL/CO/5 (26 January 2023) paras. 11-14.

¹⁸⁹ The [Farrelly Commission of Investigation](#) was established in 2017 to examine the culture and treatment of individuals with intellectual disabilities in a foster care setting in the South East. 'Grace' is the pseudonym of a woman now in her 40s who has been in the care of the State all her life. In April 2025, the [Farrelly Commission](#) published its final report, which found evidence of "serious neglect" and "financial mismanagement," but not of physical, sexual or emotional abuse: RTÉ, [Key findings from €13m Farrelly Commission report](#) (16 April 2025).

¹⁹⁰ The report was criticised by the Minister with responsibility for disability, disability stakeholders and the legal representatives of 'Grace'. The Irish Times, [Submissions of Grace's legal team not referred to 'in any way' in final investigation report, says wardship solicitor](#) (29 April 2025). IHREC's [Disability Advisory Committee \('DAC'\)](#) has the view that the investigation seemingly did not address systemic failures that enabled abuse to occur within the public system, including within the criminal justice system, oversight of social work, inspection bodies, and the care system.

¹⁹¹ Irish Examiner, [Grace report: Whistleblower says Farrelly Commission was 'a complete waste of time'](#) (16 April 2025).

¹⁹² The High Court's general solicitor for minors and wards released a public statement to state that "the legal team appointed by the general solicitor made considered and extensive Submissions to the commission on behalf of Grace. It appears that these submissions have not been included nor referred to in any way in the report." RTÉ, ['Grace' report: More questions after unprecedented statement](#) (30 April 2025).

¹⁹³ Media reports indicate that the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality contacted the Chair of the Farrelly Commission to request that they would let the people involved in the investigation know that the report was due to be released. The Chair of the Commission did not agree to this request. Irish Examiner, [Grace report: Chair of investigation commission refused to contact families before publication](#) (15 April 2025).

¹⁹⁴ The final report is 2,000 pages but does not include an executive summary of findings and recommendations or an index.

¹⁹⁵ RTÉ, [Tribunals, inquiries have cost State €544m to date - dept figures](#) (1 May 2025).

safeguarding policies and practices.¹⁹⁶ The Special Rapporteur on Child Protection has called for ‘an inquiry into the inquiry’ and to ensure that ‘Grace’ and her advocates are involved in the next steps.¹⁹⁷

The Commission recommends that the State overhauls its approach to investigations and reparations of so-called ‘historical’ abuse to ensure independent, survivor-centred, timely investigations and effective remedies for victims and survivors, including through schemes based on the right to truth, justice, reparation, non-recurrence and memory processes.

Mother and Baby Institutions

In 2024, the State opened a flawed Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme, which failed to recognise the principal human rights violation of forced family separation.¹⁹⁸ The Scheme in its design and operation breaches the rights of survivors and risks further revictimization. The Scheme has been designed to minimise financial liability and significantly narrow the eligibility for compensation. There are arbitrary and irrational elements in the Scheme including the exclusion of children who stayed in an institution for less than six months, the exclusion of mothers who stayed in an institution for less than six months from eligibility for an enhanced medical card, the criteria to be eligible for a work-related payment,¹⁹⁹ and the exclusion of people resident in institutions not included in the flawed

¹⁹⁶ Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, [Speech by Minister for Children, Disability and Equality Norma Foley on the publication of the final substantive report of the Farrelly Commission](#) (15 April 2025).

¹⁹⁷ RTÉ, [‘Grace’ solicitor comments on report an ‘alarm call’](#) (30 April 2025).

¹⁹⁸ IHREC, [IHREC calls for changes to Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme](#) (20 March 2024). We made observations on the legislation establishing the Scheme and communicated our concerns with the proposals to the Minister as the legislation progressed through the Irish Parliament: IHREC, [Submission on the General Scheme of a Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme Bill](#) (2022); IHREC, [Correspondence to Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth re: Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme Bill 2022](#) (15 December 2022); IHREC, [Correspondence to Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth re: Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme Bill 2022](#) (1 February 2023).

¹⁹⁹ A person is only eligible for a work-related payment if they were resident in a listed (small number) of institutions, and were resident for more than 90 days. The Commission of Investigation declined to recommend work-related payment for work that residents were required to do which was considered general work that they would have been doing at home. The Commission commented that while most women in Mother and Baby Homes were expected to carry out this type of work, they were not required to do commercial work. This is an

Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes Final Report.²⁰⁰ We see no rational connection between the potential harm suffered and the length of stay requirement, and believe that all persons who were resident in an institution for any length of time should be eligible to apply to the Scheme.

Overall, by failing to acknowledge the human rights violation of forced family separation, the State is denying and delaying access to justice and continuing to violate the rights of survivors. The State should remove the six-month stay requirement; extend reparations to institutions beyond those investigated by the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes; extend reparations for a work-related payment regardless of the institution they were resident in, the nature of the work, or length of stay. The redress should be provided in an easily accessible and transparent manner.²⁰¹

The Commission recommends that the State urgently prioritises a review of the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme and commits to amend the Scheme, in line with Ireland's human rights obligations, to widen the eligibility criteria to ensure victims and survivors can access a full and effective remedy.

Redress for children abused in primary/post primary schools prior to 1991/1992

We continue to raise concern with the State's implementation of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights ('ECtHR') in *O'Keeffe v Ireland*.²⁰² Two *ex gratia* redress

unfair comparison as they could not derive the benefit from the work they did in the Mother and Baby Homes. This approach also appears to reinforce gender discrimination. We are of the view that the nature of the Mother and Baby Homes and related institutions means that the work undertaken by women has to be regarded as compulsory. IHREC, [Submission on the General Scheme of a Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme Bill](#) (2022) pp. 43-44.

²⁰⁰ IHREC, [Submission on the General Scheme of a Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme Bill](#) (2022).

²⁰¹ Survivors report numerous difficulties in accessing the online Scheme, which is operated by an independent contractor - including lack of information on the appeal and review processes.

²⁰² The ECtHR ruled that in failing to fulfil its obligation to protect Louise O'Keeffe from inhuman and degrading treatment while a child in a State funded primary school, Ireland had violated Articles 3 and 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and had failed to provide her with an effective remedy. Ireland has been required to submit action plans to the Committee of Ministers on a periodic basis, outlining the individual and general measures adopted to implement the judgment of the Court. We have made submissions to the Committee of

schemes have closed, and both schemes were fundamentally flawed.²⁰³ They made arbitrary and irrational distinctions between survivors of child sexual abuse in schools. They also included conditions for access to redress that did not reflect the ECtHR's judgment. The result is that an effective remedy has so far been denied to many abuse survivors, who are legally entitled to redress from the State.²⁰⁴

It would appear, from information submitted by the Irish Government to the Council of Europe and from cases that have come before the High Court in 2024, that compensation of €84,000 (equivalent to the redress payments under the *ex-gratia* schemes) has been paid to at least 40 survivors by the State. This has arisen when these individuals took High Court actions against the Minister for Education, on the basis that they were unlawfully excluded from the *ex-gratia* schemes, even though they came within the terms of ECtHR judgment in *O'Keeffe v. Ireland*. The State has chosen to settle with these litigants, rather than allow their cases go to hearing and have judgments delivered by the High Court. It is clear that redress or a payment of equivalent compensation, in effect a 'parallel' or 'shadow' redress scheme, is in now operation by the State, for those who have the personal and financial resources to commence legal proceedings challenging the Minister for Education's refusal to provide redress.

Recently we wrote to the Minister for Education on behalf of a number of women who complained of child abuse by Leo Hickey, former teacher in Dunderrow National School, Co. Cork in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁰⁵ These cases relate to the same perpetrator, school and time period as Louise O'Keeffe. We are of the view that the survivors of historical sexual abuse in schools, including survivors from Dunderrow National School, are entitled to redress in accordance with the judgment of the ECtHR in *O'Keeffe v Ireland* and on the same basis as

Ministers noting serious shortcomings in the State's implementation of this judgment, which has negatively impacted access to justice for victims and survivors of historical child abuse. We have also called for the Council of Europe to transfer this case to an 'enhanced supervision' process. IHREC, [Commission Presents Case to Europe on Failure of State to Implement 2014 European Court of Human Rights Judgment](#) (31 May 2024).

²⁰³ IHREC, [Commission calls on Minister for Education to provide redress to survivors of sexual abuse from Dunderrow National School](#) (6 December 2024).

²⁰⁴ As of 30 January 2024, only 128 survivors had received redress payments under both *ex-gratia* schemes.

²⁰⁵ IHREC, [Commission calls on Minister for Education to provide redress to survivors of sexual abuse from Dunderrow National School](#) (6 December 2024).

provided to Louise O’Keeffe. No further litigation should be necessary. No substantive response has been received from the Minister of Education in respect of these applications for redress.

The Irish Government published the ‘*Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Schools run by religious orders*’ in September 2024.²⁰⁶ The report provides an analysis of the potential scale of historical sexual abuse in schools run by religious orders in Ireland. The report also evidences the fact that the survivors who participated in the scoping exercise were sexually abused as children prior to 1991/92 – in other words, they come within the terms of the *O’Keeffe* judgment and should already have had redress available to them.²⁰⁷

The Government reports that it has accepted the principal recommendation of the Scoping report, namely the establishment of a statutory Commission of Investigation, and in that regard a high-level Inter-Departmental Group has been convened to advise the Minister for Education on the terms of reference for such a Commission of Investigation, as well as the further recommendations of the report.²⁰⁸ It is of note that the Government has not committed to providing redress to survivors of sexual violence in primary and post primary schools in compliance with the judgment of the ECtHR.

The Commission recommends that the State fully implements the *O’Keeffe v Ireland* judgment by immediately establishing a new comprehensive, fair and non-discriminatory redress scheme to ensure access to an effective remedy for survivors and victims of child sexual abuse in primary and post primary schools before 1991/1992. The redress scheme should recognise the responsibility of the State to survivors, avoid re-traumatising survivors, and not include unreasonable or arbitrary eligibility criteria.

²⁰⁶ The report was prepared by Mary O’Toole, Senior Counsel: [Report of the Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Day and Boarding Schools Run by Religious Orders](#) (2024).

²⁰⁷ IHREC, [Commission calls for immediate fair and adequate redress scheme](#) (5 September 2024).

²⁰⁸ Houses of the Oireachtas, [Response of Minister of Education to parliamentary question](#) (13 February 2025).

Women's rights in the justice system

There is a continued lack of recognition of the distinct needs of women, particularly women from structurally vulnerable communities, in the justice system. We reiterate our longstanding concern that Civil Legal Aid is unavailable in a number of legal and administrative areas, including in the majority of equality cases, which has proved to be a barrier to access to justice for structurally vulnerable women.²⁰⁹ The timeline for finalisation of the independent review of the Civil Legal Aid Scheme is unclear.²¹⁰

The majority of the Irish judiciary are men and although, 42% of Irish judges are women, the percentage of women judges decrease in the upper tiers of the Courts system.²¹¹

Furthermore, men make up 83% of the Inner Bar.²¹² To date, since the State's establishment, there have only been 10 women judges appointed to the Supreme Court. A socio-economic disparity is evident in the membership of the Supreme Court as evidence shows that, despite only 7% of the population having attended fee-paying second-level education, 62.2% of Supreme Court judges have been past pupils of fee-paying secondary schools.²¹³ This is particularly concerning as evidence shows that women are more likely to be economically disadvantaged.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ Including for women on low incomes, those living with addiction, victims of domestic violence, victims of trafficking and labour exploitation, International Protection applicants, Travellers, Roma, and minority ethnic communities. IHREC, [Submission to the Independent Review of Civil Legal Aid Scheme](#) (2023).

²¹⁰ In 2022 the Minister for Justice launched an independent review of Civil Legal Aid: Department of Justice, [Minister announces review of Civil Legal Aid Scheme](#) (2022). In our submission to the Review Group, we highlighted the shortcomings with the Civil Legal Aid Scheme, and made a number of recommendations including to extend the scope of the Legal Aid Board, to review the financial contribution, and to ensure the Legal Aid Board is adequately resourced: IHREC, [Submission to the Independent Review of Civil Legal Aid Scheme](#) (2023).

²¹¹ Data from 2022 shows that in the District Court, almost 44% or 27 out of 62 judges were women. The Circuit Court had 42% women representation. In the High Court, women constituted 38% of the judges and in the Supreme Court the figure was 33%. It is important to note that in the Court of Appeal, 9 of the 17 judges are women equalling 53%: Association of Judges of Ireland, [Who are the Judiciary?](#).

²¹² James Rooney, [Judges, Education and Class in Ireland](#) (2023) p. 99; The gender divide within the legal profession and the stereotyping of women in specialisations with less exposure such as family law and conveyancing contributes to the decreased likelihood of women being appointed to the Inner Bar: Niamh Howlin, [Women as both Insiders and Outsiders in the History of the Legal Profession](#) (2024) pp. 4-6.

²¹³ James Rooney, [Judges, Education and Class in Ireland](#) (2023) pp. 94, 96.

²¹⁴ CSO, [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\) 2024](#) (2025).

There needs to be increased women representation in the judiciary and legal profession at senior levels. However, pathways to the legal profession for structurally vulnerable groups have to be analysed in the wider context of barriers to accessing further and higher education in Ireland which lead to poor participation rates and educational outcomes.²¹⁵ The Legal Services Regulator Authority ('LSRA') found several barriers for women's entry into the barrister profession, these include childcare, absence of maternity leave and supports as a self-employed professional, deferral of family planning, discrimination, and low remuneration in early career.²¹⁶ We recommended the adoption of measures to encourage flexible hours, flexi-time job sharing, part-time work, shorter hours, and remote working.²¹⁷ We have called for the LSRA and the Minister for Justice to consider the incorporation of equality training into barrister-at-law and solicitor training.²¹⁸

We welcome the recent establishment of the Legal Practitioners Education and Training Committee ('LPET'). However, this will require primary legislation to set and assure educational and training standards and accredit new and existing legal education and training providers to address the barriers to the legal profession.²¹⁹ Regarding the solicitor profession, although the most recent research suggests that women outnumber men in this field, women only account for a third of partner roles.²²⁰ Research shows one in three women respondents report experiencing sexual harassment in the legal profession.²²¹ Further, the reporting of

²¹⁵ Detailed in IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 140-152.

²¹⁶ One in five student and early career barristers surveyed (20% overall, 35% women and 42% people with a disability) reported having experienced discrimination in the past three years while studying, looking for work or working as a barrister. The discrimination related to gender (59%); socio economic status (29%); and age (28%). The areas of discrimination were: accessing or being awarded jobs/cases (54% overall 76% for self-employed barristers); bullying or harassment (36%) work conditions (25%) and pay (19%); Legal Services Regulatory Authority, [Breaking Down Barriers: Understanding Challenges](#) (2022) p. 7. In 2024, the LSRA published recommendations to address barriers to entry to the legal professions and to increase diversity: Legal Services Regulatory Authority, [LSRA reports identify entry and early career barriers and propose reforms to open up access to legal professions and increase diversity](#) (18 September 2024). We note the response to this publication by the then Minister for Justice. Department of Justice, [Minister McEntee publishes plan to address barriers to entry to legal professions and early career progression](#) (31 October 2024).

²¹⁷ IHREC, [Submission to the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality](#) (March 2020) p. 18.

²¹⁸ IHREC, [Submission to the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality](#) (March 2020) p. 18.

²¹⁹ Law Society Gazette, [LSRA group on legal-education reform starts work](#) (April 2025).

²²⁰ Irish Legal News, [Women make up majority of Irish solicitors but only a third of partners](#) (2021).

²²¹ The Law Society, [Dignity Matters Report](#) (2021) pp. 4-5.

sexual harassment incidents in the legal profession is very low with 75% of cases not being reported due to perceived fear of repercussions such as lack of career advancement.²²² The Judicial Appointments Commission has a role in adopting measures to achieve an equal number of women and men and reflecting the diversity of the population in recommendations for appointment to the judiciary.²²³

The Commission recommends that the Review of the Civil Legal Aid Scheme is progressed as a matter of priority, and access to civil legal aid is broadened to quasi-judicial tribunals and bodies including the Workplace Relations Commission.

The Commission recommends that the measures to address barriers to diversity in the legal profession are gender and equality proofed, and progressed as a matter of priority.

The Commission recommends the State ensures 50-50 gender parity in the judiciary and ensures that the judiciary reflects the diversity of Irish society.

Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV)

Policy and legal framework

Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence policy is an area which has seen several positive reforms in recent years.²²⁴ However, these developments are failing to translate into tangible improvements for victims and survivors.²²⁵

²²² The Law Society, [Dignity Matters Report](#) (2021) pp. 4-5.

²²³ [Judicial Appointments Commission](#).

²²⁴ Measures include the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence ('Istanbul Convention'); ratification of ILO Convention C190; publication of the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence; and enhanced legislative protections for those subjected to DSGBV. IHREC, [Ireland and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (2023) p. 31.

²²⁵ We note the recent findings of the Central Statistic Office's Sexual Violence Survey, which found that 52% of women experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. Younger people report higher levels of sexual violence; 22% of those aged 18-24 experienced sexual violence both as an adult and as a child compared with 8% of those aged 65 and over. CSO, [Sexual Violence Survey 2022 – Main Results](#) (2023). We also note the publication of a

Cuan, the statutory DSGBV agency, was established in 2024.²²⁶ It is responsible for co-ordinating and driving the implementation plan for the Government's Zero-Tolerance Strategy and is dedicated to tackling and reducing DSGBV in Ireland. However, we have raised concerns regarding the strength of Cuan's mandate and its independence, specifically its location of the agency under the Department of Justice and the lack of a policy function which may compromise its ability to independently monitor implementation and critically evaluate the State's performance.²²⁷ The State did not engage with our recommendations, and we have rule of law concerns with the pace of the legislation establishing Cuan through the Irish Parliament and the lack of time for scrutiny of the proposals.²²⁸

There are notable deficits in specialist support services for victims and survivors of DSGBV.²²⁹ Given that DSGBV is a leading cause of homelessness, refuge accommodation for victims and survivors is inadequate, and the proposed increases will not meet need,²³⁰ particularly in light of the lack of transitional facilities and barriers to accessing social housing.²³¹ These issues

study on familicide and domestic and family violence, which found that at least 166 people were killed in incidents of family violence between 2000 and 2019. Department of Justice, [A Study on Familicide & Domestic and Family Violence Death Reviews](#) (2023) p. 69.

²²⁶ [Department of Justice – Cuan](#).

²²⁷ Other key concerns raised include the Minister being able to appoint the first CEO without having a fair and transparent competitive process, restrictions on external recruitment of staff, a lack of a strong data collection function, and a lack of regard to the PSEHRD in its functions. See, IHREC, [Submission on the General Scheme of the Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency Bill](#) (2023). Cuan will receive its budget from the Department of Justice Vote. [Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency Act 2023](#).

²²⁸ The Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency Bill 2023 was introduced in the Irish Parliament in September 2023 and was passed by both houses only ten weeks later, with only five days of debate on the Bill.

²²⁹ For more information on therapeutic services, Female Genital Mutilation services, support for victims and survivors of sexual violence, helplines and court accompaniment services, see IHREC, [Ireland and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (2022) pp. 66-73, 100-101. Issues with specialist supports were also raised in consultation with civil society including the particular experiences of disabled women, including Deaf women and the availability of Irish Sign Language ('ISL') interpreters.

²³⁰ The Programme for Governments commits to deliver 280 refuge spaces by 2026. Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) p. 120 The Council of Europe has set the standard at one place per 7,500 of the population and one family place per 10,000 of the population; Council of Europe, [Combating violence against women: minimum standards for support services](#) (2008) p. 18. As of figures from census 2022, Ireland's population is 5.25 million, necessitating 687 individual units and 514 family units. IHREC, [Ireland and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (2022) pp. 66-73, 100-101. Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

²³¹ Barriers include inadequate supply of social housing and failure to meet criteria due to co-ownership of properties and rigid rules about calculation of household income. Mercy Law Resource Centre, [Social Housing, Domestic Violence and the Public Sector Duty](#) (2023) pp. 12-14. Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

are compounded by additional challenges faced by women from structurally vulnerable groups,²³² and gaps in protection in the *Domestic Violence Act 2018*,²³³ which create difficulties for victims and survivors wishing to remain in the home.

Research has shown the inadequate interaction of separate elements of the justice system with each other has led to the onus on survivors and victims of DSGBV to navigate the different legal processes simultaneously.²³⁴ This is concerning as it could lead to significant trauma and revictimization for DSGBV victims/survivors.²³⁵ There is a need for the new NSWG to include women's access to justice as a key strategic priority and to be aligned with the implementation of the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence.²³⁶

²³² For example, the State fails to accommodate victims of trafficking in refuge accommodation, instead placing them in Direct Provision centres which are ill-equipped to cater to their support needs. IHREC, [Ireland and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (2022) pp. 114-116. Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

²³³ Interim barring orders and barring orders may not be granted if the perpetrator has a legal or beneficial interest in the residing property, but the victim/survivor does not, or if the perpetrator's interest is greater than the victim's. Although the victim does not have to satisfy the property test to be able to get an emergency barring order, this order can only last for a maximum of eight days and a new emergency barring order may not be made until a month after the first one expires, except in exceptional circumstances. IHREC, [Ireland and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (2022) p. 98.

²³⁴ Research shows that survivors of DSGBV are forced to navigate three separate legal systems: criminal, family, and, if children are involved, child protection processes. NWC, [A Report on the Intersection of the Criminal Justice, Private Family Law and Public Law Child Care Processes in Relation to Domestic and Sexual Violence](#) (2023).

²³⁵ NWC, [A Report on the Intersection of the Criminal Justice, Private Family Law and Public Law Child Care Processes in Relation to Domestic and Sexual Violence](#) (2023).

²³⁶ NWC, [Submission to the Courts Service Development of Long-Term Strategy for the Courts Service](#) (2019) p. 4; The new NSWG should commit to expanding the provision of public legal assistance for women, including legal representation in areas such as employment, discrimination, social welfare and social housing law (which are not covered by the existing scheme of civil legal aid). The Legal Aid Board should also be mandated to provide early and preventative forms of legal assistance (such as advocacy, legal information, public legal education and advice services) in these areas, as well as legal assistance for parties to mediation in family law cases. The Strategy should commit to the introduction of a publicly available 'Equal Treatment Bench Book' - an anti-discrimination guide for judges which is also of assistance to legal practitioners and court users. That Bench Book should cover areas such as safe participation in family law proceedings and criminal law proceedings concerning sexual offences, adjustments for those who are pregnant or in menopause to support their participation in court proceedings, and the treatment of transgender people in court: FLAC, [Embedding Access to Justice, Equality & Human Rights in the next National Strategy for Women and Girls Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth](#) (October 2024).

We welcome the State's clear commitment to 'fully implement the Zero Tolerance Plan 2022–2026 and develop a new plan for 2026–2030'.²³⁷ The findings of the GREVIO evaluation across the prevention,²³⁸ protection,²³⁹ prosecution,²⁴⁰ and policy co-ordination²⁴¹ pillars should be central to implementation of the current plan and the development of the new plan.²⁴² We acknowledge the importance of the State considering the recommendations in the recent Garda Síochána Inspectorate's inspection report of An Garda Síochána's approach to prevention, protection, prosecution and victim support.²⁴³ We continue to call for the State, as part of implementing a zero tolerance approach to DSGBV, to establish a domestic and family violence death review process as recommended by the Study on Familicide and Domestic and Family Violence Death Reviews in 2023.²⁴⁴

The Commission recommends that consideration be given to strengthening the independence of Cuan from the State to ensure its effectiveness in evaluating the State's domestic, sexual and gender-based violence policies and measures.

²³⁷ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) p. 120.

²³⁸ GREVIO has recommended creating targeted awareness-raising campaigns on intersectional discrimination and integrating gender stereotypes and gender-based violence issues into educational curricula at all levels. GREVIO, [Baseline Evaluation Report: Ireland](#) (2023) p. 103.

²³⁹ GREVIO has recommended adopting institutionalised structures for interagency co-ordination to ensure adequate protection and support for victims and survivors. It called for adequately staffed and geographically spread specialist support services which cater to the needs of structurally vulnerable groups. GREVIO, [Baseline Evaluation Report: Ireland](#) (2023) p. 106.

²⁴⁰ GREVIO has urged the State to improve police training, evidence collection and guidelines to ensure access to justice for victims and survivors. It has also recommended addressing delays and backlogs and extending free legal aid to all forms of DSGBV. GREVIO, [Baseline Evaluation Report: Ireland](#) (2023) pp. 110–111.

²⁴¹ GREVIO has recommended introducing budget lines for policy commitments related to DSGBV; ensuring coherence between the Third National Strategy and Sectoral Strategies; and providing sufficient multi-annual funding to NGOs working on DSGBV issues. GREVIO, [Baseline Evaluation Report: Ireland](#) (2023) p. 101.

²⁴² Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum raised several issues of relevance to the implementation of GREVIO's recommendations including the need for: increased supports and assistance to survivors, drastic improvements in the experience within the justice system, multi-annual funding for specialist support services, addressing inconsistencies in approach between State agencies, trauma-informed training on engaging with survivors for An Garda Síochána and other public body staff, consideration of an island of Ireland approach, regulation of online content, and awareness raising in educational settings and inclusion in curricula.

²⁴³ Garda Síochána Inspectorate, [Domestic Abuse: An inspection of the Garda Síochána's approach to prevention, protection, prosecution and victim support](#) (2024).

²⁴⁴ The study on familicide and domestic and family violence, which found that at least 166 people were killed in incidents of family violence between 2000 and 2019. Department of Justice, [A Study on Familicide & Domestic and Family Violence Death Reviews](#) (2023) p. 69.

The Commission recommends the State urgently prioritises implementing the recommendations from the GREVIO baseline evaluation through the implementation of the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual & Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026, and in the development of actions in the new Strategy from 2026-2030.

The Commission recommends that the State ensures adequate, inclusive provision of specialist support services for all victims and survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence through appropriate training of service providers.

The Commission recommends a wrap-around system of both court and non-court supports to address the unique and complex needs of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence victims and survivors. High quality training on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence for members of the judiciary and their support staff should include trauma-informed care and coercive control, the specific and complex needs of women that are victims and survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, and unconscious bias.

The Commission recommends that the State significantly scales up the provision of culturally appropriate, universally designed refuge accommodation units; provides guidance to local authorities on supporting victims and survivors seeking emergency accommodation and social housing; and amends the *Domestic Violence Act 2018* to expand the circumstances where victims and survivors can remain in the home.

Data

Comprehensive, systematic, robust data collection relating to DSGBV is not available in Ireland.²⁴⁵ Previous concerns from the Committee and the Commission have not been addressed regarding the limited DSGBV data and research available in the Irish context on DSGBV.²⁴⁶ GREVIO found that Ireland was ‘lagging behind significantly in the area of data

²⁴⁵ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum. Particularly is the absence of data on violence against older women, who can already be marginalised in Irish society

²⁴⁶ IHREC, [Ireland and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (2022); Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, [Concluding](#)

collection’ and encouraged Ireland to ‘co-ordinate efforts aimed at developing a National Equality Data Strategy with those foreseen in the setting up of a co-ordinated data-collection system on all forms of violence against women’.²⁴⁷ The State has failed to publish its Equality Data Strategy or strengthen the National Data Infrastructure with regards to disaggregated and intersectional equality data on women and girls.

The Commission recommends that the Department of Justice and Cuan prioritise the collection and use of disaggregated and intersectional equality data on violence against women and girls. Any national survey and supplementary data collection exercises including qualitative work should document incidences of violence against structurally vulnerable women, including their experiences in accessing supports and services, and accessing justice.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

Policy and legal framework

We welcome several important legal and policy developments in recent years, which are expected to improve the State’s anti-trafficking response. As Ireland’s Independent National Rapporteur on the Trafficking of Human Beings we acknowledge the State has responded well but selectively to feedback by IHREC on the development of policy and legislation. However, areas of concern remain.

When Part 3 of the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking) Act 2024*²⁴⁸ is commenced, it will legislate for the new National Referral Mechanism (‘NRM’). We have welcomed aspects of this new NRM; however, gaps remain with regard to: the provision of

[observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland](#), CEDAW/C/IRL/CO/6-7 (9 March 2017) paras. 26(a), 27(a).

²⁴⁷ Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), [GREVIO’s \(Baseline\) Evaluation Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence \(Istanbul Convention\): Ireland](#) (2023) paras. 51, 60.

²⁴⁸ [The Criminal Law \(Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking\) Act 2024](#).

detailed assistance and supports in law, including immigration provisions; equality of treatment of victims; statutory measures for protection against prosecution; and child-specific, best interests of the child ('BIC'), identification and assistance procedures.²⁴⁹

The NRM Operational Guidelines ('the Guidelines') will accompany the 2024 Act and provide a roadmap for the operation of the NRM. Our key concerns in relation to the draft Guidelines²⁵⁰ include – the need for clarity and detail on supports and assistance; that the principle of non-prosecution and immigration-related measures have not been addressed;²⁵¹ the need for a child victim specific approach to identification and assistance with the BIC front and centre; the need for adequate consultation; and the need to reflect the amended EU Anti-Trafficking Directive.

We welcomed the Third National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking 2023-2027²⁵² ('NAP') and also highlighted gaps, calling for it to be adequately budgeted for and flagging the absence of reference to age assessments, and the amended EU Directive.²⁵³ We have no clear information on the NAP mid-term evaluation due in 2025. Any such evaluation presents an opportunity to address any shortcomings in the NAP and to promote a coordinated response to combat human trafficking.

²⁴⁹ IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) p. 10.

²⁵⁰ Draft reviewed by IHREC in December 2024.

²⁵¹ This is in line with the [EU Directive: Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA](#) "Where the age of a person subject to trafficking is uncertain, and there are reasons to believe it is less than 18 years, that person should be presumed to be a child and receive immediate assistance, support and protection."

²⁵² Government of Ireland, [National Action Plan to prevent and combat Human Trafficking 2023-2027](#) (2023).

²⁵³ The amended EU Anti-Trafficking Directive is due for transposition by July 2026. It sets out new strengthened minimum standards of response, including by explicitly recognising novel forms of exploitation and the online dimension of trafficking, adding mandatory sanctions against legal persons, the criminalisation of the knowing use of exploited services, and establishing the obligation of annual collection of statistics from the State. See IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2020) p. 2.

The Commission recommends that the States ensure the Operational Guidelines under the new National Referral Mechanism are sufficiently robust to ensure the mechanism is compliant with Ireland's anti-trafficking obligations.

The Commission recommends that child-specific identification and assistance should be detailed in the Operational Guidelines.

Investigations, prosecutions, and redress

While the number of investigations and prosecutions remain low, investigations and prosecutions for trafficking related offences appear to have increased.²⁵⁴ There has been no material change in the non-prosecution of the victim, notwithstanding consistent criticism²⁵⁵ that the current approach is insufficient and ineffective in protecting victims from prosecution or punishment for offences they were forced to commit.

Limited or insufficient practical assistance, including safe accommodation, to victims before, during, and after the criminal process has a very significant impact on victims' ability to participate fully in the criminal justice process.²⁵⁶ Victims of trafficking ('VOT') for sexual exploitation are still not afforded the same protections in criminal trials as victims of rape and

²⁵⁴ IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) pp.11, 108-109; US Department of State, [Trafficking in Persons Report: Ireland](#) (2024).

²⁵⁵ See GRETA, [Report Concerning the Implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Trafficking in Human Beings by Ireland](#) (2017) para. 207; GRETA, [Evaluation Report Ireland. Third Evaluation Round. Access to Justice and Effective Remedies for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings](#) (2022); US State Department, [Trafficking in Persons Report](#) (2022) pp. 298–302; US State Department, [Trafficking in Persons Report](#) (2023). Joint Committee on Justice (2023) [Report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Criminal Justice \(Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking\) Bill 2022](#) (2023). The Committee recommends that consideration be given to enshrining a non-prosecution principle as a statutory defence within the legislation, to guarantee that victims of trafficking would not face prosecution for any offence that they were pressured into committing as a result of being trafficked.' See also IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Second Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2023); IHREC, [Contribution to the 4th Progress Report on the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings in the European Union](#) (2022); IHREC, [Submission on Part 3 of the General Scheme of the Criminal Justice \(Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking\) Bill 2022](#) (2022); IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2022); IHREC, [Observations and Recommendations on the General Scheme of the Criminal Justice \(Exploitation of Children in the Commission of Offences\) Bill 2020](#) (2021).

²⁵⁶ IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) p. 173.

other sexual offences.²⁵⁷ Significant gaps remain in the provision of legal advice and representation for VOT.²⁵⁸ The Legal Aid Board is statutorily required to provide only legal information to victims of trafficking, and not legal advice and representation.²⁵⁹

Compensation of victims remains a key issue.²⁶⁰ Ireland has not fully transposed EU Anti-Trafficking Directive 2011²⁶¹. The current compensation mechanisms for VOT are not effective.²⁶² There is a lack of compensation for pain and suffering in the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme.²⁶³ Victims continue to face obstacles to obtaining compensation.²⁶⁴ While we welcome the 2024 review of criminal compensation by the Law Reform Commission, there is a lack of progress.²⁶⁵

The Commission recommends that the Third National Action Plan to Combat and Prevent Human Trafficking 2023-2027 is amended to include detailed actions to expand, support, and enhance the development and knowledge of An Garda Síochána and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to fully integrate technological solutions to better investigate and prosecute trafficking offences.

²⁵⁷ This should include, at a minimum: access to legal advice (without a prosecution being initiated), exclusion of the public from trials, and anonymity. IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) pp. 29, 187.

²⁵⁸ IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) p. 28.

²⁵⁹ IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) p. 174.

²⁶⁰ IHREC, [Submission on Compensating Victims of Crime to the Law Reform Commission on their Fifth Programme of Law Reform](#) (2023).

²⁶¹ Article 17 of the [EU Anti-Trafficking Directive \(2011/36/EU\)](#)

²⁶² OSCE, Conclusion and recommendations for Ireland following the visit by OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey (2020) p. 8.

²⁶³ European Commission Staff Working Document [Evaluation of the Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings and protecting its victim](#) (2022) p. 40. See also IHREC, [Submission on Compensating Victims of Crime to the Law Reform Commission on their Fifth Programme of Law Reform](#) (2023); IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2022) p. 115.

²⁶⁴ During IHREC's survivors' consultation in 2021-2022, the National Rapporteur learned that survivors were not informed about their right to compensation. See also European Commission, [Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Report on the Progress made in the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings \(Fourth Progress Report\)](#) (2022) p. 15; GRETA, ['Evaluation Report Ireland. Third Evaluation Round. Access to Justice and Effective Remedies for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings'](#) (2022) p. 24.

²⁶⁵ Dáil Éireann Debate, [Victim Support Services](#) (2024).

The Commission recommends that victims' rights and their experiences be at the centre of all efforts – both legal and policy – to combat trafficking, and that every potential victim be appointed a Garda Liaison Officer from the beginning of the investigation.

The Commission recommends a specific statutory defence for victims of trafficking where they have committed crimes as a direct consequence of them being trafficked.

The Commission recommends that an effective response to combating trafficking for sexual exploitation requires that offences are categorised as sexual offences, with associated protections.

The Commission recommends that the Review of Civil Legal Aid must prioritise survivors' legal needs and must consider the legislative reforms needed to expand the remit of the Legal Aid Board to offer advice, assistance and where necessary, representation to victims of trafficking in all relevant matters including criminal matters; the Legal Aid Board and independent law centres should be sufficiently resourced; and legal services be expanded, considering the new National Referral Mechanism.

The Commission recommends that the State should ensure the specific needs of victims of trafficking are considered in the reform of compensation.

Support services and accommodation

We have repeatedly called for more detail on assistance and supports in legislation, including immigration permits.²⁶⁶ We have called for adequate and appropriate supports and a statutory basis for these to be put in place by the State, alongside funding, to ensure that all survivors of trafficking receive specialised assistance.²⁶⁷ Such assistance must be provided regardless of a person's origin, nationality, statelessness, immigration status, or a pending International Protection claim. The 2024 Act does not make statutory provision of such

²⁶⁶ IHREC, [Commission welcomes new legislation that will support victims of trafficking](#) (04 July 2024).

²⁶⁷ IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) pp. 16, 27, 37, 153, 164.

assistance and supports. It is now essential this assistance be outlined in the ‘Operational Guidelines’ currently being drafted by the State to accompany the 2024 Act.

Concerns regarding the chronic lack of safe accommodation for women VOT remain. The State continues to rely on Direct Provision to accommodate VOT. Direct Provision does not respect the rights of VOT nor comply with CEDAW.²⁶⁸

The opening of the first gender-specific pilot shelter in 2023 was welcomed.²⁶⁹ The shelter is extremely limited in both the restrictive criteria and limited capacity of 8 beds. It cannot accommodate women with children and is not accessible for disabled people. The evaluation of this pilot has not yet happened. There is no indication of scaling up the capacity despite the number of beds not meeting current demand, which is expected to increase with the new NRM.²⁷⁰ The lack of step-down facilities and limitations on duration of stay mean women VOT often return to Direct Provisions afterwards.

A study revealed how children and young adults in residential care, particularly girls, are being targeted in an organised manner for sexual exploitation.²⁷¹

The Commission recommends that the State should ensure that assistance and supports for victims of trafficking be detailed in the National Referral Mechanism Operational Guidelines.

The Commission recommends that the State provides sustainable funding to specialist civil society organisations providing services for victims of trafficking.

²⁶⁸ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [General recommendation No. 38 \(2020\) on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration](#), CEDAW/C/GC/38 (20 November 2010).

²⁶⁹ IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) p. 11.

²⁷⁰ IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) pp. 26, 160. 90 women VOT on average reside in DP at any given time. With regard to increasing the response infrastructure for victims of domestic and sexual violence in line with the requirements of the [Istanbul Convention](#), we would point out that gender-based violence services have to be complementary and inclusive for victims of such violence, which includes trafficking in human beings.

²⁷¹ Canning M., Keenan M. and Breslin B, [Protecting Against Predators: Scoping Study on the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Young People](#) (2023) pp. 59-60. IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) p. 156.

The Commission recommends that the pilot gender-specific shelter be evaluated and scaled-up in sufficient numbers.

The Commission recommends that the State urgently investigates and takes action to address the co-ordinated grooming of children, especially girls, under the care of Tusla.

Human trafficking data

Official data demonstrates that human trafficking in Ireland is highly gendered and racialised.²⁷² Since 2013, women from a migrant background, predominantly from Africa,²⁷³ continue to represent the majority of identified victims. Studies have estimated that the data represents an underestimation of VOTs of around 40%.²⁷⁴ The number of recorded cases depends on the parameters of the NRM, which is currently under review. Once implemented, the new mechanism is expected to lead to an increase in identified victims.

The data trends remain mostly consistent from 2013 to 2023. Ireland remains primarily a destination country. The most frequently detected forms of trafficking are for the purpose of sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, and criminal activities. From 2021 to 2023, there were 139 VOT identified in Ireland, up 12% from the previous three-year period 2019-2021.²⁷⁵ From 2021 to 2023, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, show a slight increasing and decreasing trend, respectively. Trafficking for the purposes of criminal activity has risen from 0 in 2021 to 9 in 2023. The national multiannual official data demonstrates the highly gendered aspect of human trafficking, with more women (68%) being VOT than men (32%). In trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, over 96% of VOT are women. Trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation

²⁷² IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) p. 56.

²⁷³ IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) p. 407.

²⁷⁴ IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) p. 400.

²⁷⁵ IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) p. 7.

affects more men (69%). No child VOT were identified in 2020 and 2021. In 2022 and 2023, 5 children were identified each year as suspected VOT – 8 girls, 2 boys.

We have made a number of recommendations regarding how data can be approached in such a way to potentially improve the anti-trafficking response in the State.²⁷⁶ The amended EU Anti-Trafficking Directive²⁷⁷ contains strengthened provisions regarding data collection for the State.

The Commission recommends that the State mandates all State agencies and bodies involved in the response to human trafficking to take steps to ensure that their respective data systems capture disaggregated data on human trafficking.

Addressing trafficking for sexual exploitation

We welcome the recent publication of the Review²⁷⁸ of section 7A of the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017*.²⁷⁹ The report highlights the need for accurate data, improved identification processes, comprehensive support systems, enhanced training for law enforcement and service providers, enhanced multi-agency collaboration and the importance of the new NRM. The provisions contained in Part 4 of the 2017 Act have the potential to disrupt the demand for commercial sexual exploitation and increase the State's ability to tackle organised prostitution.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Including that the State develops National Referral Mechanism Guidelines for centralised uniform data-collection, and launch a data system to which all Competent Authorities and Trusted Partners must contribute information. Also, that civil society organisations could develop data systems and contribute to the national data collection efforts: IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) pp. 16, 137-138, 408.

²⁷⁷ [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims](#).

²⁷⁸ Department of Justice, [Review of the Operation Section 7A of the Criminal Law \(Sexual Offences\) Act 1993 As Amended by Part 4 of the Criminal Law \(Sexual Offences\) Act 2017](#) (2025).

²⁷⁹ IHREC, [The Commission recommends increased supports and exit pathways for people affected, to support legislation criminalising purchase of sex](#) (27 March 2025).

²⁸⁰ This must include supports to victims, as a minimum: legal, psychological and medical support; access to exit programmes; emergency and social housing; financial assistance; regularised immigration status with the right to work; and access to training and employment. IHREC, [The Commission recommends increased supports and exit pathways for people affected, to support legislation criminalising purchase of sex](#) (27 March

The Commission reiterates our recommendation that the State proactively implements the relevant provisions of the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017*, and increase supports and exit pathways for victims of trafficking.

Expungement of criminal records

We remain concerned with expungement of criminal records. We welcomed the commitment in the NAP²⁸¹ to expunge past criminal convictions for prostitution;²⁸² however, there is no progress to report on expungement of the 600 convictions for ‘sale of sex’ offences.

The Commission recommends the wider application of retrospective expungement of victims’ criminal records, when forced to commit such crimes as a direct result of them having been trafficked.

Participation in political and public life

Participation in politics

We welcome the 40% gender quota on political party candidate selection for General Elections,²⁸³ but quotas are still not in place for Seanad or local elections.²⁸⁴ We note that the Committee has recently called for a 50-50 gender parity for all decision-making systems,

2025); IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) p. 37.

²⁸¹ Government of Ireland, [National Action Plan to prevent and combat Human Trafficking 2023-2027](#) (2023).

²⁸² IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland. Third Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2024) pp. 10, 22.

²⁸³ Part 6 of the *Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012*. Gender Quotas were first enacted at 30% at the 2016 General Election which increased the proportion of women candidates and a 40% increase in the proportion of women in parliament. Claire McGing, [Why so few women in the Dáil? Gendered pathways to parliament and how to advance the selection and election of women TDs](#) (March 2024) p. 4.

²⁸⁴ With consideration for nested quotas for ethnic minority women in both Local and General Elections to enable the reflection of national parliament and local councils of Irish society: Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum. The State should also consider Seanad reform with an introduction of a diversity panel with gender parity, including Traveller and Roma women’s representation: Pauline Cullen and Shane Gough, [Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics in Ireland](#) (2022).

including the political sphere, to be implemented by State Parties by 2030. The State must address this recommendation and give due consideration upon its domestic implementation.²⁸⁵ The State must also address the findings of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights' ('ODIHR') Needs Assessment Mission undertaken prior to the 2024 General Election.²⁸⁶ ODIHR identified the persistent underrepresentation of women in politics due to structural barriers including childcare responsibilities; financial constraints; cultural attitudes; and the prevalence of violence and harassment of women in politics, which is exacerbated by the growth of social media platforms and the inadequate regulation of online content.²⁸⁷ This toxic political atmosphere has a chilling effect on potential women candidates which may cause them to disengage from politics and leads to silencing of new political perspectives.²⁸⁸

Despite the gender quota being in place for a number of years, the results of the 2024 General Election in Ireland are concerning.²⁸⁹ Although, no party violated the candidate selection quota and there was a 52% increase of women candidates since the 2020 General Election, only 25% of parliament representatives are women with 32.5% of constituencies have no women as representatives.²⁹⁰ Furthermore, 72% of the new seats were won by men.²⁹¹ Following these results, the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) tracker has found Ireland

²⁸⁵ General Recommendation No. 40 (GR 40) establishes a global roadmap to achieve fifty-fifty gender parity in decision-making systems. It recognises equal and inclusive representation of women as a fundamental human right and a game changing solution to overcome global challenges to achieving peace, political stability, economic inclusion, climate change mitigation as well as to ensure the inclusivity of technological advancement; Decision-Making Systems: Encompass political, public, economic, and digital spheres, including emerging fields like Artificial Intelligence (AI): The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [General Recommendation No 40. on The Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Systems](#) (October 2024).

²⁸⁶ We met with the ODIHR as part of their Mission to Ireland. ODIHR, [Ireland early parliamentary elections 29 November 2024: ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report 14-16 October 2024](#) (2024).

²⁸⁷ ODIHR, [Ireland early parliamentary elections 29 November 2024: ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report 14-16 October 2024](#) (2024) pp. 2, 4.

²⁸⁸ ODIHR, [Ireland early parliamentary elections 29 November 2024: ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report 14-16 October 2024](#) (2024) p. 9.

²⁸⁹ The low voter turnout of the 2024 General and Local Elections is notably the lowest recorded turnout since the State's founding. Pauline Cullen and Claire McGing, [Women Beyond the Dáil: Access, Representation and Retention in Irish Local Government -NWC Survey of Irish Women Councillors](#) (2024) p. 3.

²⁹⁰ This is despite an expansion of parliamentary seats for this election from 160 to 174. Women for Election, [GE24: Results for Women Candidates](#) (2025).

²⁹¹ The Irish Times, [GE2024 Results Hub](#) (2024).

to be 99th in the world for women's representation in national parliaments and 96th in the world for Women Cabinet Ministers²⁹² with only three women as senior ministers (21.4%) and six as junior ministers (26%).²⁹³ Women are only chairing seven (25%) of the 28 Parliamentary Committees.²⁹⁴ These results show that Ireland continues to have the lowest representation of women in parliament in Western Europe.

Prior to the 2024 General Election, Ireland had already been described as an 'unfinished democracy' due to the lack of women in politics, especially structurally vulnerable women.²⁹⁵ We welcome the recent election of the first Traveller woman to the Seanad;²⁹⁶ however, no Traveller, Roma or Black woman has ever been elected to the Dáil.²⁹⁷ Additionally, it is important to note that although Ireland has had 2 women presidents, since the State was established, there has not been a single woman Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister). Representation of women in politics is essential to the development of policies and legislation; greater representation of women leads to enhanced gender responsiveness, particularly in good governance, policies and decision-making.²⁹⁸

There is a lack of transparency from political parties as they are not required to collect and publish data around candidate selection, party funding, funding of candidates and equality data on membership and candidates.²⁹⁹ It is important to note that, since there are no fixed

²⁹² As of March 2025. For reference, Ireland's stagnation in women's representation in parliament is evident as Ireland was 35th in the world in 1997: International Parliamentary Union, [Monthly Ranking of Women In National Parliaments](#) (2025); UN Women, [Women in Politics: 2025](#).

²⁹³ Department of the Taoiseach, [Government Ministers](#) (Feb 2025).

²⁹⁴ Women for Election, [Another chance for gender balance in Oireachtas squandered with Committee Chair appointments](#) (25 April 2025).

²⁹⁵ Pauline Cullen and Claire McGing, [Women Beyond the Dáil: Access, Representation and Retention in Irish Local Government -NWC Survey of Irish Women Councillors](#) (2024) p. 2-3. Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum including the particular barriers faced by disabled women in accessing information on political participation, including material translated into Irish Sign Language and in easy-to-read formats.

²⁹⁶ The Seanad is the Upper House of Parliament. Eileen Flynn was elected to the Seanad in 2025, having previously been a nomination to the Seanad by the Taoiseach in 2020-2024.

²⁹⁷ The Dáil is the Lower House of Parliament. Women for Election, [Women in all their Diversity](#).

²⁹⁸ Pauline Cullen and Claire McGing, [Women Beyond the Dáil: Access, Representation and Retention in Irish Local Government -NWC Survey of Irish Women Councillors](#) (2024) p. 3

²⁹⁹ Candidate selection has been described as the 'secret garden of politics' – an obscure process, hidden away from view. Parties do not publish data on unsuccessful aspirants, nor shed light on direct interventions by Headquarters: Claire McGing, [Why so few women in the Dáil? Gendered pathways to parliament and how to advance the selection and election of women TDs](#) (March 2024) p. 6, Regarding transparency, civil society has

dates for the General Elections,³⁰⁰ late candidate selection can pose as a problem as this can significantly disadvantage candidates added late.³⁰¹ There is evidence that many women were added late to make up the gender quota for the 2024 General Election.³⁰² There have been calls to reform the *Electoral Act 1997* (which allows for political party expenditure to diversify membership and candidate lists) to stipulate parties spend this funding in the allocated year or be required to surrender it.³⁰³

The current political system undermines the 40% candidate selection gender quota.³⁰⁴ The so-called 5 C's have been identified as barriers for women to enter politics.³⁰⁵ These are: childcare, cash, confidence, culture, and candidate selection processes. The lack of supports for women in politics disincentivises women from entering and staying in politics, including the lack of adequate remuneration for Local Councillors.³⁰⁶ Supports to facilitate greater representation of women at the national level must be first rooted in the Local Elections as

called for political parties to abide by the same rules as State-funded civil society organisations for mandatory complaints and compliments log to create voter transparency. Regarding funding transparency, there is no known information regarding who is funding far-right parties: Issue raised at CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

³⁰⁰ While a General Election must be held every five years, the Taoiseach can advise the President to dissolve the Dáil.

³⁰¹ This is evidenced through the low votes of women candidates that were added late by the three major parties. Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum that this is a form of quota-chasing to avoid the consequences of non-compliance with the 40% gender quota. This includes late selection very near to or after the dissolution of the Dáil.

³⁰² National Women's Council, [No Breakthrough for Women in General Election 2024](#) (December 2024).

³⁰³ Pauline Cullen and Shane Gough, [Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics in Ireland](#) (2022) p. 18.

³⁰⁴ We are particularly concerned regarding the retention rate of women in politics as findings show that women councillors had a lower retention rate in 2024, due to the incumbency. An analysis reveals that 39 women incumbents in local politics opted to not contest the 2024 Local Election. In two local electoral areas, no woman ran. The poor retention rates lead to less incumbents running in subsequent elections lessening the chances of women winning available seats Pauline Cullen and Claire McGing, [Women Beyond the Dáil: Access, Representation and Retention in Irish Local Government -NWC Survey of Irish Women Councillors](#) (2024) p. 3.

³⁰⁵ We also note the under-representation of women among independent candidates as the gender quota is not applicable to this group of candidates, along with the additional barriers to running independently as a woman.

³⁰⁶ The remuneration for Local Councillors barely covers the cost of childcare. Prior to selection, for both General and Local elections, there is an expectation of free labour which significantly disadvantages women's prospects of being selected as this assumes extra labour and commitments that may not be feasible for women with caring responsibilities. In the case of disabled women, they would lose their disability allowance and medical card but the remuneration rate is not adequate enough to live on: Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum; Pauline Cullen and Claire McGing, [Women Beyond the Dáil: Access, Representation and Retention in Irish Local Government -NWC Survey of Irish Women Councillors](#) (2024) p. 6.

gender imbalances among Local Councillors significantly affect the candidate selection processes for Dáil elections.³⁰⁷

We welcome recent legislation which provides maternity leave for members of the Dáil and Seanad³⁰⁸ and Local Councillors.³⁰⁹ However, comments from male politicians about women politicians taking maternity leave raise concern.³¹⁰ Informal expectation from constituents also impacts public representatives who are women to take maternity leave and includes a pressure to continue working during maternity leave.³¹¹

Gendered online hate-speech and political violence towards women candidates during electoral periods is a significant issue. Irish research evidences the disproportionate harassment and political violence towards women, particularly ethnic and racial minority and migrant women. Such violence has been found to be a catalyst for the decreased retention rate of women in political life in Ireland. This is a threat to women and a threat to democracy and the electoral system, undermining free and open participation.³¹² There is a lack of will by

³⁰⁷ Historically, Local Government has served as a critical pipeline to national office and is statistically more significant for women candidates than men. Therefore, advancing women's representation in Local Government is critical not only for the health and quality of Irish local democracy, and as an indicator of gender equality in its own right, but also for potentially improving gender representation in national politics: Pauline Cullen and Claire McGing, [Women Beyond the Dáil: Access, Representation and Retention in Irish Local Government -NWC Survey of Irish Women Councillors](#) (2024) p. 4.

³⁰⁸ The Seanad is the upper house of parliament; [Maternity Protection, Employment Equality and Preservation of Certain Records Act 2024](#).

³⁰⁹ [Local Government \(Maternity Protection and Other Measures for Members of Local Authorities\) Act 2022](#).

³¹⁰ Comments by a Junior Minister about the level of work they were required to undertake while the Minister was on maternity leave was regarded by some other politicians as criticising the Minister for taking maternity leave. The Irish Times, [Junior minister's remarks on McEntee's maternity leave replacements 'completely misinterpreted', says Tánaiste](#) (November 2024).

³¹¹ Women councillors often work a 'triple shift' combining paid work, unpaid care work, and council duties. This is consistent with research findings which show that politics is a gendered workplace which is reflected by the design of political institutions, political practices, structures and norms that are inhospitable to care responsibilities. Evidence shows that parties and voters often expect women on leave to undertake constituency-based work and attend events: Pauline Cullen and Claire McGing, [Women Beyond the Dáil: Access, Representation and Retention in Irish Local Government -NWC Survey of Irish Women Councillors](#) (2024) p. 6-19.

³¹² Among those experiencing violence, women are more likely than men to limit their speech, curtail their canvassing and social media activities, and make themselves less visible to the public with women more likely to experience psychological violence, in particular degrading talk and false rumours, and to report that their associates were subject to intimidation; Gendered motives make women targets for political violence and abuse because they are women. Research has linked violence against women politicians to perceptions that women politicians are disrupting the male-dominated status quo and threatening male hegemony over the political

the Gardaí to be involved in political spaces, even when hate speech and political violence is present.³¹³ The Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life,³¹⁴ examined the increasing level of abuse, including online abuse, harassment and intimidation experienced by those who participate in political life, particularly women and those from minority communities.³¹⁵ We welcome the State's commitment to implement the sixteen recommendations. However, there is a lack of detail on the progress in implementing the recommendations.

The Commission recommends the amendment of the *Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012* to mandate a 50% legislative gender quota on political party candidate selection for General Elections. The legislative gender quota should be extended to Local and Seanad elections.

The Commission recommends sufficient remuneration for Local Councillors to remove barriers to the recruitment and retention of women.

The Commission recommends the State prioritises the early and full implementation of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life's recommendations.

The Commission recommends the Electoral Commission (An Coimisiún Toghcháin) be mandated with specific obligations to address discriminatory rhetoric and hate speech in political discourse during candidate selection processes, elections and referendums. Codes

process. Although the volume of online threats and harassment is high for both men and women, researchers find that women are more likely than men to receive harassing and uncivil messages and that the abuse they receive is more often gendered and sexualised in nature: Fiona Buckley et al., [Violence against politicians in Ireland: what does it look like and how is it gendered?](#) (Dec 2024) p. 2-18. See also Pauline Cullen, [Minoritized Mother Politicians in Ireland: Subjectivities and Subjectivation in the Political Workplace](#) (January 2025) p. 401,

³¹³ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

³¹⁴ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) p. 149.

³¹⁵ The recommendations include a research programme on abuse faced by politicians, funding for support networks for women and minority groups, making it optional to publish the home addresses of election candidates, and a long-term Government strategy for increasing political representation by under-represented groups. The Report also directs recommendations to the Houses of the Oireachtas, Electoral Commission, Media Commission, An Garda Síochána, political parties, and social media companies. The Houses of the Oireachtas, [Report of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life](#) (2024). In correspondence to the Task Force, we raised the importance of engaging with groups facing barriers to political participation; putting in place a comprehensive regulatory framework to address hate; and that the Electoral Commission would be mandated to address the use of discriminatory rhetoric and hate speech in political campaigning by developing and promoting standards in political discourse during elections and referenda : IHREC, [Correspondence to the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life](#) (25 July 2023).

of conduct for public representatives and election candidates should be developed which clearly prohibit the use or endorsement of misogynistic hate speech.

Participation in public and private leadership

We welcome the State's Balance for Better Business initiative.³¹⁶ The State has failed to adequately transpose the EU Directive on Gender Balance on Corporate Boards and implement quotas to facilitate this, missing the deadline of December 2024.³¹⁷ As a result, the European Commission sent a letter of formal notice to Ireland in January 2025 requiring the State to fully transpose the Directives and to respond within two months on the measures taken.³¹⁸ The importance of effectively transposing the Directive is evident through the decrease in the proportion of women in leadership and zero women CEOs in the 20 companies of the Ireland Overall Stock Exchange Index (ISEQ 20), with an increase of all male leadership teams from 16% in 2023 to 20% in 2024.³¹⁹ In transposing the Directive, the State should consider the Committee's call for fifty-fifty parity in decision-making systems in introducing quotas which may go beyond the minimum requirements of the Directive.³²⁰

We note that despite a review in 2016 and our previous recommendations to expand the scope of commitments to gender equality in the Local Community Development Committees

³¹⁶ Balance for Better Business is an independent business-led review group established by the Government in 2018 to improve gender balance in senior business leadership in Ireland. The Review Group is examining the gender mix within the governance and senior management of companies in Ireland and the issues which arise in connection with the appointment of company directors and senior management: [Balance for Better Business](#).

³¹⁷ The Directive requires Irish publicly listed companies to ensure that the targets of a minimum either 40% of all non-executive director positions or 33% of all director positions are held by women are fulfilled by June 2026: [Directive \(EU\) 2022/2381](#).

³¹⁸ European Commission, [Commission takes action to ensure complete and timely transposition of EU directives](#) (J31 January 2025).

³¹⁹ The latest report of the Balance for Better Business (B4BB) Review Group shows that there are no women CEOs currently on leadership teams of ISEQ 20 companies. The B4BB Review Group has called for all companies to develop a plan to achieve 40%+ women representation on boards and leadership teams: Balance for Better Business, [Seventh Annual Report](#) (November 2024).

³²⁰ The Committee recommend that States "Adopt innovative measures to achieve parity in appointments to positions of economic responsibility, including boards of companies, and as chief executive officers of State-owned enterprises and private listed and unlisted companies". Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [General recommendation No. 40 \(2024\) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems](#), CEDAW/C/GC/40 (25 October 2024) para. 66(f).

(LCDC)³²¹ guidelines, the inadequate commitment to gender equality in the LCDC guidelines persist.³²² There has been no reviews of LCDCs since 2019 and this review highlighted a gender imbalance as 65% of LCDC members are male, whilst in one LCDC 94% of members are male.³²³

We welcome recent developments to address the lack of diversity in the Civil Service.³²⁴ There is ongoing unequal gender balance in senior positions of the Civil Service³²⁵ and State boards³²⁶ and there are a lack of ethnic minorities in the Public Service.³²⁷ There is a lack of research by the State regarding diversity in the Civil and Public Service to appropriately develop and inform new policies and strategies.

³²¹ LCDCs have primary responsibility for co-ordinating, planning and overseeing local, community and rural development funding: Changing Ireland, [What is the role of LCDCs in your community?](#) (2018).

³²² The guidelines for the establishment of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) contain only a weak commitment to gender equality, stating that ‘every effort should be made to ensure an equitable gender balance.’ This is regrettable because the LCDCs were established as the primary participative decision-making and coordinating bodies at local level for all local and community development interventions and activities in local government reform: Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, [Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland](#) (2015) p. 12; Department of Rural and Community Development, [Review of the Guidelines for the Operation of Local Community Development Committees](#) (2016); Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, [Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Local Community Development Committees](#) (2014) p. 18.

³²³ An average of 35% women membership points strongly to the need for greater efforts, nationally and locally, in this regard. Department of Rural and Community Development, [Review of Local Community Development Committees](#) (July 2019) p. 21.

³²⁴ Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, [Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2025](#); [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024](#). This strategy aims to ensure gender balance across leadership levels in the Civil Service and for the composition of the Civil Service to reflect the Irish demographic: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, [Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy: ‘Building on Our Strengths’](#) (2021); Potential candidates holding Stamp 4 permission will now be able to pursue civil servant roles: Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, [Minister Donohoe announces expanded eligibility requirements to promote greater diversity in the Irish Civil Service](#) (2023).

³²⁵ Women represent 71% of the lowest grade of the Civil Service (Clerical Officer), however, represent only 28% of the highest grade (Secretary General), despite representing 64% of the Irish population: Public Appointments Service, [Citizenship Eligibility Criteria in the Civil Service: A barrier to opportunity, inclusion & integration](#) (2024) p. 2.

³²⁶ Although women made up 46% of State boards in 2021, gender diversity was not evenly spread across boards with only 59% of boards meeting the benchmark of 40% women membership. Only 31.5% of State boards were chaired by a woman in 2021. Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, [Gender Balance Diversity on State Boards: the next steps](#) (2022).

³²⁷ Only 83% of the Irish population are White Irish, however, 97% of White Irish represent the Civil Service: Public Appointments Service, [Citizenship Eligibility Criteria in the Civil Service: A barrier to opportunity, inclusion & integration](#) (2024) p. 2.

The Commission recommends that the State fully transposes the EU Directive on Gender Balance on Corporate Boards, and introduces legislative quotas of 40% for corporate and State boards and that public funding is contingent on compliance. Quotas should be complemented by policy commitments to promote women's leadership in the new national strategy for women and girls.

The Commission recommends that the Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Local Community Development Committees be amended to include a mandatory gender balance requirement on each Committee.

The Commission recommends the State undertakes research on gender inequality in senior Public Service positions and on State boards, and commits to implement the recommendations.

Education

Access to and participation in education

In Ireland there are poorer educational outcomes and participation rates for women and girls, from structurally vulnerable groups including those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds,³²⁸ and girls in care and women with care experience.³²⁹ Barriers to access include the lack of recognition that engagement in education is a longer process for structurally vulnerable women in particular, and that specific needs-based supports are

³²⁸ IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 140-141.

³²⁹ There is an absence of disaggregated data broken down by gender on the experiences of girls in care and women who were in care. 48% of the children in care in January 2024 were girls, and 49% of children who have left since 2018 were women. Of the girls and women in care who started post-primary education between 2013 and 2016, 23% left school early without completing the Leaving Certificate. The percentage for all children was lower at 8%. Of children who left care and were aged 18-23 years by January 2024, 36% were enrolled in further education and 16% in higher education in 2022. Of all children that were aged 18-23 years by January 2024, 10% were enrolled in further education and 39% in higher education in 2022. CSO, [Educational Attendance and Attainment of Children in Care, 2018 – 2024](#) (2024). See also IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 146-147.

required, including childcare, mentoring, ICT equipment, transport and sustainably resourced community education programmes.³³⁰

Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum have emphasised the value of accessible community education programmes for women, and the need for wraparound supports for women in education.³³¹ Consideration needs to be given to the educational opportunities available to women with caring responsibilities.³³² Education should not be solely focused on labour market activation, but rather support personal development and wellbeing.³³³

The Covid-19 pandemic and measures taken in response to it, further exacerbated unequal educational experiences and outcomes for girls from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds; asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant girls; Traveller and Roma girls; girls experiencing homelessness; and disabled girls with complex needs.³³⁴ Many girls did not have the appropriate environment, space, equipment, connectivity and support for their online studies. There was an absence of gender equality and child rights impact assessments on the measures adopted. However, we also note benefits of the move to online learning such as for women who can balance caring responsibilities with virtual participation.³³⁵

The Commission recommends that the State examines and progresses the policy measures required to improve educational participation rates and outcomes for structurally vulnerable groups of women and girls, including through the resourcing of community education programmes.

³³⁰ See for example, Women's Collective Ireland, [Statement by Miriam Holt on Challenges facing women accessing education, leadership and political roles](#) (13 June 2023). See also Aontas, [Submission to the National Women and Girls Strategy Consultation](#) (2024).

³³¹ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

³³² Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum raised that it should be normalised as a form of learning that you can enter and re-enter the education system due to personal circumstances. Participants discussed options including shorter modules, and being able to pause and resume the course.

³³³ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

³³⁴ IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 151-152; Ombudsman for Children's Office, [The impact of school closures on children's rights in Ireland: A Pilot Child Rights Impact Assessment \(CRiA\)](#) (2022). Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

³³⁵ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

The Commission recommends that the State conducts a rights-based examination of the impact of the restrictions during the response to the Covid-19 pandemic on access to, and participation in education, to inform the protective measures required to mitigate the disproportionate impact of future crises on the right to education for women and girls.

Education for ethnic minority women and girls

The State report is silent on intersecting barriers to education for linguistic and ethnic women and girls who face multiple barriers in accessing and working in education.³³⁶ There is no reference to the past pupil criterion under the *Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018*³³⁷ which continues to act as a barrier to accessing education, particularly for Traveller and Roma girls, and migrant girls.³³⁸ Religious discrimination in school admissions is also still permitted, including to maintain the ‘ethos’ of a school.³³⁹ The State should ensure equal access to quality and inclusive education at all levels to all ethnic minority women and girls.³⁴⁰ National teaching and school curricula should include mandatory content on ethnic minorities’ culture

³³⁶ Dr Malgosia Machowska-Kosiack and Dr Maria Barry, [Experiences of Second-Generation Ethnic Minority Young People in Ireland](#) (2022).

³³⁷ The Act sets out that 25% of the places in a school that is oversubscribed can be reserved for children or grandchildren of past pupils.

³³⁸ The Committee on the Rights of the Child have called for the Act to be amended to prohibit the practice of granting priority admission to children or grandchildren of former students in oversubscribed school. Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland](#), CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6 (28 February 2023) para. 37(a)(i).

³³⁹ See Section 7(3)(a) of the *Equal Status Acts 2000-2018* as amended by the 2018 Act, Section 11(b). Privately funded primary schools and secondary schools which purport to be providing education in an environment which promotes religious values can give preferential treatment to students of a particular religion, and publicly-funded schools providing education in an environment which promotes religious values can refused to admit students on the basis of religion where doing so is considered essential to maintain the ‘ethos’ of the school. In our legal outreach, we have engaged with religious minority families whose children must travel long distances to attend school. To ensure equal access to education, including for children of non-faith backgrounds, we continue to call for review of the relevant legislative provisions: see IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland’s fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 139-140.

³⁴⁰ Meadhbh Ní Dhuinn and Elaine Keane, [‘But you don’t look Irish’: identity constructions of minority ethnic students as ‘non-Irish’ and deficient learners at school in Ireland](#) (2021).

and history to combat stereotypes, build respect for diversity and work to eradicate identity-based bullying.³⁴¹

While we welcome the publication of the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024-2030, we note that concerns have been raised by Travellers and Roma that the Strategy does not adequately address Traveller and Roma children's experiences of exclusion, racism and identity-based bullying.³⁴²

Financial and other support to continue school and enter higher education is required for Traveller, Roma, migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women and girls and other groups where this is a barrier.³⁴³ Adequate resourcing for English language supports; IT equipment; transport to after-school activities; information resources about registering for school; and culturally inclusive and trauma-informed training for teachers is required.³⁴⁴ The State should offer additional integrated supports for ethnic minority women and girls to access further and higher education including through community education.³⁴⁵ Apprenticeships should be more accessible for minority ethnic women.

The Commission recommends that the State amends the legislation on schools' admissions to prohibit the use of the past pupil criterion and to ensure access to education for all girls, including to define what is required to maintain the 'ethos' of a school.

The Commission recommends that the State embeds mandatory antiracism programmes at all levels of the education system as well as in initial teacher training and continuous

³⁴¹ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum. See also Black and Irish, [Building a Black Inclusive Curriculum in Ireland: Evidence of a demonstrated need for a Black inclusive anti-racist curriculum within the Irish education system](#) (2023).

³⁴² Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, [Memorandum on the human rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland](#) (2025) para. 35; National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, [Joint Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on the next National Strategy for Women and Girls, October 2024](#) (2024).

³⁴³ College Connect and National Traveller Women's Forum, [A Community Needs Analysis with Traveller and Roma Students on Their Experiences of Higher Education: A Call to Action for Accountable and Transformative Policy and Practice Throughout the Higher Education System](#) (2025); National Women's Council, [Pre-Budget Submission 2025](#) (2024) p. 19.

³⁴⁴ Nasc, [Submission by Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to inform the National Strategy for Women and Girls](#) (October 2024).

³⁴⁵ Aontas, [Submission to the National Women and Girls Strategy Consultation](#) (2024).

professional development programmes that combat racism and promote intercultural understanding, including content tailored to different groups' experiences.

The Commission recommends that the implementation of the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024-2030 is coordinated with the new national strategy for women and girls, to provide targeted supports to address educational disadvantage experienced by Traveller and Roma women and girls.

The Commission recommends that the State progresses additional integrated supports for structurally vulnerable women and girls to increase access to further and higher education, including through the resourcing of community education programmes.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

We welcome the State's commitment to ensure 'efficient delivery of the Social, Personal and Health Education and Relationship and Sexuality Education (SPHE/RSE) curricula'³⁴⁶ and the consultation on the draft Wellbeing curriculum, including SPHE.³⁴⁷ Progress in reforming SPHE and RSE at primary-level has been slow with the current curriculum in place since its introduction in 1999.³⁴⁸

We welcome the recent publication of the revised SPHE curriculum at junior and senior cycle at Secondary Level and the inclusion of an integral focus on RSE.³⁴⁹ However recent studies show rises in sexually transmitted infections (STIs),³⁵⁰ low knowledge regarding fertility³⁵¹ and

³⁴⁶ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) p. 66.

³⁴⁷ In 2024, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment published a draft Wellbeing Specification for all primary and special schools: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, [Draft Wellbeing Specification For all primary and special schools for consultation](#) (2024). A consultation on the draft curriculum took place in 2024, and a report on the consultation was published in December 2024: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, [Report on the consultation on the Draft Primary Curriculum Specifications](#) (2024).

³⁴⁸ Government of Ireland, [Primary School Curriculum: Social, Personal & Health Education](#) (1999).

³⁴⁹ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, [Updated Junior Cycle SPHE specification](#) (2023); Department of Education, [Curriculum Specification for Senior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education \(SPHE\)](#) (2024).

³⁵⁰ Albeit high knowledge of STI prevention: ESRI, [Sexual Health and Sexual Health Behaviour Among Young Adults in Ireland](#) (February 2025).

³⁵¹ ESRI, [Sexual Health and Sexual Health Behaviour Among Young Adults in Ireland](#) (February 2025).

pregnancy loss,³⁵² low levels of condom use or other forms of contraception among young people in Ireland,³⁵³ challenges in teaching gender equality due to the influence and rise of the manosphere and misogynistic online rhetoric³⁵⁴ and inadequate confidence and skills of teachers to teach high quality RSE.³⁵⁵ Inconsistent implementation of RSE throughout Ireland has been reported with school ethos identified as a factor.³⁵⁶

The pushback by some male students on discussions on gender in the classroom and the influences of misogynist online content in behaviour in school is having a significant impact on male students' perception and treatment of female students and on women teachers.³⁵⁷ These attitudes and influences need to be combatted through the education system at primary and secondary level, ensuring the meaningful involvement of male students in discussions. Healthy relationships,³⁵⁸ reproductive health, consent and LGBTQIA+ relationships must be developed to be included as topics in RSE and SPHE curriculums.³⁵⁹ RSE in Ireland often fails to address the diverse experiences, needs, questions and concerns

³⁵² Education efforts must be evidence-informed, and free of industry influence (e.g. through inappropriate partnerships and/or sponsorship/funding), given the potential for corporations to act or engage in ways or practices that undermine women's health while claiming to be advancing gender equity or women empowerment agendas: Zara Harnett et al., [Enhancing young people's pregnancy loss and fertility awareness and knowledge via schools: a way forward](#) (2025).

³⁵³ ESRI, [Sexual Health and Sexual Health Behaviour Among Young Adults in Ireland](#) (February 2025).

³⁵⁴ Sarah Arnold and Izzy Fox, [Challenges and opportunities in teaching gender equality in Irish secondary schools](#) (2025); This is important to address as recent studies show that younger men, particularly those in their twenties, exhibit a higher adherence to traditional masculine roles compared to older age groups. This trend suggests that younger men may be more influenced by contemporary online figures who promote traditional masculinity: Women's Aid, [Evolving Manhood: Attitudes, Influence and Well-Being Among Irish Men](#) (2024) p. 9; Gender equality education in secondary schools is not prevention, it is intervention as secondary level is too late to commence gender equality education. Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

³⁵⁵ Comhairle na Nóg National Executive, [Take Action: Proposal for the Future of Relationships and Sexuality Education in Ireland](#) (2024).

³⁵⁶ Comhairle na Nóg National Executive, [Take Action: Proposal for the Future of Relationships and Sexuality Education in Ireland](#) (2024).

³⁵⁷ Sarah Arnold and Izzy Fox, [Challenges and opportunities in teaching gender equality in Irish secondary schools](#) (2025); Dr Fiona O'Rourke, Dr Catherine Baker and Dr Darragh McCashin, [Addressing the impact of Masculinity Influencers on Teenage Boys](#) (2024).

³⁵⁸ Women's Aid's '[Too Into You Campaign](#)' aims to teach young people about the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. It was raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum that a similar incentive must be instilled in Ireland's education system.

³⁵⁹ Issues raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

of LGBTQIA+ youth, with evidence indicating that LGBTQIA+ youth are turning to pornography as a source of information for sex.³⁶⁰ RSE must also be fully accessible to disabled girls.³⁶¹

The Commission recommends that the State ensures a focus in primary and secondary curricula on toxic masculinity and misogyny and their impact on female students, women teachers, and girls and women in Irish society.

The Commission recommends for the State to further develop the Secondary Level Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum to reinforce knowledge on LGBTQIA+ relationships, contraceptive use, and reproductive health.

The Commission recommends for the State to increase funding and supports in ongoing teacher professional development in Relationships and Sexuality Education.

The Commission recommends for the State to ensure the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education is grounded in the principles of gender equality, equal access and intersectionality, including independent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are in place.

Employment

Access to decent work

Barriers to the six dimensions of decent work identified by Commission-supported research (access to work; adequate earnings; employee voice; security and stability; equality of opportunity; and health and safety)³⁶² are heightened for structurally vulnerable women.

Barriers include the inadequacy of supports for older women seeking to re/join the labour market such as the ‘community employment’ scheme which provides an income only marginally higher than social welfare; non-recognition of international qualifications;

³⁶⁰ This includes those who are questioning or unsure of their sexual orientation: ESRI, [Use of Pornography by Young Adults in Ireland](#) (2024).

³⁶¹ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum. It is critical that RSE is available in schools for Deaf students and in any institutional setting where Deaf students are resident.

³⁶² IHREC and ERSI, [Monitoring decent work in Ireland](#) (2021).

language requirements; the high-prevalence of zero-hour contracts among ethnic minority, asylum seeking and refugee women; the tokenistic rather than meaningful employment of disabled women.³⁶³ The Pathways to Work Strategy 2020-2025 is ending this year, and we note the commitment to publish a new employment strategy which is focused on supports to those most distant from the labour market.³⁶⁴

There are high levels of gender discrimination in the workplace.³⁶⁵ The State must take proactive action to prevent the exploitation of structurally vulnerable migrant women in unregulated domestic care work,³⁶⁶ by formalising and regulating legal pathways and protecting their right to dignity at work. The exception to the prohibition of zero-hour contracts under the *Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018*,³⁶⁷ and the exclusion of domestic workers from the definition of “employee” in the *Employment Equality Acts 1998* both disproportionately affect migrant women and should be amended.³⁶⁸

We are extremely concerned that the planned introduction of the living wage in 2026 has been delayed until 2029.³⁶⁹ The State must embrace a living wage that can have a transformative effect on addressing income inequality and providing a decent standard of living for women.³⁷⁰ We have previously called for the Minimum Essential Standard of Living method for

³⁶³ Issues raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

³⁶⁴ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland’s Future](#) (2025) p. 102.

³⁶⁵ 20% of employment discrimination claims in 2024 cited gender discrimination as a ground. See Workplace Relations Commission, [Annual Report](#) (2024).

³⁶⁶ IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland: Second Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2023).

³⁶⁷ IHREC, [Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland’s fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 71-73.

³⁶⁸ IHREC, [Comments on Ireland’s 19th National Report on the implementation of the European Social Charter](#) (2022) p. 45.

³⁶⁹ Irish Times, [Planned roll-out of ‘living wage’ for low earners in 2026 faces delay](#) (13 April 2025). The Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality and the Joint Committee on Gender Equality both called for the introduction of a living wage. Citizens’ Assembly, [Report of the Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality](#) (2021) pp. 78-80; Oireachtas Joint Committee on Gender Equality, [Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality: Final Report](#) (2022) pp. 121-123.

³⁷⁰ In 2023, almost one in three women employments (32.1%) had weekly earnings of less than €450, compared with almost one in five male employments (19.4%): CSO, [Women in the Labour Market 2023-2024](#) (2025). In 2022, 25% of women were in low-paid employment in Ireland (using the definition of earning less than two-thirds of the median hourly pay): ESRI, [Gender and labour market inclusion on the island of Ireland](#) (2024) p. xi. See also IHREC, [Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland’s fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 68-70.

determining a living wage to be the foundation of all calculations to ensure the cost of living is the primary consideration.³⁷¹

Collective bargaining and trade union representation play a key role in mitigating the effects of inequality in the labour market for women;³⁷² however, there is no statutory basis for collective bargaining in Ireland.³⁷³ Commission-supported research demonstrates that a statutory right to collective bargaining can be created without conflicting the Constitution.³⁷⁴ The EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages for Member States requires States with a collective bargaining coverage rate below 80% to provide a framework of enabling conditions and an action plan for the implementation of collective bargaining.³⁷⁵ The Programme for Government commits the State to publish an action plan on collective bargaining in 2025,³⁷⁶ and we note the recent launch of a public consultation on the content of the action plan.³⁷⁷

The Commission recommends that the State proactively addresses institutional discrimination and structural barriers impacting women's labour market access, including for older women seeking to re/join the labour market; recognition of international qualifications; language requirements; the prevalence of zero-hour contracts among ethnic minority, asylum seeking and refugee women; and the tokenistic rather than meaningful employment of disabled women.

³⁷¹ IHREC, [Ireland and the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (2023) pp. 29-31.

³⁷² In 2021, 32% of women employees were members of a trade union. Union membership is increasingly becoming a female phenomenon, with 54% of union members being women. However, it is important to note that the proportion of the workforce that is in union membership has declined from a high of over 60% in the early 1980s to about 25% by 2021. John Geary and Maria Belizon, [Union voice in Ireland: First findings from the UCD Working in Ireland Survey, 2021](#) (2022), See also OECD, [Can collective bargaining help close the gender wage gap for women in non-standard jobs?](#) (2020).

³⁷³ The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality and the Joint Committee on Gender Equality both called for a statutory right to collective bargaining to address the inequalities faced by women. Citizens' Assembly, [Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality](#) (2021) pp. 78-80; Oireachtas Joint Committee on Gender Equality, [Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality: Final Report](#) (2022) pp. 123-124.

³⁷⁴ Dr Alan Eustace and Professor David Kenny, [Collective Bargaining and The Irish Constitution—Barrier or Facilitator?](#) (2023).

³⁷⁵ [Directive \(EU\) 2022/2041 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on adequate minimum wages in the European Union](#).

³⁷⁶ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) p. 17.

³⁷⁷ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, [Launch of a public consultation on collective bargaining](#) (14 April 2025).

The Commission recommends the State amends the *Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018* and the *Employment Equality Acts 1998* to strengthen the employment protections for migrant women.

The Commission recommends that the new employment strategy recognises women as a distinct group who need supports to enter the workforce. The strategy must be aligned with the strategies for women and girls, disabled people, LGBTQIA+ people, migrants, and Travellers and Roma.

The Commission recommends that the State recommits to introducing a living wage by 2026 and adopts the Minimum Essential Standard of Living method for determining a living wage as the foundation of all calculations, informed by the active participation of women.

The Commission recommends that the State provides for a statutory right to collective bargaining to support women in challenging employment inequalities and structural discrimination.

Gender pay and pension gaps

The gender pay and pension gaps are approximately 11.2%³⁷⁸ and 36%³⁷⁹ respectively.

Horizontal segregation persists, perpetuating stereotypes.³⁸⁰ We welcome the *Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021* but are concerned that the Act excludes organisations with less than 50 employees and charities not receiving public funding. Under the Act, we have legal powers regarding the conduct of Equality Reviews and Equality Action Plans; however, we have received no additional resource to use these. The legislation does not impose a duty on employers to disaggregate data across multiple equality grounds despite the gender pay gap disproportionately affecting particular groups of women. The EU Pay Transparency Directive addresses some of these issues, and provides the State with an opportunity to go beyond

³⁷⁸ As of March 2024 – PWC, [PwC report on gender pay gap reports of over 550 companies](#) (2024).

³⁷⁹ As of October 2023 – Irish Life, [Women and pensions](#) (2024).

³⁸⁰ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

existing commitments, with the ultimate goal of ensuring access to equal pay for women.³⁸¹ We are of the view that the delayed online portal, where organisations are required to report the progress they are making to address the gender pay gap, should provide accessible disaggregated equality data to inform gender-sensitive employment policies due to the evidence that the gender pay gap is wider for Black women, Traveller women, disabled women, non-Irish women and other structurally vulnerable groups.³⁸²

The gender pension gap is linked to the gender pay gap, care inequality,³⁸³ and the male breadwinner model of welfare.³⁸⁴ Women are less likely to have a private pension, and are more likely to receive the non-contributory pension from the State, as opposed to the higher, contributory alternative.³⁸⁵ IHREC-funded research has raised concerns about the potential negative impacts of the Government's planned auto-enrolment pension scheme³⁸⁶ on the gender pension gap and on the value placed on care.³⁸⁷

The Commission recommends that gender pay gap reporting is extended through ambitious transposition of the EU Pay Transparency Directive to increase the scope of organisations covered and mandate the collection and reporting of data across the grounds of discrimination in the *Employment Equality Acts*. In ambitiously transposing the legislation,

³⁸¹ The EU Directive on Pay Transparency, to be transposed by 7 June 2026, provides for intersectional discrimination, requires employers to consider the needs of disabled workers and obliges employers to publish gender pay gap data by 'categories of worker' including job functions or grades. European Council, [Gender Pay Gap: Council adopts new rules on pay transparency](#) (2023).

³⁸² See discussion in IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p. 56.

³⁸³ Women are often unable to take on paid work due to disproportionate caring responsibilities, meaning they do not have the opportunity to accumulate private pensions or qualify for the State (Contributory) pension. IHREC, [Policy Statement on Care](#) (2023) pp. 20-21.

³⁸⁴ Many women derive pension benefits through their partner under the 'qualified adults' system, which perpetuates their economic dependence. IHREC, [Policy Statement on Care](#) (2023) p. 20.

³⁸⁵ See discussion in IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p. 57.

³⁸⁶ The auto-enrolment is a pension savings scheme for certain employees who are not currently paying into a pension. They will be automatically included in the scheme but can opt out after 6 months. Under the scheme, the employee, employer, and Government all pay a certain amount into the employee's pension fund.

³⁸⁷ National Women's Council and Tasc, [Still Stuck in the Gap December 2024 Pensions Auto-enrolment from a gender and care lens](#) (2024).

the State should exceed the EU Directive on Gender Pay Transparency's minimum requirements particularly on intersectional discrimination.

The Commission recommends that the State urgently addresses pension inequality in Ireland, including through the introduction of a Universal State Pension system.

Sexual harassment in the workplace

We welcome the ratification of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention on Violence and Harassment, 2019, (No.190)³⁸⁸ and the protection provided by the *Employment Equality Act 1998* for employees from employment-related sexual harassment based on one or more of the other prohibited grounds.³⁸⁹ Research shows that sexual harassment in the workplace is underreported due to the fear of retaliation and victimisation.³⁹⁰ There is an inability of victims and survivors who require legal assistance in sexual harassment cases to access legal aid.

We have published a Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment and Harassment at Work as a practical guidance for employers, organisations, trade union and employees on what are sexual harassment, prevention and adequate procedures. We have called for monitoring of policy effectiveness, adequate training for managers, supervisors and all staff on strategies to prevent harassment and a complaints procedure with regular reviews.³⁹¹ It is also important to note that a national counselling initiative for victims/survivors of sexual harassment is absent.

³⁸⁸ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, [Protection for Workers from Violence and Harassment](#) (2022).

³⁸⁹ The 1998 Act defines sexual harassment as any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person. The prohibited grounds are: Civil Status; Family Status; Sexual Orientation; Religion; Age; Disability; Race; and Membership of the Traveller community: [Employment Equality Act, 1998](#).

³⁹⁰ Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, [Workplace Sexual Harassment & Abuse](#) (2021). Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

³⁹¹ IHREC, [Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment and Harassment at Work](#) (2022).

Following the disclosure of sexual harassment of women in the Defence Forces by the Women of Honour advocacy group, the Independent Review Group on Dignity and Equality issues in the Defence Forces was established and the publication of a report followed in 2023.³⁹² The report highlighted current and ongoing patterns of unacceptable behaviour in the defence forces, including bullying, discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. It identified a ‘culture of discrimination towards women,’ including hypermasculinities and deeply misogynistic attitudes. In relation to the investigation of complaints, the system is found to be profoundly lacking, with victims and survivors describing the consequences of reporting as ‘potentially career ending.’

This report provides another example of the failings of the State in relation to institutional abuse. The Independent Review Group notes this is not historical abuse, but ongoing persistent and pervasive behaviour requiring ‘immediate and significant’ action. Thus we welcome the recent establishment of the External Oversight Body of the Defence Forces³⁹³ and the Tribunal of Inquiry³⁹⁴ which will examine the effectiveness of the complaints processes in the Defence Forces concerning workplace issues relating to discrimination, bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and sexual misconduct. However, we emphasise that all processes and development of policies by the Tribunal and External Oversight Body must be underpinned by human rights and equality standards.

³⁹² The report identifies a number of patterns of unacceptable behaviour in the Defence Forces, including: sexualised language; sexual gesticulating; indecent exposure; spiking alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks with drugs; grooming; physical assault; sexual assault; and rape. In a benchmarking survey accompanying the report, 25% of respondents reported experiences of sexual harassment. 88% of those who reported experiencing sexual harassment were women; 76% of survey respondents who experienced unwanted physical contact or sexual assault did not report the incident(s). The main reason for not reporting was that the respondent did not think there was any point. Of those who reported instances of unwanted physical contact or sexual assault, no respondent (0%) felt satisfied with the outcome. The report notes the Department of Defence’s assurance that An Garda Síochána has been involved in investigating incidents of child sexual abuse and that two of the complaints were submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions. However, the authors of the report were not aware of any prosecutions which had taken place or which are currently ongoing: Department of Defence, [Report of the Independent Review Group on Dignity and Equality issues in the Defence Forces](#) (2023).

³⁹³ Per recommendation 4.3.1 by the report of the Independent Review Group published on 28 March 2023, which was established to examine issues relating to allegations of discrimination, bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and any form of sexual misconduct in the Defence Forces. This is provided for by the *Defence (Amendment) Act 2024: External Oversight Body of the Defence Forces* (2025).

³⁹⁴ [Defence Forces Tribunal](#).

The Commission recommends that our Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment and Harassment at Work should inform the development and implementation of policies and procedures that establish working environments free of harassment in which the dignity of everyone is respected.

The Commission recommends that the operation of the Defence Forces Tribunal should ensure an effective, human rights and equality-based inquiry, with the involvement of rights holders and their representative organisations.

Pregnancy related discrimination

We previously provided legal representation in a complaint regarding pregnancy related discrimination in the Defence Forces, in which the Workplace Relations Commission Adjudication Officer called out the lack of pregnancy related discrimination protections in the Handbook for the Defence Forces.³⁹⁵ We welcome the inclusion of harassment and sexual harassment in the recently updated Code of Conduct for interactions between members of the Defence Forces which detail the required standards of interpersonal behaviours expected of all serving members of the Defence Forces. However, it continues to exclude pregnancy related discrimination.³⁹⁶ This is concerning given the prevalence of pregnancy-related discrimination in workplaces in Ireland.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ Workplace Relations Commission, [O'Rourke v Minister for Defence, ADJ-00007375](#), 2 December 2020; IHREC, [Captain Successfully Challenges Pregnancy Related Discrimination by Defence Forces](#) (2020); we emphasise that all processes and development of policies by the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces must be underpinned by international human rights and equality standards and the statutory obligation of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty for public bodies under Section 42 of the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014* which requires public bodies, in the performance of their functions, to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and protect human rights of staff and people availing of their services and to assess, address and report on progress in relation to equality and human rights in their strategic plan and annual reports in a manner that is accessible to the public: Section 42 of the [Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014](#).

³⁹⁶ Interim Grievance Manager of the Defence Forces, [Code of Conduct](#) (April 2025).

³⁹⁷ Workplace Relations Commission, [Annual Report 2024](#) (2025) pp. 87-89; Less favourable treatment of pregnant employees, employees on maternity leave or employees recently returning from maternity leave is surprisingly still commonplace both in Irish and European society in spite of it being clearly outlawed for many years. The Annual Reports of the Workplace Relations Commission show, year on year, a consistently high number of enquiries about pregnancy and maternity-related issues from women who have experienced

The Commission recommends the amendment of the Code of Conduct for Interactions Between Members of the Defence Forces to include safeguards against pregnancy-related discrimination.

Childcare and parental leave

Ireland has a persistently poor track record on the provision of affordable childcare and places an overreliance on the market to deliver care.³⁹⁸ A lack of available, affordable, and accessible childcare is a significant barrier to women's employment, in particular for lone-parents.³⁹⁹ Irish women spend 5.7 years less in paid employment than men, a gap wider than the EU average of 4.3.⁴⁰⁰ Measures such as the four-day working week should be advanced.⁴⁰¹

We welcome recent investments in childcare, but systemic change requires the State transitioning to a public model by 2030 in line with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's concluding observations,⁴⁰² Sustainable Development Goal 4,⁴⁰³ and Recommendation 8 of the Citizens' Assembly.⁴⁰⁴ In the meantime, the State should increase spending on Early Childhood Education and Care ('ECEC') in successive budgets, with a view to increasing its spending to match EU and OECD averages and reach the UNICEF target of 1% of Gross National Income.⁴⁰⁵

difficulties in their workplace as a result of their pregnancy or something related to their pregnancy: Marguerite Bolger et al., [Employment equality law 2nd edition](#) (2022) section 4-50.

³⁹⁸ Privatisation has resulted in care being defined as a 'product', removing its relational nature and institutionalising commercial norms. Seeking to make a profit from care is antithetical to its values. Care is driven by human needs and experiences and therefore, it does not fit into market logic. IHREC, [Policy Statement on Care](#) (2023) pp. 29-31.

³⁹⁹ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁴⁰⁰ Eurostat, [Duration of Working Life](#) (2023).

⁴⁰¹ We have recommended that the State publishes its research on this and progresses the use of pilot projects in consultation with employers, workers and trade unions: IHREC [Policy Statement on Care](#) (2023) p. 23.

⁴⁰² Increase the availability of affordable childcare options for working parents, particularly for those in disadvantaged situations, including by significantly increasing the resources allocated to childcare and transitioning towards a publicly funded model of childcare, in line with the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality: Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland](#) (2023) para. 26(d).

⁴⁰³ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, [SDG Goal 4: Targets and Indicators](#) (2023).

⁴⁰⁴ Citizens' Assembly, [Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality](#) (2021) p. 61.

⁴⁰⁵ IHREC [Policy Statement on Care](#) (2023) p. 56.

We welcome the increase in statutory parental leave, but entitlements should be further expanded to be equally available to lone-parent families, with payments reflective of the rising cost of living.⁴⁰⁶ Recently published Commission-supported research has found that only around half of fathers avail of Paternity leave⁴⁰⁷ and a quarter take Parent's Leave⁴⁰⁸ compared to two-thirds of mothers.⁴⁰⁹ The report recommends policy measures including increasing the payment rate of the benefit, promoting awareness of leave entitlement, and addressing workplace attitudes towards fathers taking leave. We note the Government has committed to encourage employers to publish statistics of the take up of parental leave by women and men, consideration should be given to placing this on a statutory footing.⁴¹⁰

The Commission recommends that the State creates a detailed, ambitious and adequately resourced roadmap on transitioning to a public model of Early Childhood Education and Care by 2030.

The Commission recommends that provision is made for parental leave schemes which are adequate both in terms of length and payment; apply equally to children in lone-parent families; are non-transferable to encourage sharing of responsibilities; and are coordinated with Early Childhood Education and Care to eliminate periods where neither paid leave nor affordable childcare is available.

The Commission recommends that the State undertakes an awareness campaign promoting the uptake of parental leave and paternity leave by men.

⁴⁰⁶ IHREC, [Policy Statement on Care](#) (2023) pp. 22-23. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recommended that the State should review existing parental leave schemes with a view to ensuring equitable and adequate parental leave benefits, in terms of both length and payments, and ensuring that they apply equally for children in single-parent families: [Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland](#), E/C.12/IRL/CO/4 (20 March 2024) para. 37(a).

⁴⁰⁷ Paternity leave gives new parents 2 weeks off work, and they can start the leave any time in the first 6 months after the baby's birth.

⁴⁰⁸ Parent's leave entitles each parent to 9 weeks' leave during the first 2 years of a child's life.

⁴⁰⁹ The related welfare benefits paid are flat-rate so income-related concerns are a significant barrier to higher take-up rates along with workplace norms: IHREC and ESRI, [Child Related Leave: Usage and Implications for Gender Equality](#) (2025).

⁴¹⁰ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) p. 98.

Health

Accessibility, availability, affordability and quality of health services

We are strongly of the view that State efforts to ensure accessible, available, affordable and quality health services for women and girls are falling significantly short of human rights obligations.⁴¹¹ The healthcare system has severe capacity issues at every level, resulting in shortages in primary, community and hospital care; in- and outpatient appointments; scheduled procedures and emergency services. The State is failing to allocate resources in a way that ensures the availability of services as of right, rather than contingent on ability to pay. Ireland's two-tier healthcare system does not provide equitable care with rights-based universal healthcare (Sláintecare) significantly delayed and not gender proofed.⁴¹² The result is a system in crisis, with concerning health inequalities for women and girls in lower income households and structurally vulnerable groups. Despite recent improvements including sixteen new gynaecology clinics,⁴¹³ substantial barriers remain. The current gynaecology waiting list stands at 36,884 patients.⁴¹⁴ A systemic change and cultural shift is required to dismantle paternalistic, patriarchal institutional legacies, including the practice of symphysiotomy and cervical cancer screening scandal. We regret the institutional undermining of independent women's health policy, research and practice through the dissolution of the Women's Health Council in 2009 as an austerity measure by the State during the financial crisis.

⁴¹¹ See discussion in IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 123-130.

⁴¹² We note the recent publication of Sláintecare 2025+ which "sets out 23 individual Sláintecare Projects and the milestones to be achieved on the path to achieving universal healthcare across three priority areas: improving access to health and social care services; improving service quality for patients and service users; and increasing capacity of the health and social care service". While this Plan is welcome it needs to be prioritised for implementation; and supported by adequate resourcing. Government of Ireland, [Path to Universal Healthcare: Sláintecare & Programme for Government 2025+](#) (2025) p. 32.

⁴¹³ The State has recently committed to expand the number of gynaecology clinics by 3, to have 19 clinics by the end of 2025: Government of Ireland, [Path to Universal Healthcare: Sláintecare & Programme for Government 2025+](#) (2025) p. 32.

⁴¹⁴ HSE, [National Waiting Lists](#) (2025).

While we welcome the Women's Health Action Plan 2024-2025,⁴¹⁵ the plan and a successor plan have not been specifically referred to in the Programme for Government 2025. Further, we note concerns that the Action Plan fails to fully consider the health inequalities experienced by structurally vulnerable women.⁴¹⁶ The State must improve accessibility of healthcare to structurally vulnerable women and girls including disabled women, Traveller, Roma and other ethnic minorities.⁴¹⁷ We are concerned about provision of healthcare to transgender women and girls,⁴¹⁸ who face a traumatic, up to 10+ years, waiting period⁴¹⁹ with women seeking international protection not eligible for care.⁴²⁰ With regard to fertility treatment services, we note the commitment to extend eligibility to State-funded provision and are concerned about eligibility restrictions, including restrictions with a discriminatory effect on women over 41.⁴²¹

The Commission recommends that the State urgently prioritises implementation of the transformation to a universal healthcare service, Sláintecare, including through significantly increasing public spending on women's and girls' health to meet the required levels for long-term reconfiguration of the healthcare system and to end disproportionate reliance on private healthcare services.

The Commission recommends that the State develops a new Women's Health Action Plan, which includes targeted measures to address health inequalities experienced by structurally

⁴¹⁵ Department of Health, [Women's Health Action Plan 2024-2025 Phase 2: An Evolution in Women's Health](#) (18 April 2024).

⁴¹⁶ National Women's Council, [General Election Manifesto 2024: Supporting policy document](#) (2024) p. 2. Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁴¹⁷ IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 128-129.

⁴¹⁸ We have repeatedly stressed that the failure to provide universal, affordable care for transgender people is a violation of the right to health. A lack of timely access to services can create mental health issues, due to the added stress of waiting lists, not-fit-for-service gender clinics, transphobia, and delayed intervention. IHREC, [Ireland and the 6th Monitoring Cycle of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#) (2024) pp. 21-22; IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 129-130.

⁴¹⁹ The Beacon, ['National Gender Service waiting list surpasses a decade'](#) (2024).

⁴²⁰ TGEU, [Trans Health Map](#) (2024). Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁴²¹ HSE, [Getting IVF and other specialist treatment through the HSE](#). IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p. 133.

vulnerable groups of women. The Action Plan must be aligned with the strategies for women and girls, disabled people, LGBTQIA+ people, migrants, and Travellers and Roma. The Plan should commit to further resource specialist women's health services especially gynaecology; and remove age-based, weight-based and partnership-based discrimination from free fertility treatment.

The Commission recommends that the State develops and adequately resources rights-based, evidence-based healthcare for transgender children, young people and adults, as a matter of urgency.

Abortion services

Despite the legal advancements that have been made to make abortion more accessible in Ireland,⁴²² there remains significant barriers to equitable and accessible abortion services. These barriers include the uneven geographical distribution of services (particularly in rural areas),⁴²³ the mandatory wait periods,⁴²⁴ fatal foetal abnormality criteria⁴²⁵ and non-providing GPs and 'conscientious obstructors'.⁴²⁶ Additional barriers have also been identified by ethnic

⁴²² The [Health \(Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy\) Act 2018](#) came into effect in Ireland on 1 January 2019. We prepared a submission as part of the review: IHREC, [Submission to the Review of the Health \(Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy\) Act 2018](#) (2022). [The Health \(Termination of Pregnancy Services\) \(Safe Access Zones\) Act 2024](#) was signed into Law by the President on 7 May 2024. We submitted legislative observations on the General Scheme of the [Health \(Termination of Pregnancy Services\) \(Safe Access Zones\) Bill 2022](#) – IHREC, [Submission on the General Scheme of the Health \(Termination of Pregnancy Services\) \(Safe Access Zones\) Bill](#) (2022).

⁴²³ J Mishtal et al., [Abortion policy implementation in Ireland: Lessons from the community model of care](#) (2022) pp. 16-18.

⁴²⁴ D Chakravarty et al., [Restrictive points of entry into abortion care in Ireland: a qualitative study of expectations and experiences with the service](#) (2023) p. 7: "I got an appointment for Thursday. After the first appointment I had to wait until Monday. There was a weekend in between. So, it ended up being a four-day waiting period. It was not great. But what can you do? ... I do believe that the three-day waiting period is unnecessary." IHREC, [Submission to the Review of the Health \(Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy\) Act 2018](#) (2022) pp. 15-16. Medical professionals have expressed concerns that mandatory waiting periods can impact access to health care and completion of care, for example if the initial termination fails, particularly for women close to the 12 weeks' gestation limit. Of concern are reports that women are timing out of eligibility for care as a direct result of the mandatory waiting period.

⁴²⁵ D Chakravarty et al., [Restrictive points of entry into abortion care in Ireland: a qualitative study of expectations and experiences with the service](#) (2023) p. 9.

⁴²⁶ D Chakravarty et al., [Restrictive points of entry into abortion care in Ireland: a qualitative study of expectations and experiences with the service](#) (2023) p. 6: In some cases, non-providing GPs have actively tried

minority women, migrant women, asylum-seekers, undocumented individuals, and temporary residents such as international students or women from Northern Ireland.⁴²⁷

We continue to have concerns regarding the lack of political will to fully and effectively implement the recommendations⁴²⁸ of the State commissioned an Independent Review of the *Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018*.⁴²⁹ While the Programme for Government commits to ensuring that maternity hospitals provide equitable access to termination of pregnancy services,⁴³⁰ there is no specific commitment to implement all the recommendations of the review. This is deeply concerning because as noted by the Independent Review, a significant number of women are continuing to travel abroad for abortion services due to the barriers outlined above.⁴³¹

The Commission recommends that the State prioritises the full implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Review of the *Health (Regulation of Termination of*

to dissuade their patients from accessing abortions. As a 37-year-old woman in Dublin recalls: “*I guess it was with my GP who didn’t provide the services but tried to talk me out of it. I was shocked by it. She made me feel like a bad person for wanting an abortion. With the change in legislation, I thought GPs would have to provide the services. I didn’t hope that they would refuse.*” Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁴²⁷ The current framework provides abortion care for free at the point of access to individuals with either a Personal Public Service Number (‘PPSN’) or an Irish address. This creates potential barriers to access for groups, who may not have a PPSN, including: asylum-seekers, migrants, and undocumented individuals, temporary residents such as international students or women from Northern Ireland. See, IHREC, [Submission to the Review of the Health \(Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy\) Act 2018](#) (2022). Additionally, language barriers and translation, racism and lack of proper pathways to care have been identified. See, D Chakravarty et al., [Restrictive points of entry into abortion care in Ireland: a qualitative study of expectations and experiences with the service](#) (2023) pp. 9-11.

⁴²⁸ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum. See also IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (2024) pp. 131-133. See, 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](#) (2023) p. 69.

⁴²⁹ Section 7 of the [Health \(Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy\) Act 2018](#) provides that a review of the operation of the Act be carried out by the Minister for Health no later than three years after service commencement. See, M. O’Shea, [The Independent Review of the Operation of the Health \(Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy\) Act 2018](#) (2023).

⁴³⁰ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland’s Future](#) (2025) p. 87.

⁴³¹ M. O’Shea, [The Independent Review of the Operation of the Health \(Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy\) Act 2018](#) (2023). The National Women’s Council has noted that at least 860 women travelled to the UK for abortions since the legislation was introduced. National Women’s Council, [Everyone who needs an abortion must be able to access it: NWC](#) (2023).

Pregnancy) Act 2018 to ensure that women have equitable and accessible abortion services in Ireland.

Maternal health

The new National Maternity Hospital has been repeatedly delayed.⁴³² We welcome the commitment to develop a successor to the National Maternity Strategy.⁴³³ The State must ensure equal access to secular, safe maternal healthcare for all women and girls. For every 100 maternities, there are approximately 31.2 hospitalisations for the four main causes of maternal morbidity.⁴³⁴ Noting evidence of increased risk and poorer outcomes for certain groups, maternal healthcare should be accessible, appropriate and safe for structurally vulnerable women.⁴³⁵ We welcome the recommendation of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for Ireland to ensure equal access, in particular in rural areas, to maternal health services (antenatal, perinatal and postnatal care) for Traveller, Roma, migrant women and women from minority groups with the aim of reducing maternal and child mortality rates.⁴³⁶

The Commission recommends that the State provides secular, safe maternal healthcare for all women and girls.

⁴³² Irish Independent, [New national maternity hospital due 'late 2028 to early 2029', as health officials tell of 'lessons learnt'](#) (12 November 2024).

⁴³³ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) pp. 87-88. Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum raised concern around the implementation of the previous National Maternity Strategy, due to the lack of ring-fenced funding.

⁴³⁴ The four main causes are: haemorrhage, hypertension, sepsis and thrombosis. Maternal Morbidity Advisory Group, [Maternal morbidity and mortality: an iceberg phenomenon](#) (2022).

⁴³⁵ Women born outside Ireland accounted for 23.7% of all maternities from 2009–21 but 31% of all direct and indirect maternal deaths: MDE Ireland, [Confidential maternal death enquiry in Ireland, report for 2019 – 2021](#) (2023). Non-Irish women faced barriers in maternity hospitals including difficulties in accessing interpreters and cultural differences: Dr Cathy Rowland et al., [Irish Maternity: A Changing Ethnic Landscape](#) (2021) 114 Irish Medical Journal 265. Expectant mothers from Roma communities face barriers at all stages, including lack of access to free maternal healthcare, primary healthcare and medical cards; racism and discrimination; limited culturally appropriate information; and inconsistent postnatal care: Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, [Le Romneango Sfato. Roma women's voices: experiences of maternal health services in Ireland](#) (2023). Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁴³⁶ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland](#), E/C.12/IRL/CO/4 (20 March 2024) para. 47(b).

The Commission recommends that the new National Maternity Strategy includes targeted measures for ensuring equal access to maternal healthcare across Ireland for structurally vulnerable groups including investment in the prevention of maternal mortality and morbidity amongst ethnic minority women.

Mental health

Contrary to the UNCRPD, mental health legislation, policy and funding is institutionally separated (in the Department of Health) from other disability legislation, policy and funding (in the Department of Children, Disability and Equality). Provision of mental health services in Ireland are marked by persistent underfunding reflected in long waiting lists, inappropriate treatments, gaps between public and private services and poor health outcomes.⁴³⁷ Concerns have been raised by civil society regarding access to perinatal healthcare⁴³⁸ and diagnostic overshadowing.⁴³⁹

There is a lack of gender-sensitivity in mental health provision in Ireland.⁴⁴⁰ While the Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone includes gender-sensitive approaches as a recommendation and key action, gender-sensitive mental healthcare has yet to be embedded in the Health Service Executive's ('HSE') National Service Plans.⁴⁴¹ A gender-sensitive approach to mental health requires an analysis of the individual and group mental health

⁴³⁷ IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (2024) pp. 133-137; IHREC, [Ireland and the Rights of the Child](#) (2022) pp. 73-78; IHREC, [Submission on the General Scheme of the Mental Health \(Amendment\) Bill](#) (2022).

⁴³⁸ For example, concerns were raised regarding the absence of a mother and baby unit for mothers requiring treatment for mental health conditions during the perinatal period, resulting in mother and baby separation. (Disability Advisory Committee, April 2025). Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁴³⁹ For example, dismissal of physical health symptoms mistakenly attributed to mental health conditions, autonomy regarding treatment, instability of treatment options in mental health services with an overreliance on medication and lack of structured and stable support systems within the systems (Disability Advisory Committee, April 2025).

⁴⁴⁰ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁴⁴¹ Department of Health, [Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone](#) (2022) p. 95. The 2022-2024 Implementation Plan, and subsequently the 2025-2027 Implementation Plan, committed to including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on women's mental health in HSE Service Plans; however, KPIs have not yet been developed. The 2025-2027 Implementation Plan commits to developing a toolkit for embedding women's mental health, including specific actions and indicators, by 2026. Department of Health, [Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone: Implementation Plan 2025-2027](#) (2022) p. 29 HSE, [National Service Plan 2023](#) (2023).

impacts of discrimination, inequality and human rights abuses; an understanding of the barriers faced by structurally vulnerable groups;⁴⁴² the provision of evidence-based, trauma-informed interventions;⁴⁴³ access to independent advocacy; and a diversification of mental health professions including at senior grades.

The continued dominance of the medical model prevents women with psychosocial disabilities from accessing their rights.⁴⁴⁴ Progress in this area has been hampered by delays in legislative reform,⁴⁴⁵ meaning that women with psychosocial disabilities continue to be subject to seclusion and restraint;⁴⁴⁶ family separation;⁴⁴⁷ disproportionate electroconvulsive

⁴⁴² Qualitative research undertaken by the National Women's Council has noted particular issues with access for victims and survivors of DSGBV; women with addiction issues; women seeking international protection; transgender women; and women in rural areas. National Women's Council, [Gender-Sensitive Mental Health: Developing Policy and Services Which Meet the Particular Needs of Women and Girls](#) (2023) p. 11. Roma women have also been highlighted as a group experiencing acute mental health issues; 1 in 3 Roma women report that they did not experience one day in the previous month where their mental health was not poor. Pavée Point Traveller and Roma Centre, [Le Romneango Sfato. Roma women's voices: experiences of maternal health services in Ireland](#) (2023) p. 3. Traveller women are five times more likely to die by suicide than the general population. Traveller and Roma coalition, [Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth: Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities: Ireland's Fifth Periodic Report 2023](#) (2023) Appendix II. In this connection, we welcome the allocation of 'priority groups' in the policy framework and supporting documents and recommend that this priority focus is maintained during the implementation phase. Department of Health, [Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone](#) (2022) p. 29.

⁴⁴³ For example, women have higher rates of affective disorders and may opt for talk therapies over other treatments. National Women's Council, [Gender-Sensitive Mental Health: Developing Policy and Services Which Meet the Particular Needs of Women and Girls](#) (2023) p. 19.

⁴⁴⁴ IHREC is the Independent Monitoring Mechanism under the UNCRC and the incoming Coordinating National Preventive Mechanism under OPCAT.

⁴⁴⁵ Following review of the *Mental Health Act 2001* in 2015, the Draft Heads of Bill for the *Mental Health (Amendment) Bill* were published in 2021, while the Pre-Legislative Scrutiny Report was published in October 2022. In September 2024, the Government published the Mental Health Bill, which is currently before the Houses of the Oireachtas. [Mental Health Bill 2024](#). See also IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (2022) pp. 63-64. IHREC, [Submission on the General Scheme of the Mental Health \(Amendment\) Bill](#) (2022). Urgent action is required to reform legislation in line with international standards, including the *Mental Health Bill 2024*, the *Criminal Law (Insanity) Act 2006* and the *Disability Act 2005*.

⁴⁴⁶ At present, certain practices of seclusion and restraints are considered to be within the scope of the *Mental Health Act 2001*, which demonstrate the need for timely reform. Disabled Women Ireland, [Submission to the Public Consultation on the Review of the Mental Health Act 2001](#) (2021) p. 6.

⁴⁴⁷ Concerns have been raised that inpatient mental health care operates to unreasonably separate mothers from children shortly after birth. Disabled Women Ireland, [Submission to the Public Consultation on the Review of the Mental Health Act 2001](#) (2021) pp. 6-7.

therapy compared to men;⁴⁴⁸ reduced decision-making capacity,⁴⁴⁹ and deprivation of liberty due to restricted movement in inpatient psychiatric facilities.⁴⁵⁰ We remain concerned about the absence of robust protection mechanisms,⁴⁵¹ and the absence of effective and independent oversight of *de facto* detention in mental health establishments, and healthcare and residential settings. The absence of protection of liberty legislation continues to be of significant concern. Despite the development of proposals in 2016, legislative proposals are only now at consultation stage with no timeframe for the publication of a Bill.⁴⁵² There is a

⁴⁴⁸ Disabled Women Ireland, [Submission to the Public Consultation on the Review of the Mental Health Act 2001](#) (2021) p. 6.

⁴⁴⁹ Advanced Healthcare Directives set out instructions in relation to preferred healthcare treatments. They are applied if a person loses capacity to make healthcare decisions but have limited applicability in mental health contexts. Despite the opportunity for amendment in the *Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Act 2022*, this form of discrimination against women with psycho-social disabilities remains in operation. Disabled Women Ireland, [Submission to the Public Consultation on the Review of the Mental Health Act 2001](#) (2021) p. 5.

⁴⁵⁰ The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities have stated that the detention of persons on the grounds of their actual or perceived impairment is discriminatory in nature and amounts to arbitrary deprivation of liberty and is therefore incompatible with Article 14 of the UNCRPD. Involuntary commitment of persons with disabilities on health-care grounds also contradicts the principle of free and informed consent to healthcare under Article 25 of the UNCRPD. The Committee on the UNCRPD has repeatedly called on States to repeal provisions that permit involuntary detention of disabled persons in mental health institutions. In 2023, 2,516 people were involuntary detained in mental health institutions, and 1,114 involuntary detention orders were renewed. Mental Health Commission, [Annual Report 2023](#) (2024) p. 64. We have previously recommended that reform of mental health legislation is accompanied by other measures to ensure less restrictive forms of treatment in the community are available, with the ultimate aim of eradicating coercive treatment of persons with psychosocial disabilities. IHREC, [Submission on the General Scheme of the Mental Health \(Amendment\) Bill](#) (2022) pp. 19-20. We have also recommended that reform of mental health law must be accompanied by a suite of measures – including strategies, action plans, rules and codes of practice – aimed at ensuring less restrictive forms of treatment in the community are available and the ultimate eradication of coercion in the treatment of people with psychosocial disabilities. IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (June 2022) p. 65.

⁴⁵¹ The *Mental Health Act* does not provide for a mechanism to handle individual complaints, and there have been calls to establish an effective complaints mechanism to safeguard persons receiving mental health services. IHREC, [Access to Justice: Implementation of Article 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (2024) p. 26. The Department of Health carried out a public consultation on a general scheme of the *Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards Bill* in December 2017. The draft Bill has not yet been published and there does not appear to be a clear timeframe for its publication.

⁴⁵² In April 2025, the Department of Health launched a consultation to close on 30 May 2025 to inform the development of Protection of Liberty Safeguards Legislation. Such has been the appalling delay in this legislation that IHREC made a submission to a previous consultation in 2018: [Submission to the public consultation on Deprivation of Liberty: Safeguard Proposals](#) (2018). In April 2024, the Law Reform Commission ('LRC') published the *Adult Safeguarding Bill 2024* which aims to introduce a statutory safeguarding framework for at-risk adults in Ireland. As highlighted by the LRC, there is a limited amount of legislation in Ireland that is relevant to adult safeguarding, with significant gaps remaining across a range of services and settings, including hospitals, residential centres for older people, residential centres for adults with disabilities, residential centres for international protection, etc. The proposed *Adult Safeguarding Bill 2024* should align with forthcoming legislation on the protection of liberty and mental health reform. See Law Reform Commission, [Report: a regulatory framework for adult safeguarding: Executive Summary](#) (2024) para. 258.

need to prioritise rights-based mental health and protection of liberty legislation, along with systemic reform to progress de-institutionalisation.

Structurally vulnerable groups of women and girls have particularly poor mental health outcomes in Ireland, linked with the systemic discrimination that they face in many aspects of their lives.⁴⁵³ The State must address structural determinants of women's and girls' mental health using an intersectional, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. It must take preventative measures to eliminate mental health conditions which arise as a direct result of individual or systemic discrimination and human rights violations.

The Commission recommends that the State comprehensively reviews mental health legislation and develops protection of liberty safeguards legislation, aligning to international standards, particularly the UNCRPD, in consultation with disabled people, and provides for the establishment of an independent complaints' mechanism.

The Commission recommends that the State immediately progresses its plans to develop a toolkit for embedding women's mental health in policy-making, in consultation with disabled women, including those with lived experience of mental health services.

The Commission recommends that the State includes priority and intersectional targets and indicators on improving the mental health of structurally vulnerable women and girls across all relevant national equality and health strategies, accompanied by investment in specifically tailored, accessible, affordable and quality community mental health services.

⁴⁵³ Including Travellers, Roma, LGBTQIA+ people, ethnic minorities, migrants, those in the international protection system, victims of human trafficking, those experiencing homelessness, and people with addiction issues. See IHREC, [Ireland and the 6th Monitoring Cycle of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#) (2024) pp. 20-21; IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (2024) pp. 135-137. The experience of structurally vulnerable groups accessing mental health care was raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

Data

The State collects insufficient data to adequately address the structural issues facing women and girl's health.⁴⁵⁴

The Commission recommends that the State routinely publishes information on the proportion of the overall health budget spent on women's and girls' health, including disaggregated data on public spending on sexual health, maternal health, fertility, menopause, gender-based violence, and mental health.

Economic empowerment

Equality budgeting

We recognise the importance of comprehensive equality budgeting⁴⁵⁵ to ensure programming and budgetary decisions are adequately equality proofed and to monitor the impacts of spending on specific groups of women. However, we reiterate our concerns that the State's approach to equality budgeting has been deficient.⁴⁵⁶ In the recent Budgetary Revised Estimates process for the Public Service, 27 of 45 Votes report equality budgeting objectives and performance indicators, and there is a noticeable absence of intersectional considerations across the metrics.⁴⁵⁷ The Parliamentary Budgetary Office have found a 'lack

⁴⁵⁴ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁴⁵⁵ Equality budgeting relates to and progresses the positive obligation on all public bodies under Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect human rights. Equality budgeting is reflected in two key outputs each year in Ireland: the [Revised Estimates Volume for the Public Services \(the REV\)](#) and the [Public Service Performance Report \(PSPR\)](#). The REV is published in mid-December, providing detail on the allocations that were announced in the Budget in October and contains information on equality budgeting objectives and performance indicators from all Government Departments, and sets out targets for each of these metrics for the upcoming year. The PSPR provides information on how each Department performed in the achievement of their REV targets for the preceding year and is typically published in June.

⁴⁵⁶ IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (2024) pp. 48-51.

⁴⁵⁷ According to the Parliamentary Budget Office ('PBO'), the equality budgeting objectives within the REV are, for the vast majority of Votes, not divided into specific equality dimensions. There are nine dimensions under equality budgeting tagging by Departments: gender, disability, minority groups, health and well-being services,

of explicit linking of metrics with their equality dimensions’ which reduces transparency.⁴⁵⁸ In the absence of a statutory basis for equality budgeting and an overarching strategy, Government programming and budgetary decisions are not adequately equality proofed which impacts the extent to which we can monitor the impact of spending on specific groups.⁴⁵⁹

The State’s Medium-Term Fiscal and Structural Plan⁴⁶⁰ does not detail how women’s and girls’ rights will be protected and advanced through gender and/or equality budgeting. The State has not indicated any intention to human rights and equality proof the Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate, Nature Fund.⁴⁶¹

We note the State has committed to develop a way to advance gender budgeting.⁴⁶² It is unclear how this will work will interact with the work on equality budgeting and wellbeing budgeting. In implementing gender budgeting, the State should draw on the work of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (‘OECD’), including their work on incorporating an intersectional perspective.⁴⁶³

The State must prioritise the use of resources, to advance human rights and equality in Ireland and support the OECD recommendations that an equality budgeting statement be published alongside the budget, and that tax expenditures should be subject to equality

education, housing, children and young people, society, and disadvantage. The PBO analyse equality metrics pertaining specifically to two dimensions of equality (gender and disability) under their own headings, with the remaining 7 equality dimensions analysed under the ‘equality (other)’ heading. In addition, the PBO also analyse metrics under the environmental, socio-economic, and well-being dimensions: [An Analysis of Equality Budgeting Content in the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2024](#) (2024).

⁴⁵⁸ Parliamentary Budget Office, [An Analysis of Equality Budgeting Content in the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2024](#) (2024).

⁴⁵⁹ IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (2024) pp. 48-51.

⁴⁶⁰ Each EU Member State is required to submit a Medium-Term Fiscal and Structural Plan with a four to five year horizon. Ireland submitted its Plan in October 2024 and committed in the Programme for Government to submitting an updated Plan in summer 2025. This updated plan is to: ‘include provision for additional capital spending – over €17 billion – to be financed by the AIB share sales and the proceeds of the Court of Justice of the European Union decision of 10th September 2024’: [Medium Term Fiscal and Structural Plan](#) (2024) p. vi.

⁴⁶¹ The Government has committed to ‘(b)uild up the two long term savings funds in preparation for fiscal challenges including demographic changes, climate resilience and dealing with future shocks’. Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland’s Future](#) (2025) p. 18.

⁴⁶² Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland’s Future](#) (2025) p. 98.

⁴⁶³ OECD, [Gender budgeting](#).

review.⁴⁶⁴ We reiterate our support for the implementation of the Committee on Gender Equality's recommendations on gender equality budgeting including that it should be placed on statutory footing and public bodies should be required to actively demonstrate application of the PSEHRD in respect of departmental budgets, public procurement and the contracting of services.⁴⁶⁵ In line with international best practice, these equality budgeting measures must incorporate three fundamental principles: development (including public participation); implementation (including awareness raising); and evaluation (including ex-poste review).⁴⁶⁶

The Commission recommends that the State places equality budgeting on a statutory footing, with a strong focus on gender, and ensures that all Government Departments and public bodies are required to actively demonstrate application of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty in their budgets.

The Commission recommends the State ensures enhanced public participation of women and girls in all budgetary processes, with the direct and active involvement of structurally vulnerable women and girls and their representative organisations, in line with international best practice.

The Commission recommends that the State human rights and equality proofs the new Medium-Term Fiscal and Structural Plan, the Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate, Nature Fund and publishes a statement on how they protect and advance women's and girls' rights.

Business and human rights

It is critical to focus on gender in the development and implementation of policies on business and human rights as women and girls can disproportionately experience the adverse

⁴⁶⁴ OECD, [OECD Scan: Equality Budgeting in Ireland](#) (2021).

⁴⁶⁵ IHREC, [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](#) (2023) pp. 25-27.

⁴⁶⁶ OHCHR, [Realizing human rights through government budgets](#) (2017) p. 38.

impacts of business activities.⁴⁶⁷ It is extremely concerning that Ireland has been without an action plan on business and human rights since the previous plan expired in 2020.⁴⁶⁸ While a new plan is under-development, it has been subject to significant delays.⁴⁶⁹ It is essential that the new national plan plays a central role in embedding gender equality considerations into business activities both in Ireland and internationally. The new plan must address the findings of a Departmental review of the previous plan that there was a failure to meet key commitments within agreed timeframes and the plan focused on ‘promotion’ rather than mandatory and ambitious requirements.⁴⁷⁰ The PSEHRD should be central to the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the new plan.⁴⁷¹

The plan should adhere to the aim of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to achieve “tangible results for affected individuals and communities”.⁴⁷² The new plan should be informed by and implement the recommendations to the State by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;⁴⁷³ Committee on the Rights of the Child;⁴⁷⁴ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination;⁴⁷⁵ and relevant UN Committee

⁴⁶⁷ Women are frequently overrepresented in precarious, informal or casual forms of work within the labour market and are often vulnerable to sexual harassment and violence in the workplace: Danish Institute for Human Rights, [Gender in National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights: Where are we and where are we heading](#) (2023) p. 5.

⁴⁶⁸ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [National Plan on Business and Human Rights 2017-2020](#).

⁴⁶⁹ In June 2024, we provided observations on the draft second National Plan on Business and Human Rights: IHREC, [Observations on the draft second National Plan on Business and Human Rights](#) (June 2024).

⁴⁷⁰ The review recommended that the new plan should focus on time-bound and measurable goals, use specific and directive language, and include clear timelines and responsibilities: Department of Foreign Affairs, [Review of implementation of National Plan on Business and Human Rights 2017-2020](#) (2021).

⁴⁷¹ Human rights due diligence should be framed as having regard to the Public Sector Duty. IHREC, [Observations on the draft second National Plan on Business and Human Rights](#) (June 2024) p. 3.

⁴⁷² We note that the Guiding Principles “should be implemented in a non-discriminatory manner, with particular attention to the rights and needs of, as well as the challenges faced by, individuals from groups or populations that may be at heightened risk of becoming vulnerable or marginalized, and with due regard to the different risks that may be faced by women and men”. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework](#) (2011) p. 1.

⁴⁷³ We note that the State is required to report to the Committee on the implementation of the Committee’s recommendation by 31 March 2026. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland](#), E/C.12/IRL/CO/4 (20 March 2024) para. 11.

⁴⁷⁴ Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland](#), CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6 (28 February 2023) para. 13.

⁴⁷⁵ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, [Concluding observations on the combined fifth to ninth reports of Ireland](#), CERD/C/IRL/CO/5-9 (23 January 2020) para. 48.

General Comments⁴⁷⁶. The plan should detail the mechanisms to provide effective access to remedies for victims of human rights abuses by of Irish-domiciled or State-owned enterprises,⁴⁷⁷ in line with the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child⁴⁷⁸ and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights⁴⁷⁹. The plan should be aligned with and take account of the State's anti-trafficking response,⁴⁸⁰ and programmes of work to address climate change⁴⁸¹ and artificial intelligence⁴⁸².

We have previously welcomed the adoption of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive ('CSRD')⁴⁸³ and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive ('CSDDD'),⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁶ Including: Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General comment No. 16 \(2013\) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights](#), CRC/C/GC/16 (17 April 2013); Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [General comment No. 24 \(2017\) on State obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the context of business activities](#), E/C.12/GC/24 (10 August 2017).

⁴⁷⁷ We have highlighted that rights holders who experience business-related adverse impacts face significant barriers to accessing a remedy, including due to the lack of collective redress mechanisms, significant legal costs, and limited legal aid or third-party funding. IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p. 28; IHREC, [Ireland and the Rights of the Child: Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Ireland's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports](#) (2022) p. 21. See also Rachel Widdis, [Review of Access to Remedy in Ireland](#) (2020, commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs).

⁴⁷⁸ The Committee on the Rights of the Child have called for the State to "ensure that access to effective remedies is available in the State party for child victims living within or outside the State party concerning violations of their rights by companies operating in or managed from the State party's territory": Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland](#), CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6 (28 February 2023) para. 13(e).

⁴⁷⁹ The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have called for the State to "set up effective complaint and redress mechanisms and collect information on complaints filed by victims of abuses of economic, social and cultural rights committed by State-owned and private business enterprises operating or domiciled in the State party and entities that they control, including those in their supply chains": Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland](#), E/C.12/IRL/CO/4 (20 March 2024) para. 11(c).

⁴⁸⁰ Important to consider the responsibilities owed by companies and businesses as legal persons in the prevention and reduction of demand for human trafficking within their activities and supply chains. The [EU Strategy for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021–2025](#) has identified measures to disrupt the business model of human trafficking as a priority. The amended EU Anti Trafficking Directive has strengthened requirements in this area, and we will be closely monitoring its transposition, due by July 2026.

⁴⁸¹ Effective governance and human rights due diligence is essential if Ireland is to successfully transition to a carbon-neutral economy. See IHREC, [Policy Statement on a Just Transition](#) (2023) p. 22; IHREC, [Ireland and the Sustainable Development Goals: Submission to the 2023 UN High-Level Political Forum on the second Voluntary National Review of Ireland](#) (2023) p. 37.

⁴⁸² Including the recent adoptions of the [European Union Regulation laying down harmonised rules of Artificial Intelligence \(Artificial Intelligence Act\)](#) and the [Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law](#).

⁴⁸³ European Commission, [Corporate Sustainability Reporting](#).

⁴⁸⁴ European Commission, [Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence](#).

due to their potential to advance corporate accountability and minimise the negative impacts of businesses on human rights and the environment.⁴⁸⁵ However, we are concerned about the proposals in the European Commission’s Omnibus Package including postponing deadlines for implementation,⁴⁸⁶ drastically reducing the number of companies covered by the CSRD,⁴⁸⁷ and excluding the full value chain of all companies. The State will have to consider how its regulatory framework on human rights due diligence aligns with the recommendation of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that it should be mandatory for enterprises operating or domiciled in Ireland, including those in their supply chains, to identify, prevent, mitigate and address rights abuses.⁴⁸⁸

We note that the State has recently launched a consultation on Ireland’s first National Public Procurement Strategy.⁴⁸⁹ We have previously recommended that the State conducts a comprehensive human rights-led revision of the State’s procurement practices in the wider context of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and its obligations under the PSEHRD.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁵ IHREC, [Observations on the draft second National Plan on Business and Human Rights](#) (June 2024) p. 5.

⁴⁸⁶ The transposition deadline for the CSDDD would be postponed by one year to 26 July 2027. The reporting requirements for companies within the scope of the CSRD have been postponed for two years.

⁴⁸⁷ The European Commission propose restricting the application of the CSRD to companies with over 1,000 employees (up from 250). It would remove 80 percent of companies from the scope of the CSRD: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, [Minister Burke welcomes EU proposals for simplifying the obligations on business in relation to corporate sustainability](#) (31 March 2025).

⁴⁸⁸ The Committee recommend that the State should ‘Adopt a comprehensive regulatory framework on human rights due diligence, making it compulsory for business enterprises operating or domiciled in the State party’s jurisdiction and entities that they control, including those in their supply chains, to identify, prevent, mitigate and address abuses of economic, social and cultural rights in their domestic and overseas operations, giving priority to enterprises that are State-owned and those in which the State holds shares’: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland](#), E/C.12/IRL/CO/4 (20 March 2024) para. 11(b).

⁴⁸⁹ Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, [Ministers Chambers and Higgins welcome public consultation on Ireland’s first National Public Procurement Strategy](#) (25 March 2025).

⁴⁹⁰ IHREC, [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland: Second Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) (2023) pp. 74–75. The Committee on the Rights of the Child have called on the State to “enhance accountability in public procurement to ensure the availability, accessibility and quality of goods and services for children by non-State actors, including by requiring their compliance with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty and establishing the clear jurisdiction of independent monitoring mechanisms to receive and address complaints against them”: Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland](#), CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6 (28 February 2023) para. 13(d).

The Commission recommends that the development, implementation and monitoring of the second National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights is informed by input from women and girls, international obligations on women's and girl's rights, best practice in other countries, and island of Ireland considerations.

The Commission recommends the State ensures through the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights that Irish-domiciled or State-owned enterprises are required to protect and advance the rights of women and girls who are working in businesses and connected to their supply chains.

The Commission recommends that in transposing the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, the State should go beyond the minimum requirements in the Directive and ensure that robust and mandatory human rights due diligence legislation is introduced, that includes the full value chain of all companies and environmental protections within its scope, prioritises transparency in reporting, and ensures effective sanctions and enforcement.

Taxation

We regret that the State report provides no response to the Committee's request for information on its assessment of the recommendations of the Commission on Taxation and Welfare in relation to an individualised tax system and cliff edges⁴⁹¹ in the taxation and welfare system.⁴⁹² This highlights the State's lack of commitment to progress reform of the tax system.

Cliff edges in Ireland's taxation and welfare systems including strict thresholds, and the sudden incurrence of previously inapplicable tax obligations, influence the decisions and capacity of low-income workers to pursue higher earnings or secure more hours.⁴⁹³ This is a

⁴⁹¹ A cliff-edge refers to 'where benefits entitlements and other supports are withdrawn sharply (or entirely) as income rises or where tax and social insurance liabilities increase steeply as income rises.' M. Doolan and C. Keane, [Cliff edges in the Irish tax-benefit system, Budget Perspectives](#) (ESRI: 2023) p. 1.

⁴⁹² Commission on Taxation and Welfare, [Foundations for the Future: Report of the Commission on Taxation and Welfare](#) (2022).

⁴⁹³ The withdrawal of eligibility for social supports in response to a change in circumstances, such as increased access to employment, can act as strong incentives to cluster at an income threshold rather than seek more

poverty trap, and the more gradual or gentler tapering of thresholds could help significantly in addressing the inequalities of the system by slowing the rate at which benefits are withdrawn.⁴⁹⁴ The current orientation of the tax system towards joint taxation also has demonstrable impacts on gender inequalities, including in relation to the employment rate.⁴⁹⁵

The Commission recommends that cliff-edges in the Irish tax and social welfare systems which impact women should be removed and replaced by more gradual or tapered thresholds.

The Commission recommends that the State gender proofs the taxation system and commits to a phased move towards a fully individualised tax system.

Access to social protection

Women suffer disproportionately from an inadequate, arbitrary, and overly bureaucratic social welfare system which is not benchmarked against the cost of living or indexed against national wages. A major contributing factor to the inadequacy of social supports is the arbitrary and discretionary nature of their calculations, in the absence of formal requirements for living costs, poverty alleviation or the protection of living standards to be considered. The Commission on Taxation and Welfare has recommended that increases in social welfare rates should be based on a transparent and evidence-led process, with working age payments

hours, higher pay, or promotions: IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 86-87.

⁴⁹⁴ IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p. 39.

⁴⁹⁵ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum. A joint system of taxation applies for married, co-habiting and civil union partners. Part of the standard rate tax band may be transferred between the higher earner and the lower earner. This means the higher earner can pay tax at the standard or lower rate for a greater share of their income than if they were single. The overall tax burden for the couple is lowered by the lower earner who faces a higher rate of tax on their income. This has financial consequences and behavioural implications for the lower earner who is usually the woman in heterosexual couples. Joint taxation can be regarded as endorsing the patriarchal male breadwinner model. Full individualisation of the tax system was a key recommendation of the Commission on Taxation and Welfare: [Foundations for the Future: Report of the Commission on Taxation and Welfare](#) (2022).

benchmarked.⁴⁹⁶ We have previously called for the indexation of all social welfare payments against national wages and reiterate our view that such measures would significantly help to address the systemic inadequacies of Irish social protection.⁴⁹⁷

Lone-parent households, the majority of which are headed by women, face particular barriers.⁴⁹⁸ Lone parent families encounter complex conditions attached to social protection payments, which can result in an administrative burden and act as a disincentive to seek employment or educational opportunities.⁴⁹⁹ The cost of living crisis had particular impacts on low income families leading to reduced spending on basic provisions and families taking on debt, which has long-term negative impacts.⁵⁰⁰ Entitlements are under-utilised by low-income families due to a lack of information around availability and eligibility.⁵⁰¹ Overly burdensome application processes also impact the access to social protection.⁵⁰² Lone parents are excluded from the living alone allowance, and conditionalities of lone parent payments do not take childcare into account.⁵⁰³ There is a need to change from a charitable model of social protection to a rights-based model, which benchmarks social protection payments against rising cost of living to lift people out of poverty.⁵⁰⁴

⁴⁹⁶ Commission on Taxation and Welfare: [Foundations for the Future: Report of the Commission on Taxation and Welfare](#) (2022) pp. 287-295.

⁴⁹⁷ IHREC, [Policy Statement on the Index-Linking of Welfare Payments](#) (2023).

⁴⁹⁸ Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum highlighted the difficulties and anomalies in the social protection system faced by lone parent families.

⁴⁹⁹ One Family, [Pre-Budget Submission 2025](#) (2024) p. 10.

⁵⁰⁰ A study found that almost nine-in-ten (87 per cent) of low-income families reported cutting day-to-day spending as a result of the cost-of-living crisis. The most common cuts were to groceries (63 per cent), clothing and footwear (60 per cent) and electricity and heat (53 per cent). One-in-three households reduced savings, and a similar proportion took on more debt or entered arrears (on utility bills, rent, mortgage repayments, or other borrowing repayments). For half of those who entered arrears, this was their first time to do so. ESRI, [The response of low-income households to the cost-of-living crisis in Ireland](#) (2025) p. vii.

⁵⁰¹ A study showed that only half (52 per cent) of those on very low reported availing of a Medical or GP Visit Card and less than half of renters reported availing of one of the Rent Tax Credit, Rent Supplement or Housing Assistance Payment. ESRI, [The response of low-income households to the cost-of-living crisis in Ireland](#) (2025) p. viii.

⁵⁰² Including the Additional Needs Payment, Carer's Benefit, the Energy Hardship Fund and the One Parent Family Benefit. ESRI, [The response of low-income households to the cost-of-living crisis in Ireland](#) (2025) p. viii. Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum stressed the complicated nature of the application process for some social protection payments.

⁵⁰³ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁵⁰⁴ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

The Habitual Residence Condition ('HRC') and other administrative obstacles continue to have a discriminatory impact on structurally vulnerable women, including Roma, by impeding equal access to basic social protections such as Child Benefit, housing supports and Disability Allowance.⁵⁰⁵ Despite repeat criticism from this Committee,⁵⁰⁶ and from other UN and Council of Europe monitoring committees,⁵⁰⁷ the State has not acknowledged or assessed the indirectly discriminatory impact these conditions have on minority communities such as Roma. The State should ensure inter-agency coordination including at a local level to ensure that social protection is not denied on the basis of Housing Circular 41/2012, given that it should be read in light of SI 548/2015 European Communities (Free Movement of Persons).⁵⁰⁸ Legislation ensuring social housing access to non-Irish nationals should be prioritised.

Recent IHREC-supported research on the cost of disability has found that disabled households are forced to spend the majority of their disposable income (52-59%) on disability-related costs.⁵⁰⁹ Disabled individuals and their households experience a double penalty to their living standards, with both a lower average income and a higher average expenditure.⁵¹⁰ This emphasises the importance of targeted services and supports for disabled people.

⁵⁰⁵ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum. See discussion in IHREC, [Ireland and the 6th Monitoring Cycle of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#) (2024) pp. 40-42; IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 85-86.

⁵⁰⁶ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland](#), CEDAW/C/IRL/CO/6-7 (9-March 2017) paras. 46-47.

⁵⁰⁷ See for example Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland](#) (20 March 2024) paras. 34-35; GREVIO, [Baseline Evaluation Report: Ireland](#) (2023) pp. 16, 52; ECRI, [ECRI Report on Ireland – Fifth Monitoring Cycle](#) (2019) p. 22.

⁵⁰⁸ Office of the Ombudsman, [Case Study: Local authorities used outdated circular for deciding 'right to reside' and entitlement to housing support](#) (2024).

⁵⁰⁹ This means that households with a disabled member require, on average, 52-59% extra disposable income, to achieve the same standard of living as a similar household with no disabled members. For households with a member who has severe limitations, the cost of disability can be as high as 93% of their disposable income. IHREC and ESRI, [Adjusting Estimates of Poverty for the Cost of Disability](#) (2025).

⁵¹⁰ The study finds that the at risk of poverty ('AROP') rate is substantially higher for disabled people, sitting at 24%, compared to 10% for non-disabled people, when measured in the usual way. However, when the average estimated cost of disability is deducted from the disposable income of people living in households affected by disability, their AROP rate increases to between 65%-76%. IHREC and ESRI, [Adjusting Estimates of Poverty for the Cost of Disability](#) (2025).

There is a need for the State to take measures to combat stigmatising narratives about social welfare recipients, including through public awareness campaigns. We have noted that conditions to access entitlements reinforce stigmatising narratives that it is the claimant who is responsible for their individual circumstances, rather than broader structural and economic societal problems.⁵¹¹ Social welfare recipients report stigma permeating everyday interactions across their lives, with a particularly gendered impact for lone parent families.⁵¹² This is felt through violations of privacy, public degradation, and negative and shaming encounters with staff, and is accompanied by feelings of constant scrutiny and dread.⁵¹³ Cultural competence training is required for Department of Social Protection staff,⁵¹⁴ along with a commitment from the State not to rely on AI in social welfare provision given the potential to entrench bias.

The Commission recommends that the State formally adopts Welfare Indexation across social protection policy development and reform, as a matter of priority, in line with the guiding principles of poverty reduction and the protection of living standards.

The Commission recommends that all developments, reforms and new policies relating to social protection provision be gender, equality and poverty proofed and assessed for their fiscal and distributional impact on structurally vulnerable groups.

⁵¹¹ This fuels 'povertyism' and the perception that 'undeserving applicants' must be targeted by making the experience more punitive, thereby playing a role in keeping welfare rates low and creating consent for budget cuts. IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 88-90.

⁵¹² As noted in a study, 'These experiences take on gendered contortions for lone parents since it is their roles, activities and work as mothers which is erased due to its perceived irrelevance against the necessity of finding paid employment. The stigma gaze is refined further to the category of women lone parent itself through invasions of privacy regarding status, past and current relationships and living arrangements. Such invasions are often grounded in moralising judgments about sexuality, blame and responsibility.' P. Finn and M. Murphy, A [Multi-Dimensional View of Stigma Experienced by Lone Parents in Irish Homeless and Employment Services](#) (2022) 21(4) Social Policy & Society 679, p. 682. Reports also note abuses of power by social welfare inspectors against lone parents including unannounced visits and searches of possession. Irish Examiner, [Welfare claimants fear retribution if they complain about inspectors](#) (26 October 2020).

⁵¹³ IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p. 89. The power imbalance between women and social protection officials was also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁵¹⁴ This was raised in our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

The Commission recommends that the State reviews and gender and equality proofs all administrative social protection criteria, application procedures, and the appeals process to ensure they are not impeding access to social protection for structurally vulnerable groups.

The Commission recommends that the State should co-design with disabled women, and their representative organisations, a programme of targeted and long-term measures required to address the cost of disability.

The Commission recommends that all staff engaged in the administration of social protection receive training on their obligations and duties under the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

Poverty and social exclusion

Our concerns regarding persistent poverty and social exclusion in Ireland remain unaddressed.⁵¹⁵ 2024 findings show 4.8% of women in consistent poverty, 11.3% at risk of poverty, and 17% experienced enforced deprivation.⁵¹⁶ Unemployed persons were the most at risk of poverty at 34.1%, and more likely to experience enforced deprivation at 37.8%.⁵¹⁷ The rate of women in employment increased to 70.6%, but is still below the male employment rate of 78%.⁵¹⁸ Jobless households are more likely to be lone parents and more susceptible to poverty and social exclusion.⁵¹⁹ For lone parents, which are often women, there were 10.1%

⁵¹⁵ We recognise that poverty impacts the realisation of many rights and in our Strategy Statement 2025-2027, we commit to challenge the State on the structural causes of poverty and its impact on people's lives: [Strategy Statement 2025-2027](#) (2025) p. 14. See our previous positions and recommendations on poverty: IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 102-112; 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](#) (2023) pp. 75-77.

⁵¹⁶ CSO, [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\) 2024](#) (2025).

⁵¹⁷ CSO, [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\) 2024](#) (2025).

⁵¹⁸ CSO, [Women and Men in Ireland Hub](#) (2025).

⁵¹⁹ ESRI, [Profiling Barriers to Social Inclusion in Ireland](#) (2018) p. 3.

living in consistent poverty, 20.3% at risk of poverty, and 44.5% experienced enforced deprivation.⁵²⁰

The majority of women living in poverty today have experienced intergenerational poverty for decades.⁵²¹ Poverty persists due to the State's lack of consistent poverty reduction measures, weak institutional framework, issues with policy co-ordination, and data collection.⁵²² The *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025* failed to include standalone objectives relevant to poverty reduction;⁵²³ along with a failure to set targets and objectives to address poverty and social inclusion. We note the recent launch of the public consultation on the successor to the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025*.⁵²⁴ In developing the plan, the State should implement the recommendation of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for the State to adopt a national action plan to eradicate poverty, and ensure targeted support for groups who are disproportionately affected by poverty.⁵²⁵

Women who experience poverty face many barriers including access to: transport,⁵²⁶ education, employment and decent work, childcare,⁵²⁷ and services. Regulated, affordable

⁵²⁰ The Deprivation rate decreased from 44.5% to 45.6%. See: CSO, [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\) 2024](#) (2025).

⁵²¹ The ESRI has found that a significant number of adults living in poverty also experienced poverty at a young age. ESRI, [Intergenerational Poverty in Ireland](#) (2022) pp. 67-68.

⁵²² IHREC, [Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p. 103.

⁵²³ See: IHREC, [Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p. 103. Department of Social Protection, [Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025](#) (2020); Department of Social Protection, [Mid-term review of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025](#) (2023).

⁵²⁴ The public consultation on the successor to the "Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025" opened on 10 April 2025 and will close on 30 June 2025. See: [Public consultation on the successor to the "Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025"](#).

⁵²⁵ See: Economic and Social Council, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [Concluding observations on the fourth period report of Ireland](#), E/C.12/IRL/CO/4 (2024) paras. 38-39.

⁵²⁶ Women on jobseeker's allowance and women on low-incomes do not have access to the transport pass and face financial constraints on using transport. Longford Women's Link reported that public transport options do not coincide with crèche and school times which affects lone parents wishing to access education and employment. Offshore islands have an extra cost of paying for the ferry. See: National Women's Council, [Paper on Women in Rural Communities](#) (2021) pp. 19-22. IHREC [Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p.64. Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁵²⁷ There is an added barrier for women in Gaeltacht and Island areas where after school activities, or creches are unavailable making it difficult for women to get back into employment. Across Ireland maternity leave is 6 months but many creches only take children over 12 months causing many lone parents falling into poverty. Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

credit can be inaccessible for lone parents, jobless families, and low-income families⁵²⁸ to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Furthermore, the absence of women in the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme's ('SICAP') target group list is concerning as this incentive provides funding to tackle poverty and social exclusion through local engagement and partnerships in Ireland.

There is lack of commitments to address the digital divide.⁵²⁹ The reduced digital access has a particular impact on low-income and lone-parent families.⁵³⁰ This deprivation exacerbates economic barriers by reducing access to education and employment opportunities.⁵³¹ Furthermore, the State's growing preference for the digitalisation of public services,⁵³² is a significant barrier, especially for lone parents.⁵³³ Moreover, the State must ensure the accessibility of all communications, thus communications in Plain English is a necessity.⁵³⁴

⁵²⁸ Low-income, jobless families and lone parent families are more likely to experience financial exclusion – they are less likely to hold a bank account, and have limited access to low-cost sources of credit. See: Department of Children and Youth Affairs, [Income, Poverty and Deprivation among Children: A Statistical Baseline Analysis](#) (2020) p. 12.

⁵²⁹ In our parallel reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights we recommended that the State adopt measures to address the digital divide, and that public services remain accessible to those who do not use or have access to technology by retaining non-digital options. In its concluding observations, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child placed emphasis on the need to improve digital inclusion for children, and enhance digital literacy. In General Comment No. 25, the Committee has highlighted the opportunities and challenges associated with the rapid development of science and technology, and emphasises accessibility and a human rights-focused approach. See: UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding Observations](#) (2023) p.6. IHREC, [Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\) on Ireland's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports](#) (2022) p. 34. CESCR, [General comment No. 25 \(2020\) on science and economic, social and cultural rights](#) (2020). IHREC, [Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p. 156.

⁵³⁰ These households are more likely to be disadvantaged. The CSO General Household Survey, reveals significant levels of both exclusion and constraint among low-income households. The Survey reveals that the proportion of very 'disadvantaged households without an internet connection at home is five times higher than among 'very affluent' households. Citizens Information Board, [Digital Exclusion and E-Government in Ireland](#) (2022) pp. 35, 36.

⁵³¹ National Women's Council, [The Impact of Covid-19 on Women's Economic Mobility](#) (2021) pp. 4, 7, 14, 22.

⁵³² Government of Ireland, [Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy: Building on our Strengths](#) (2021) pp. 18-21. Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, [Public Service ICT Strategy](#) (2023); and Government of Ireland, [Harnessing Digital: The Digital Ireland Framework](#) (2022) p. 15.

⁵³³ Lone-parent families have a low rate of using the internet for contacting public services and public authorities, although they are more likely to depend on social security benefits which suggests there may be a lack of skills that may affect these parents financially. See: Citizens Information Board, [Digital Exclusion and E-Government in Ireland](#) (2022) pp. 25, 43. Human Rights Council, [Non-take-up of rights in the context of social protection: Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights](#), (2022) p. 18.

⁵³⁴ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

We note the relative stabilisation of the unprecedented cost of living crisis, which Ireland has been experiencing since 2020;⁵³⁵ however, the household budget has increased substantially.⁵³⁶ Food insecurity is a growing concern, with food costs being the largest category of expenditure for each age-group.⁵³⁷ The Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) food basket⁵³⁸ has increased by 21.2%. The core MESL costs remain highest for children of second-level age – approximately 60% higher than the minimum needs of younger children, with social welfare supports meeting only 63%. MESL costs for an infant has shown the largest increase of all age-groups, rising by 22.4%.⁵³⁹ We acknowledge the school meal programme and welcome its expansion to all primary schools, and the Summer Programme for eligible schools.⁵⁴⁰ However, the current lack of wraparound services⁵⁴¹ raises concerns.⁵⁴²

The Commission recommends that the State develops a human rights, equality and gender proofed multidimensional national action plan to eradicate poverty addressing root causes; and ensuring the inclusion of clear and measurable targets, the allocation of adequate resources for its implementation, and effective mechanisms for coordination among national

⁵³⁵ Robert Thornton, Hannah Boylan and Niamh O'Carroll, [Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2024 Annual Update](#), Dublin: Saint Vincent De Paul (2024) p. iv.

⁵³⁶ There has been a cumulative increase of 16.8% in core Minimum Essential Standards of Living (MESL) costs from 2020 to 2024. The household energy basket has increased by 64.5%. See: Robert Thornton, Hannah Boylan and Niamh O'Carroll, [Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2024 Annual Update](#), Dublin: Saint Vincent De Paul (2024) pp. iv, v.

⁵³⁷ Robert Thornton, Hannah Boylan and Niamh O'Carroll, [Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2024 Annual Update](#), Dublin: Saint Vincent De Paul (2024) p. 49.

⁵³⁸ MESL is a social consensus on the goods and services necessary for a minimum acceptable standard of living in Ireland. The MESL outlines the weekly cost of these essential items, which are required to ensure people can meet their basic needs, live with dignity, and avoid poverty. It serves as a needs-based indicator of the income required for individuals and households to live with dignity and acts as an evidence-based benchmark for assessing income adequacy. The MESL food baskets are comprised of an array of items, which vary in type, quantity, and rate of consumption between household types. See: Robert Thornton, Hannah Boylan and Niamh O'Carroll, [Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2024 Annual Update](#), Dublin: Saint Vincent De Paul (2024) pp. iii, 20.

⁵³⁹ Baby milk formula increasing by 37% from 2020 to 2024. See: Robert Thornton, Hannah Boylan and Niamh O'Carroll, [Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2024 Annual Update](#), Dublin: Saint Vincent De Paul (2024) pp. v, 3, 23.

⁵⁴⁰ The eligibility for all schools and the Summer Programme is from 2025. Citizens Information, [School Meals Scheme](#) (2025).

⁵⁴¹ Lone parent families are more likely to experience deprivation and therefore more likely to struggle financially during school holiday periods. See: CSO, [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\) 2024](#) (2025).

⁵⁴² In its Concluding Observations, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child placed emphasis on the need to expand the school meals programme and provide nutrition services to address food insecurity. See: UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding Observations](#) (2023) p. 11.

and local governments. Targeted long-term supports must be in place for lone women parents and low-income households, headed by women, to ensure their right to an adequate standard of living.

The Commission recommends that strategic approaches to poverty alleviation are gender proofed and consider the effects of the social protection system; low-paid and precarious work; financial exclusion; the digital divide, and socio-economic discrimination in obstructing the right to an adequate standard of living, and include actions to dismantle these and other poverty traps.

The Commission recommends the amendment of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) to include women, particularly women who may experience multiple discrimination, as a target group in order to ensure that gender equality projects are supported.

Housing

There is an alarming lack of progress to address the ongoing structural housing crisis in Ireland, with low housing affordability and availability a persistent societal challenge.⁵⁴³ High property prices,⁵⁴⁴ chronic undersupply of social housing stock,⁵⁴⁵ and a private rental market

⁵⁴³ Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum raised that the failings in housing policy have pitted communities against each other. Participants noted that while the State is investing money and resources in its response, the emphasis is on the private market rather than public provision of housing. See also IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 112-121; European Commission, [2024 Country Report Ireland](#) (2024) pp. 3-4; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland](#), E/C.12/IRL/CO/4 (20 March 2024) paras. 40-41; National Women's Council, [Pre-Budget Submission 2025](#) (2024) pp. 10-11.

⁵⁴⁴ House and rental prices have increased by over a third over the last four years to 2024, which is nearly double the rate of inflation: European Commission, [2024 Country Report Ireland](#) (2024) pp. 3-4. See also Parliamentary Budget Office, [Housing Affordability for Private Household Buyers in Ireland](#) (2023).

⁵⁴⁵ Only 9% of the housing stock is social housing: Housing Europe, [The State of Housing in Europe 2023](#) (2023) p. 66. The Housing Commission have recommended that the social and cost-rental housing stock should be increased to 20% of the national housing stock: [Report of the Housing Commission](#) (2024) p. 13. The State have committed to building 12,000 social houses per year: see Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) p. 44. The Parliamentary Budget Office estimates that there were 115,425 households with an 'ongoing need' for permanent, state-supported housing at end-2023. This includes households on the social housing waiting lists plus households in receipt of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). See Parliamentary Budget Office, [Social Housing – Ongoing Need 2023](#) (2024).

marred by inaccessibility and unaffordability⁵⁴⁶ have created dire circumstances for many women.⁵⁴⁷ The Government's delivery of annual housing targets has been inconsistent,⁵⁴⁸ and the targets do not match the current and future housing demand.⁵⁴⁹ The State should not only be meeting all of its targets, but exceed these and provide quality and appropriate public and social housing and cost rental homes to all who require it, with a view to ending reliance on the private sector and the Housing Assistance Payment ('HAP')⁵⁵⁰ for social housing solutions.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁶ Research found that in Q4 2024, only 2,300 properties were available to rent in Ireland with only 1,200 of them in Dublin: Daft, [The Daft.ie Rental Price Report: An analysis of recent trends in the Irish residential rental market 2024 Q4 - Year in Review](#) (2025). In Q3 2024, the standardised average rent in new tenancies was €1,693 (a 6.4% year-on-year increase) while the standardised average rent in existing tenancies was €1,429 (a 4.7% year-on-year increase); the standardised average new tenancy rent was 18.5 per cent higher than the standardised average existing tenancy rent in Q3 2024: Residential Tenancies Board, [Rent Index Q3 2024](#) (2024). While 30.6% of the population are living in rented or rent-free accommodation, they make up 56.9% of those at risk of poverty and 76.0% of those living in consistent poverty. See CSO, [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\) 2024](#) (2025). See also Social Justice Ireland, [Budget 2025 Analysis & Critique](#) (2024) p. 5; European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland, [Poverty Watch Ireland 2024](#) (2024) pp. 14-15; Simon Communities of Ireland, [Locked out of the Market - March 2025](#) (2025).

⁵⁴⁷ See National Women's Council, [General Election Manifesto 2024: Supporting policy document](#) (2024) pp. 12-14; National Youth Council of Ireland, [State of Our Young Nation: A report into the lives of Irish 18-29-year-olds](#) (2024) pp. 26-29.

⁵⁴⁸ In 2024, the State only built 7,871 new social homes which fell short of the target of 9,300 homes in its Housing for All Strategy. See Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, [Social Housing Delivery – Target and Progress 2022 to 2024](#) (2025). The Housing Commission estimate that there is a housing deficit of between 212,5000 and 256,000 homes: [Report of the Housing Commission](#) (2024) p. 28.

⁵⁴⁹ In Housing for All 2021-2030, the Government committed to building 33,000 houses every year until 2030. The ESRI estimate that 44,000 homes are needed a year until 2030: [Population Projections, The Flow of New Households and Structural Housing Demand](#) (2024). The Central Bank of Ireland estimate that 52,000 homes could be needed a year due to the pent-up demand for housing: [Economic policy issues in the Irish housing market](#) (2024) p. 3. The Government have committed to building over 300,000 new homes by the end of 2023 (an average of over 50,000 homes a year). See Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) p. 40; Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, [Government agrees to progress amendments to Draft Revision of National Planning Framework & ambitious new housing targets](#) (November 2024).

⁵⁵⁰ HAP is a form of social housing support operated by Local Authorities. Under the scheme, monthly rental payments are made directly from Local Authorities to landlords on behalf of the HAP recipient. HAP recipients are responsible for finding their own accommodation in the private rented sector, do not have security of tenure and may have to make additional 'top-up' payments to landlords. There is a shortage of properties to rent within HAP limits, in March only 41 properties (4%) were available to rent within standard or discretionary HAP limits. See Simon Communities of Ireland, [Locked out of the Market - March 2025](#) (2025).

⁵⁵¹ IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 114-115.

The housing crisis exacerbates the challenges faced by structurally vulnerable groups including disabled women,⁵⁵² lone parents,⁵⁵³ migrants,⁵⁵⁴ older women,⁵⁵⁵ women in detention,⁵⁵⁶ and Travellers and Roma⁵⁵⁷. The housing crisis and the State's overreliance on the private rental market has led to increased precarious circumstances for women tenants,

⁵⁵² Disabled people have a high rate of homelessness, and face barriers in accessing social housing which is accessible. European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland, [Poverty Watch Ireland 2024](#) (2024) p. 16. The significant levels of institutionalisation in Ireland is a concern. Despite evidence indicating that older adults prefer to age in place and disabled people wish to live independently in the community, these preferences are not adequately respected in Ireland and both groups are often required to live in inappropriate institutional settings due to a lack of resources to facilitate independent living. See IHREC, [Mid-Term Report to the UN Human Rights Council for the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of Ireland](#) (2024) p. 11.

⁵⁵³ Lone parent households are the second highest household group on the waiting list for social housing, comprising 21.2% of the waiting list: The Housing Agency, [Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2024: Key Findings](#) (2025) p. 11.

⁵⁵⁴ Housing affordability is disproportionately impacting migrants due in part to their reliance on the private market as there are barriers to accessing social housing. Migrants are impacted by Housing Circular 41/2012 which provides advice to Local Authorities on whether to accept a social housing application and recommends granting applications depending on conditions such as visa status, length of residence in Ireland or employment. The Circular has not been updated since 2012 and does not reflect changes to immigration law in the intervening period. It is also applied stringently by Local Authorities, despite the lack of a legislative basis, which leads to disproportionate exclusion of migrants from the social housing list. Migrants with limited financial means or who are originally from countries with inefficient administrative systems are also impacted by onerous and bureaucratic requirements to prove they do not own property abroad. See ESRI, [Monitoring Report on Integration 2024](#) (2025) pp. 68-74; Mercy Law Resource Centre, [Minority groups and housing services: barriers to access](#) (2021) pp. 5-8, 13-16.

⁵⁵⁵ Housing policy means that there is an increase in older people renting properties, and there will be a continued rise as people reach an older age. Older women are in worse housing situations than older men. See Age Action, [Spotlight on Income in Older Age: The State of Ageing in Ireland 2023](#) (2023) pp. 25-26, 28. See also Alone and Threshold, [Double Deficit: Older and Ageing Persons in the Irish Private Rental Sector](#) (2023).

⁵⁵⁶ Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum raised that the revolving door approach to penal policy for women with short custodial sentences impacting on their access to services and supports, including housing. These women fall through the cracks when released from prison. See also Irish Penal Reform Trust, [Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth consultation on the next National Strategy for Women and Girls](#) (2024) p. 5; Irish Penal Reform Trust, [Maternal Imprisonment in Ireland: A Scoping Study](#) (2023) p. 19.

⁵⁵⁷ Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum raised that Travellers continue to face persistent barriers to securing the right to culturally appropriate and quality accommodation. Historical undersupply of appropriate accommodation and ongoing neglect of this supply issue have generated a scarcity, which has seen many Travellers homeless or living in unsuitable, overcrowded conditions while spending years on waiting lists or opting for culturally inappropriate accommodation due to a lack of alternatives. Many Travellers face discrimination in the rental market. The living conditions within Traveller accommodation have a particular impact on Traveller women as they spend more time in the home and are primary carers. See IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 119-120.

particularly in relation to the exploitative practice of landlords offering reduced rent or free accommodation in exchange for sex.⁵⁵⁸

The State's plans for the delivery of social housing are not having a tangible impact on addressing homelessness.⁵⁵⁹ The rates of women's homelessness remain persistently high,⁵⁶⁰ with lone parent families headed by women making up a large proportion of families in homeless accommodation.⁵⁶¹ Women also experience high rates of hidden homelessness where they are dependent on family, friends and other informal options for accommodation rather than homelessness service providers.⁵⁶² Homelessness is directly linked to the response to DSGBV.⁵⁶³ Women in homelessness have complex and intersecting needs, and require streamlined access to specialist gender-sensitive and trauma-informed services, as

⁵⁵⁸ The National Women's Council have stated that this practice appears to primarily occur when renters are seeking to rent a room from a landlord under a license agreement as opposed to a self-contained dwelling which would be covered by the *Residential Tenancies Act*. Women are particularly placed in a power imbalance and are the targets of this form of exploitation due to their ethnicity, immigration status, socio-economic status, and disability. See National Women's Council, '[Sex for Rent' An NWC Report on Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment in the Rental Housing Market](#) (2023). See also Irish Council for International Students, [Renting in Ireland: The Housing Crisis from the Perspective of International Students](#) (2025) pp. 21-22, 28-29.

⁵⁵⁹ Focus Ireland, [Recommendations to Government for Budget 2025](#) (2024) p. 3; European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland, [Submission to National Reform Programme 2024](#) (2024) p. 7.

⁵⁶⁰ The number of women that were homeless increased by 42% from Census 2016 (2,888 women) to Census 2022 (4,087 women). See Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, [The State of the Nation's Women and Girls: Statistical Spotlight](#) (2025) pp. 65-66. In March 2025, 4,186 women were accessing local authority managed emergency accommodation. These figures only include those accessing State funded accommodation and do not include those staying with family and friends, rough sleepers, women in domestic violence refuges, women in institutional settings, and those in international and temporary protection. See Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, [Monthly Homeless Report – March 2025](#) (2025). See also Focus Ireland, [Focus on Homelessness: Adult-Only Households](#) (2024) pp. 13-15.

⁵⁶¹ It is predominantly young, single mothers with one or two young children who are most vulnerable to becoming homeless: Focus Ireland, [Insights into Family Homelessness in Dublin during 2022 and 2023](#) (2024) p. 45. In 2024, over half the families in emergency accommodation were lone parent families despite lone parent families only being 17% of all families: see European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland, [Poverty Watch Ireland 2024](#) (2024) p. 14. In Dublin, between 2020-2023, 61% of families who entered homelessness services were lone parent households. Of these households, 93% of lone parents were women. See Dublin Region Homeless Executive, [New families entering emergency accommodation in the Dublin region, years 2020- 2023](#) (2024) p. 22.

⁵⁶² Simon Communities of Ireland, [Under the Radar: Unveiling Hidden Homelessness Across the Island of Ireland](#) (2024) p. 12.

⁵⁶³ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum. Victims and survivors often remain in dangerous situations due to a fear of becoming homeless or are forced to stay in refuge accommodation for long periods of time. See IHREC, [Ireland and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (2022) p. 61. See also Focus Ireland, [Insights into Family Homelessness in Dublin during 2022 and 2023](#) (2024) p. 7; Mercy Law Resource Centre, [Social Housing, Domestic Violence and the Public Sector Duty](#) (2023).

well as targeted supports for over-represented groups.⁵⁶⁴ The language of the Government's commitment to 'work towards ending homelessness by 2030'⁵⁶⁵ is not sufficiently strong and there is an absence of detail on how this objective will be achieved.⁵⁶⁶

The Commission recommends the State significantly scales up its supply of and investment in social, affordable and cost-rental housing to match current and future need, in line with the recommendations of the Housing Commission. The State should ensure its housing policies and strategies are gender proofed.

The Commission recommends that the State develops a robust and costed action plan to end homelessness by 2030. In the interim, the State should gender proof its response to homelessness to ensure gender-sensitive prevention, support and housing services are available and appropriately resourced.

Child Maintenance

Lone parent households, which are predominantly headed by women, are among those most of risk at poverty in Ireland.⁵⁶⁷ The payment of child maintenance can be a means of addressing poverty.⁵⁶⁸ The late, insufficient, or non-payment of child maintenance can have an extremely negative impact on lone parent families.⁵⁶⁹ Withholding child maintenance

⁵⁶⁴ Focus Ireland, [Proposal to tackle long-term homelessness](#) (2024); Focus Ireland, [Insights into Family Homelessness in Dublin during 2022 and 2023](#) (2024).

⁵⁶⁵ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) p. 44.

⁵⁶⁶ National Women's Council, [A Feminist Analysis of the Programme for Government 2025](#) (2025) p. 14.

⁵⁶⁷ For lone parent households with children under 18, the consistent poverty rate is 11%, the at risk of poverty rate is 24.2%, and the enforced deprivation is 46.3%. See CSO, [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\) 2024](#) (2025).

⁵⁶⁸ Participants at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum emphasised that child maintenance is directly linked to child and family poverty. Research has shown that child maintenance payments alone will not address poverty, it needs to be accompanied by other measures such as disregarding child maintenance payments as a means of income in social protection assessments. See Mia Hakovirta, Christine Skinner, Heikki Hiilamo, and Merita Jokela, Child Poverty, [Child Maintenance and Interactions with Social Assistance Benefits among Lone Parent Families: A Comparative Analysis](#) (2020) 49 *Journey of Social Policy* 1, pp. 19-39.

⁵⁶⁹ Lone parents who receive child maintenance payments face a lower risk of economic vulnerability: see ESRI, [Lone parent transitions, employment transitions and poverty outcomes](#) (2024) pp. 25, 34. See also National One Parent Family Alliance, [Position on Child Maintenance](#) (2021) pp. 1, 3-6.

payments can also prolong the abuse faced by survivors of domestic violence.⁵⁷⁰ However, over half of lone parents receive no maintenance payments.⁵⁷¹ Those seeking maintenance orders must take on an adversarial system, prohibitive costs, and lengthy delays alongside the emotional burdens of pursuing enforcement.⁵⁷² There is a scarcity of data on child maintenance orders, which impacts transparency around the process.⁵⁷³

We welcome that in response to the Committee's 2017 recommendation,⁵⁷⁴ the State established a Child Maintenance Review Group to examine the treatment of child maintenance payments in the social protection system and the establishment of a State Child Maintenance Agency.⁵⁷⁵ The State implemented the recommendation of the Review Group to exclude child maintenance from assessments of means for some social protection payments.⁵⁷⁶

While a majority of the Review Group recommended the establishment of a statutory Child Maintenance Body,⁵⁷⁷ the State has confirmed it will not set up a child maintenance agency or

⁵⁷⁰ Forcing parents to keep returning to court for enforcement can continue the cycle of abuse: see Gayle Smith, [The Enforcement of Child Maintenance](#) (2024) 27 Irish Journal of Family Law 1, p. 1.

⁵⁷¹ Data drawn from the Growing Up in Ireland study. See ESRI, [Lone parent transitions, employment transitions and poverty outcomes](#) (2024) pp. 25-26. See also SPARK Ireland, [Child Maintenance Survey](#) (2022).

⁵⁷² ESRI, [Lone parent transitions, employment transitions and poverty outcomes](#) (2024) p. 57.

⁵⁷³ We note that the Department of Justice's Review of the Enforcement of Child Maintenance Orders recommends that maintenance figures granted by Court Orders should be collected and reported to increase transparency. See Department of Justice, [Review of the Enforcement of Child Maintenance Orders](#) (2024) pp. 46-47.

⁵⁷⁴ The Committee recommended that the State consider establishing a statutory maintenance authority and prescribing amounts for child maintenance in order to reduce the burden on women of having to litigate to seek child maintenance orders. See Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland](#), CEDAW/C/IRL/CO/6-7 (9 March 2017) para. 57(b).

⁵⁷⁵ Child Maintenance Review Group, [Report of the Child Maintenance Review Group](#) (2022).

⁵⁷⁶ As provided for under the [Social Welfare and Civil Law \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Act 2024](#). The State estimate that the reforms will benefit over 16,000 lone parents as parents on reduced rates of payment will see their payment increase. See Department of Social Protection, [Minister Humphreys announces implementation of landmark legislation to reform child maintenance system](#) (4 June 2024). However, we note that civil society has raised concerns that child maintenance is still being counted for secondary benefits including social housing, legal aid, and Student Universal Support Ireland ('SUSI') grants: Treoir, [Pre-Budget submission to the Department of Social Protection Budget 2025](#) (2024).

⁵⁷⁷ Four of the seven members of the Review Group were in favour of the establishment of a State agency: Child Maintenance Review Group, [Report of the Child Maintenance Review Group](#) (2022) p. xxvi.

service.⁵⁷⁸ Two Parliamentary Committees have subsequently recommended that a Statutory Child Maintenance Agency be established as it is the best approach to facilitate co-operative agreements and reduce the burden on lone parents.⁵⁷⁹ The absence of a statutory maintenance agency continues an adversarial approach to child maintenance and places pressure on an overburdened court system, including due to repeated delays in reforming the family court system.⁵⁸⁰

In place of establishing an agency, the State undertook a review to improve the system of enforcement of child maintenance orders.⁵⁸¹ The review, published in 2024, made 26 recommendations for reform, including in relation to strengthening court enforcement of child maintenance orders.⁵⁸² The Review recommended the development of child maintenance guidelines,⁵⁸³ which are currently in development.⁵⁸⁴ These guidelines, if

⁵⁷⁸ The Government stated that there was no consensus in the Review Group around the establishment of a State agency: See Minister for Justice, [Family Support Services, Dáil Éireann Debate, Monday - 9 September 2024](#).

⁵⁷⁹ Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands, [Report on the pre-legislative scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Social Welfare \(Child Maintenance and Liable Relatives Provisions\) Bill](#) (2023) pp. 6-7; Joint Committee on Justice, [Report on Enforcement of Court Orders relating to Child Maintenance, Access and Custody](#) (2023) p. 6.

⁵⁸⁰ One Family, [Response to the publication of the Review of the Enforcement of Child Maintenance Orders](#) (2024); National One Parent Family Alliance, [Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the Social Welfare \(Child Maintenance and Liable Relatives Provisions Bill\)](#) (2023).

⁵⁸¹ The Review Group identified enforcement as the ‘single, most problematic, and challenging issue’ which causes ‘widespread frustration for the users of the system and which undermines the effectiveness of the Maintenance process’: Child Maintenance Review Group, [Report of the Child Maintenance Review Group](#) (2022) p. xviii. The Family Justice Strategy 2022-2025 committed the State to review the enforcement of child maintenance orders: see Department of Justice, [Family Justice Strategy 2022-2025](#) (2022) p. 21.

⁵⁸² The 26 recommendations span three different approaches: consensus, compliance, and deterrence in order to in order to generate maximum compliance with child maintenance orders, to ensure security and stability for children and to aid poverty prevention. Department of Justice, [Review of the Enforcement of Child Maintenance Orders](#) (2024) p. 42. We welcome the State’s recent re-commitment to enhance the enforcement mechanisms for child maintenance orders: Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland’s Future](#) (2025) p. 120.

⁵⁸³ The Department noted that Irish courts operate without any guidelines in the determination of child maintenance which can lead to inconsistencies in the system. The Department stated that “child maintenance guidelines may lead to a greater number of parents making voluntary maintenance agreements and would increase transparency, consistency and predictability for those seeking and paying child maintenance.” However, Judges will not be bound by the guidelines but rather they should have regard to them as the facts of each case may differ. See Department of Justice, [Review of the Enforcement of Child Maintenance Orders](#) (2024) pp. 44-45.

⁵⁸⁴ The guidelines are being developed by a Committee chaired by the Department of Justice and comprising officials from the Department of Social Protection; the Department of Children, Disability and Equality; the Courts Service; the Legal Aid Board; and Tusla. In April 2025, the Minister for Justice launched a public survey to

equality and human rights proofed, could be key to ensuring transparency and reducing the need for parents to go to the court.⁵⁸⁵

The Commission recommends that State ensures the expertise and experience of lone parent families, and their representative organisations, are central to the development and implementation of child maintenance guidelines, including by ensuring that child maintenance provides for an adequate standard of living for the lone parent and their children.

The Commission recommends the State prioritises the implementation of reforms to the system of enforcement of child maintenance orders and in the wider family court system. The State should commit to independently reviewing the implementation of the measures, which should include consideration of the establishment of Statutory Child Maintenance Agency.

Climate change and disaster risk reduction

There is no evidence that the gendered nature of climate and environmental risks receive the necessary priority at national level. Recent research has highlighted the lack of gender proofing of climate policies, the failure of climate policies to address inequalities, and the absence of women from climate decision-making processes.⁵⁸⁶ Ireland's recently approved Climate Action Plan 2025 has not been gender or equality proofed as it contains no specific actions to address the impact of climate change on women and girls in Ireland or ensure their inclusion in the response to climate change.⁵⁸⁷ We welcome the several commitments the

inform the development of the voluntary guidelines to inform parents on how to make private child maintenance arrangements: Department of Justice, [Minister Jim O'Callaghan asks public for their views on the payment of child maintenance to help inform new guidelines](#) (7 April 2025).

⁵⁸⁵ Kathryn O'Sullivan, [The "Dejudicialisation" of family law in Europe: Where does Ireland stand?](#) (2024) 27 Irish Journal of Family Law 1, pp. 4-6.

⁵⁸⁶ Feminist Communities for Climate Justice, [Feminist Climate Justice Report](#) (2024).

⁵⁸⁷ [Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, Climate Action Plan 2025](#) (2025). See also Feminist Communities for Climate Justice, [Government's plan fails to harness the potential of women & communities to lead climate transition](#) (16 April 2025).

State has made regarding the climate crisis in its 2025 Programme for Government. However, we note that there are no commitments to address gendered impacts.

Ireland remains a 'low-performing' country in climate action and the failure of meeting national and EU emissions targets in the first and second carbon budget periods (2021- 2025; 2026-2030).⁵⁸⁸ The Climate Action Plan 2025 does not put Ireland on a clear path to meet its climate obligations.⁵⁸⁹ The failure by the State to reduce carbon emissions and step up on climate action by 2030 could result in a fine of €8 to €26 billion which would further reduce the State's ability to invest in equality and human rights.⁵⁹⁰ Ireland continues to experience unprecedented biodiversity degradation loss.⁵⁹¹

The lack of action to address the climate crisis increases other crises, conflicts and risks. Increases in storms in recent times,⁵⁹² the ever-increasing threat of storm surges and extreme waves to Ireland as sea levels continue to rise,⁵⁹³ frequency of heatwaves,⁵⁹⁴ and the high

⁵⁸⁸ This is due to Ireland's ongoing majority use of fossil fuels and the upward trend of carbon energy-related emissions.

⁵⁸⁹ Friends of the Earth, [Climate Action Plan fails to put the brakes on pollution and fossil fuels](#) (15 April 2025).

⁵⁹⁰ The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council and the Climate Change Advisory Council estimate that Ireland could potentially have to pay out €8 to €26 billion to its EU partners if it does not step up climate action swiftly. However, if the Government implements the additional measures in its own Climate Action Plan by 2030, it could reduce the range to €3 to €12 billion: Irish Fiscal Advisory Council and Climate Change Advisory Council, [A Colossal Missed Opportunity Ireland's: Climate Action and the Potential Costs of Missing Targets](#) (2025). See also Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, [Fiscal Assessment Report: Ireland's bounty](#) (December 2024) pp. 31-32.

⁵⁹¹ Despite the State already declaring a 'Biodiversity Emergency' in 2019, 85% of protected areas remain in unfavourable conditions and inadequate implementation of the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity is ongoing. This includes constitutional amendments to provide for substantive environmental rights, such as the right to a clean, healthy, safe environment; the right to a stable and healthy climate; and the rights of future generations to these and other environmental rights. At present, the Irish Constitution does not include any reference to a right to a healthy environment. However, in 2017 the High Court determined that there was a constitutional right to an environment that is consistent with human dignity. The Supreme Court did not support this, but in a 2020 ruling made an observation that in other jurisdictions specific wording has been inserted into constitutions when they were being adopted or amended. The Supreme Court appeared to suggest that rather than the courts deciding the issue, an amendment to the constitution could be considered. The right to a clean, health and sustainable environment has been explicitly recognised by the UN General Assembly in 2022. See Citizens' Assembly, [Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss](#) (March 2023) pp. 16, 88; United Nations General Assembly, [Resolution A/76/L.75: the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly](#) (2022).

⁵⁹² As observed by the State meteorological service of Ireland: Met Éireann, [Why are we seeing so many storms this season?](#) (2024).

⁵⁹³ Environmental Protection Agency, [Ireland's Climate Change Assessment – Synthesis Report](#) (2023) p. 2.

⁵⁹⁴ ESRI, [Health Impacts of Climate Change and Mitigation Policies in Ireland](#) (2024) pp. 24-25.

likelihood of an increase in rainfall and wind strengths due to climate change⁵⁹⁵ are concerning. These changes contribute to disruption in women's and girls' everyday lives; insecurity in island, coastal and rural communities and nomadic culture, and disproportionately poor health outcomes. Storms can have detrimental impacts on socio-economic rights with decreased access to employment, education, transport and utilities (water, electricity, digital connection) due to infrastructure damage.⁵⁹⁶ Furthermore, the impact of climate change potentially exacerbates the rates of DSGBV in Ireland due to restricted access to transport, communication, refuge accommodation and support services.⁵⁹⁷

Research shows that women may be more physically vulnerable to certain forms of pollution and toxins.⁵⁹⁸ Socio-economic factors are also impacted by climate change as these are exacerbated by higher health costs and changes in the structure of the labour market as part of Ireland's transition to a carbon-neutral economy. Due to the heavy reliance of family farming and related seasonal work on the unpaid and paid work of women, it is essential to consider the gendered impacts of restructuring agricultural practices, mechanisation and automation.⁵⁹⁹

The gender-differentiated impacts of climate change are well established.⁶⁰⁰ Despite this, women's voices have been excluded or marginalised from environmental decision-making at

⁵⁹⁵ Colin Manning et al., [Compound wind and rainfall extremes: Drivers and future changes over the UK and Ireland](#) (2024) p. 12.

⁵⁹⁶ Storm Eowyn resulted in over 700,000 homes, farms and businesses in Ireland without power and with 133,000 homes, farms and businesses continuing to have no power after a significant time even after the Storm. Ireland also experienced school closures and a number of schools having significant infrastructure damage due to Storm Eowyn: Department of the Taoiseach, [Whole-of-government recovery response continues following Storm Éowyn](#) (January 2025); RTÉ, [Storm leaves number of schools with significant damage](#) (January 2025); The Irish Times, [After the storm: how were different areas in Ireland impacted by Storm Éowyn?](#) (January 2025).

⁵⁹⁷ Feminist Communities for Climate Justice, [Feminist Climate Justice Report](#) (2024) pp. 93, 98. Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁵⁹⁸ S. O'Neill, [Environmental Justice in Ireland: Key dimensions of environmental and climate injustice experienced by vulnerable and marginalised communities](#) (2022) pp. 6, 43-44. For further discussion, see IHREC, [Policy Statement on a Just Transition](#) (March 2023).

⁵⁹⁹ See Byrne, A., Duvvury, N., Macken-Walsh, Á., and Watson, T., [Gender, Power and Property: "In my own right": The Rural Economy Development Programme \(REDP\) Working Paper Series](#), (2013).

⁶⁰⁰ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [General recommendation No.37 \(2018\) on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate](#), CEDAW/C/GC/37 (2018); Climate

local, regional and national level, and this particularly applies to disabled women,⁶⁰¹ women in poverty, rural and community women's groups and young girls.⁶⁰²

Overall, insufficient attention has been given to the specific requirements for public participation and engagement by women, the long-term impacts of environmental inequality on women's health, education and livelihoods; and the gender and disability dimensions to environmental incentives such as transport measures.⁶⁰³ It is essential that the State ensures the inclusion and protection of women and girls at all stages of climate change and disaster prevention, mitigation, response, recovery and adaptation to ensure the advancement of substantive gender equality and the protection of human rights in Ireland,⁶⁰⁴ including through SDGs 5 (Gender Equality) and 13 (Climate Action) of the Agenda 2030.

The Commission recommends that all climate action and adaptation measures are poverty and equality proofed throughout the design, development and implementation stages, to assess and reduce the impact on women and girls, including those from structurally vulnerable groups. The State should ensure the inclusion of women and girls in decision-making processes on climate action. The State should leverage all available resources, including domestic and EU financing mechanisms, to ensure transformative mitigation and adaptation actions in response to climate change and biodiversity loss.

injustice is a compound form of injustice. It adds another layer to the injustices already experienced by people who may be economically, socially and politically marginalised, thus perpetuating and exacerbating existing inequalities and marginalisation.

⁶⁰¹ This issue has been raised through IHREC's [Disability Advisory Committee](#).

⁶⁰² S. O'Neill, [Environmental Justice in Ireland: Key dimensions of environmental and climate injustice experienced by vulnerable and marginalised communities](#) (2022) pp. 43-44; Dr. C. McCabe, [Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare](#) (2022) pp. 34-36. The presence of women in political decision-making is linked to more ambitious climate goals and policies. However, for example, Ireland did not appoint a woman to lead their UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties delegation between 2008 and 2019: OECD Environment Working Papers No. 193, [Women's leadership in environmental action](#) (2022).

⁶⁰³ S. O'Neill, [Environmental Justice in Ireland: Key dimensions of environmental and climate injustice experienced by vulnerable and marginalised communities](#) (2022) p. 43. Department of Rural and Community Development, [Public Participation Networks: Annual Report 2021](#) (2021) p. 51. In this context, we do note the [Gender Equality Initiative](#) of the Environmental Protection Agency.

⁶⁰⁴ See IHREC, [Submission to the 2023 UN High-Level Political Forum on the second Voluntary National Review of Ireland](#) (2023) and IHREC, [Policy Statement on a Just Transition](#) (2023).

The Commission recommends for the State to develop measures to ensure the availability and accessibility of refuge accommodation and support services to survivors and victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in preparation for climate-related disasters, through the inclusion of the response to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in the development of national climate strategies and action plans.

Disadvantaged groups of women

Rural women

We note the State's failure to address the Committee's request for information on measures taken to improve rural women's land ownership in both Ireland's 2017 and 2025 reviews.⁶⁰⁵ Recently published research shows that women farm holders only represent 13.5% of farm holders in Ireland, with little increase in this proportion since 1991.⁶⁰⁶ The Programme for Government commits to implement the National Women in Agriculture Action Plan including promoting women succession and addressing any taxation barriers to women's participation.⁶⁰⁷

Rural women experience the reduced accessibility to basic services and supports due to longer travel distances and disproportionate caring responsibilities. Inaccessible supports and services have specific impacts on rural women living in coastal and island communities, and in Gaeltacht⁶⁰⁸ areas.⁶⁰⁹ Investment is needed in reliable, safe, cost-effective public transport to ensure accessibility, especially for structurally vulnerable groups of women such

⁶⁰⁵ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Eighth periodic report submitted by Ireland under article 18 of the Convention](#) (November 2024) paras. 200-202. In General Recommendation No. 34 on the rights of rural women, the Committee recognises that rural women's rights are ignored or insufficiently addressed in national and local policies and strategies: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [General Recommendation No. 34 on the rights of rural women](#) (2016) para. 4.

⁶⁰⁶ Dr Martina Roche, Dr Mary Anne Hurley, Dr Áine Macken-Walsh and Dr Nóirín MacNamara, [Highlighting pathways to Empower Rural women to have Sustainable and Equitable Livelihoods in Farming](#) (2025).

⁶⁰⁷ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) p. 26. Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, [National Women in Agriculture Action Plan](#) (2024).

⁶⁰⁸ The term 'Gaeltacht' is used to describe the regions in Ireland in which the Irish language is, or was until recently, the primary spoken language of the majority of the community.

⁶⁰⁹ The particular experience of women living in these areas was raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

as those on low incomes, without access to a car, who are disabled and/or older, and those living in Direct Provision accommodation, many of which are located in rural and remote areas. Equally, services and supports must cater to rural areas and move away from being urban centric. Health services, childcare, education, employment and housing supports must be available in rural areas.⁶¹⁰

We welcome the LEADER programme, SICAP and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.⁶¹¹ However, these schemes intended to address economic and social inequality in rural areas lack adequate timelines and targets and we note the resistance of the State to commit to these.⁶¹² We note the State's commitment to the publication and implementation of 'Our Rural Future 2025–2030'.⁶¹³ We emphasise that the development of this policy must include consideration of human rights and equality and include an explicit, detailed gender perspective.

The Commission recommends that the State prioritises implementing the National Women in Agriculture Action Plan including promoting women succession and addressing taxation barriers to participation.

The Commission recommends that the State undertakes research into the barriers to women's land ownership and develops and implements recommendations that are complementary with the findings.

The Commission recommends that the State ensures the integration and mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all rural development policies, strategies, plans and programmes, particularly in Our Rural Future 2025–2030, to ensure equal access and benefits for rural women.

⁶¹⁰ NWC, [Her Rural Future: Key Demands for Women in Rural Ireland](#) (2023) p. 4.

⁶¹¹ Department of Rural and Community Development, [LEADER](#) (2025); Pobal, [Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme \(SICAP\) 2024 – 2028](#); Department of Rural and Community Development, [Rural Regeneration and Development Fund](#) (2025).

⁶¹² Houses of the Oireachtas, [Dáil Debates: Income Inequality](#) (27 March 2025).

⁶¹³ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (2025) p. 106.

The Commission recommends that the State must provide adequate investment in rural public transport and undertake a review of the gender-differentiated demands for transport services in rural areas in order to ensure that policy reflects the mobility needs of rural women and provide them with safe, affordable and accessible means of transport.

Traveller and Roma women

Traveller and Roma⁶¹⁴ women and girls continue to face structural discrimination and inequalities in health,⁶¹⁵ education,⁶¹⁶ employment,⁶¹⁷ accommodation and housing,⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁴ We note the lack of availability of disaggregated data in relation to the Roma community, which impacts on our awareness of the barriers Roma face. See Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, [Roma in Ireland: Statistical Spotlight](#) (2025) p. 3.

⁶¹⁵ Key issues include access to maternal health services; higher mortality rates; poor mental health outcomes; access to medical card; lack of interpretation and translation services. See IHREC, [Ireland and the 6th Monitoring Cycle of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#) (2024) pp. 33, 39; IHREC, [Letter to the Secretariat of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, following their visit to Ireland as part of the 5th monitoring cycle](#) (26 October 2023) pp. 13-14. See also Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, [Memorandum on the human rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland](#) (2025) pp. 8-10; Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, [Fifth Opinion on Ireland](#) (2024) paras. 24, 163-172.

⁶¹⁶ Key issues include the costs of accessing education; the disproportionate use of reduced school days for Traveller and Roma children; lack of inclusive curriculum; placement in special support groups; transition to secondary, further and higher education; impact of gender roles and childcare responsibilities on access to higher education; and exclusion, racism and identity-based bullying from students and staff. See IHREC, [Letter to the Secretariat of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, following their visit to Ireland as part of the 5th monitoring cycle](#) (26 October 2023) pp. 10-11. See also Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, [Memorandum on the human rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland](#) (2025) pp. 7-8; Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, [Fifth Opinion on Ireland](#) (2024) paras. 128-147.

⁶¹⁷ Key issues include high levels of unemployment and underemployment; the gender pay gap; discriminatory recruitment practices; precarious work; and childcare supports. See IHREC, [Letter to the Secretariat of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, following their visit to Ireland as part of the 5th monitoring cycle](#) (26 October 2023) pp. 11-12. See also Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, [Fifth Opinion on Ireland](#) (2024) paras. 45, 155-158, 160-161.

⁶¹⁸ Key issues include insufficient local authority budgets; overcrowded living conditions; inadequate sanitation; provision of appropriate accommodation; location of accommodation; evictions; planning issues; and homelessness. In June 2024, we published Equality Action Plans from seven local authorities on the provision of Traveller accommodation and services, and we stated that significant challenges remained for Travellers accessing local authority accommodation. The European Committee of Social Rights has repeatedly found Ireland in violation of the European Social Charter in the provision of accommodation to Travellers. See IHREC, [Ireland and the 6th Monitoring Cycle of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#) (2024) pp. 33-36; IHREC, [Commission publish Equality Action Plans from seven local authorities on Traveller accommodation](#) (26 June 2024). See also Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, [Memorandum on the human rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland](#) (2025) pp. 5-7; Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the

standard of living,⁶¹⁹ and participation in political and public life^{620, 621} Travellers and Roma continue to experience significant levels of prejudice in Irish society.⁶²² While the recognition of Irish Travellers as an ethnic minority in 2017 had symbolic value, it is of no legal effect and their rights remain unclear and unprotected.⁶²³

We welcome the recent reports of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and the Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities following their respective visits to Ireland.⁶²⁴ The reports found that

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, [Fifth Opinion on Ireland](#) (2024) paras. 45, 83-93, 173-180; European Committee of Social Rights, [4th Assessment of follow-up: European Roma Rights Centre \(ERRC\) v. Ireland, Complaint No. 100/2013, decision on the merits of 1 December 2015, Resolution CM/ResChS\(2016\)4](#) (2023) pp. 124-127.

⁶¹⁹ Key issues include higher rates of poverty and social exclusion; and the discriminatory effect of the Habitual Residence Condition and Housing Circular 41/2012 on access to social welfare and housing. See IHREC, [Ireland and the 6th Monitoring Cycle of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#) (2024) pp. 40-41. See also Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, [Fifth Opinion on Ireland](#) (2024) paras. 159, 160, 162.

⁶²⁰ Key issues include low participation of Traveller women and no representation of Roma women in Ireland's Parliament; representation in the media; and levels of racism, hate and intolerance faced. See IHREC, [Ireland and the 6th Monitoring Cycle of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#) (2024) p. 38. See also Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, [Fifth Opinion on Ireland](#) (2024) paras. 123-127, 148-154.

⁶²¹ Despite the Committee's recommendation in 2017 for the State to take concrete measures to improve the health, education, employment, and housing outcomes for Traveller women and girls: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, [Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland](#), CEDAW/C/IRL/CO/6-7 (9 March 2017) paras. 48-49. See more generally for discrimination and equality faced by Travellers and Roma: Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, [Memorandum on the human rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland](#) (2025); Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, [Fifth Opinion on Ireland](#) (2024); Values Lab, [Report on the outcome of the local consultation process with Traveller and Roma organisations, community groups, and individuals to inform the development of the successor strategy to the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy](#) (2023).

⁶²² Research has highlighted the negative attitudes towards Traveller and Roma among the Irish population. Travellers and Roma were among the groups which respondents to a survey were least comfortable with, across three domains examined: as a neighbour, in a love relationship with one's child, and in the same class as one's child at school. ESRI, [Understanding attitudes to Travellers and Roma in Ireland](#) (2024).

⁶²³ This was recognised in the High Court, where Justice Eager remarked that the recognition 'has no legal effect, clearly it is not legislation'. See *Mongans & Ors v Clare County Council* [2017] IEHC 709, para. 37. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended that the State take legislative measures to formalise the recognition of Travellers as an official minority group, clarify the rights accorded to them, and ensure that such rights are protected and promoted. See Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, [Concluding observations on the combined fifth to ninth reports of Ireland](#), CERD/C/IRL/CO/5-9 (23 January 2020) para. 32.

⁶²⁴ The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities visited Ireland from 18-22 September 2023: Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, [Fifth Opinion on Ireland](#) (2024). The Council of Europe Commissioner for

structural anti-Traveller and anti-Roma racism is one of the main barriers in the access to rights, and made several key recommendations including the following:

- › Establish an independent authority mandated to oversee and coordinate the planning and construction of culturally appropriate accommodation at local level.⁶²⁵
- › Adequately resource the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024-2030, ensuring a robust implementation and monitoring plan.⁶²⁶
- › Enhance access to basic healthcare, including mental and maternal healthcare for Roma, including through the issuance of medical cards and improved access to interpretation services.⁶²⁷

The systemic issues faced by Travellers and Roma women and girls emphasises the importance of having close alignment between the national strategies for Travellers and Roma and for women and girls.⁶²⁸ While we welcome the publication of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028 and its first two-year action plan (as the previous strategy had concluded in 2021),⁶²⁹ we observed deficiencies in the State's approach to development of the strategy.⁶³⁰ Concerns we raised included alignment with international standards and recommendations by treaty bodies, a lack of collaboration with civil society in

Human Rights visited Ireland from 7-11 October 2024: Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, [Memorandum on the human rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland](#) (2025).

⁶²⁵ Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, [Memorandum on the human rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland](#) (2025) p. 6.

⁶²⁶ Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, [Fifth Opinion on Ireland](#) (2024) para. 139.

⁶²⁷ Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, [Memorandum on the human rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland](#) (2025) p. 10; Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, [Fifth Opinion on Ireland](#) (2024) para. 24.

⁶²⁸ The Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities recommends that the State “ensure the inclusion of Traveller and Roma women’s needs and interests in wider gender policies and to take an integrated approach to actions targeting Traveller and Roma women and girls in the forthcoming National Strategy for Women and Girls that should be co-ordinated with the approach of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.” See [Fifth Opinion on Ireland](#) (2024) para. 71.

⁶²⁹ [National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028](#) and [National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028 Action Plan 2024-2026](#).

⁶³⁰ IHREC, [Observations on the draft National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028 and draft Action Plan 2024-2028](#) (2024).

finalising the strategy,⁶³¹ a lack of demonstrable focus on implementation, a lack of measurable impacts,⁶³² ambiguous and vague language within actions, and the omission of actions concerning persistent issues faced by the Travellers and Roma (such as the Habitual Residence Condition, Housing Circular 41/2021, and legislation governing evictions).⁶³³

The Commission recommends that the State mainstreams intersectionality and gender equality in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028 by ensuring a coordinated approach to the implementation of the Strategy and the new national strategy for women and girls.

The Commission recommends that the State ensures a robust and resourced implementation and monitoring framework is embedded in the lifecycle of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028, and that the actions are adequately costed and assessed for tangible impacts on Traveller and Roma women and girls.

The Commission recommends that the State reviews and revises the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028 and its action plan to implement the recommendations related to the most prevalent structural issues faced by Traveller and Roma women and girls by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and the Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

Women in detention

As the designated Co-ordinating National Preventive Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture ('OPCAT'), we are gravely concerned about the ongoing

⁶³¹ We stated that it was critical that stakeholders, particularly Traveller and Roma organisations, can meaningfully engage in the process as they have the lived expertise to identify the structural barriers they face and the measures needed to remove these barriers. We called for the State to be transparent with civil society on why objectives and actions were or were not included in the strategy.

⁶³² In 2017, the Committee recommended that the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy should include clear indicators and benchmarks, and that its implementation is monitored and regularly evaluated: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, [Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland](#) (9 March 2017) para.49.

⁶³³ We emphasised the importance of prioritising actions which are focused on systemic change, and which will have a greater impact on the lives of Travellers and Roma.

failure of the State to ratify the OPCAT, which would provide a human-rights based preventive mechanism for places of detention.⁶³⁴ The need for such a mechanism in law is particularly acute given the issues arising for women in detention, including *de facto* detention.

In regard to prison detention, persistent overcrowding is still a significant issue,⁶³⁵ linked, in part, to the overuse of remand.⁶³⁶ Despite recent policy responses,⁶³⁷ overcrowding continues to worsen.⁶³⁸ Concerns also persist in respect of the lack of transparency and non-publication

⁶³⁴ Ireland is the only Member State of the European Union not to have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture. The Inspection of Places of Detention Bill has not been published and has featured in successive legislative programmes. In 2021, the State committed to ratifying OPCAT before the end of 2021. Despite repeated assurances, OPCAT remains unratified.

⁶³⁵ Ireland's two women prisons are consistently the most overcrowded in the State. On 30 April 2025, Dóchas Centre prison was at 127% capacity, while Limerick Female Prison was at 152% capacity. Irish Prison Service, [Prisoner Population on 30th April 2025](#). The most recently published Annual Report of the Office of the Inspector of Prisons noted the overcapacity at the Dóchas Centre prison and the impact of overcrowding causing stress, tension and anguish, noting the profile of prisoners: [Annual Report](#) (2023) p.23.

⁶³⁶ Irish Penal Reform Trust, [Progress in the Penal System: The need for transparency 2021](#) (2022) pp. 42-45. Irish Penal Reform Trust, [Maternal Imprisonment in Ireland: A Scoping Study](#) (2023) indicates that there is a lack of robust statistical data on the use of bail and pre-trial detention which makes it difficult to ascertain where and how bail is being used in cases involving mothers and primary caregivers, pp.34-35. Irish Prison Service, [Irish Prison Service Annual Report](#) (2023) is the latest report available and indicates committals in 2023 increased by 12.7% on the previous year with the daily average of women offenders in custody increasing by 23.7%, p.52. The Report indicates that over half of committals in 2023 were for women on remand, p.54.

⁶³⁷ A new women prison opened at Limerick prison in October 2023 with capacity for 56 women. In [response to a written question in the Dáil](#) in January 2025, the then Minister for Justice stated that a Prison Overcrowding Response Group was established in 2023 and following that, a pilot scheme has been established targeting women serving custodial sentences of 18 months or less in Limerick's Women's Prison. It was also indicated that a Future Prison Capacity Working Group has been established. The Prison Overcrowding Response Group was established in July 2023 to identify short to medium term solutions to address the prison overcrowding crisis. A [Report](#) of that Group was submitted to the Minister in March 2024 and was published by the Irish Penal Reform Trust in October 2024. The report stated that of the 52 women identified as eligible for early release due to sentence length, they were not in fact eligible due to their need for support and structure that extended beyond that of the existing Community Support Scheme. A new scheme targeting this cohort was stated to be being scoped, p.22. Irish Penal Reform Trust issued a [statement](#) on the Report in October 2024 noting the focus on prison expansion and failure to prioritise changes to eligibility for Temporary Release and parole with prison as a sanction of last resort.

⁶³⁸ The Irish Prison Service publishes [daily statistics](#) on the Prisoner Population. As of 30 April 2025, the Dóchas Centre was over capacity at 127% with 12 mattresses on the floor, and Limerick Prison (female) was at 152% capacity. This represented an increase in both prisons on the same date the previous year: as of 30 April 2024, the Dóchas Centre was over capacity at 116% and Limerick Prison was over capacity at 125%. A recent [statement](#) of the Irish Penal Reform Trust (April 2025) stated that persistent overcrowding since 2023 has led to unacceptable, degrading and dehumanising conditions in prison.

of reports;⁶³⁹ the committal of women on a short-term basis for non-violent offences;⁶⁴⁰ self-harm, depression and traumatic stress disorder rates and addiction issues;⁶⁴¹ the significant overrepresentation of Travellers in women's prisons;⁶⁴² the absence of a human rights and equality informed policy on transgender prisoners;⁶⁴³ and under-resourced and insufficient

⁶³⁹ As referred, the report of the Prison Overcrowding Response Group was not published by the Department of Justice at the time of completion. In 2022, the Human Rights Committee raised its concerns about the 'lack of transparency and reiterated refusal to publish the Dóchas reports on the treatment and conditions of detention of women detainees': Human Rights Committee, [Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Ireland](#), CCPR/C/IRL/CO/5 (26 January 2023) paras. 35-36. The publication of a redacted report was subsequently welcomed by the Irish Penal Reform Trust in a [statement](#) in January 2024, nearly four years after the inspection. The Annual Report of the Office of the Inspectorate of Prisons 2023 was submitted to the Minister for Justice in March 2024 and not published until February 2025.

⁶⁴⁰ There is an overall failure to address causes of offending behaviour including unmet social needs and absence of appropriate services in the community. Irish Penal Reform Trust, [Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth consultation on the next National Strategy for Women and Girls](#) (2024), refers to the amount of women committed to prison for the non-payment of court ordered fines (5.7%) is over double the comparable figure for men (2.5%), p. 5. Irish Prison Service, [Irish Prison Service Annual Report](#) (2023) provides a breakdown by offence group for women sentenced in 2023, p. 54.

⁶⁴¹ The Health Research Board [Focal Point Ireland: national report for 2024 – prison](#) found that between 2017 and 2019 69 women self-harmed and the rate of self-harm was higher among women prisoners than males in all age groups, p. 11. The most recently published [Annual Report](#) (2023) of the Office of the Inspector of Prisons noted in respect of the Healthcare Committal Unit at the Dóchas Centre prison that conditions were such that women suffering from serious mental illness were held in very poor conditions and without access to appropriate medical treatment, and that the Unit was frequently chaotic over the duration of inspection, pp.24-25. Office of the Inspector of Prisons Inspection [Report on the Provision of Psychiatric Care in the Irish Prison System](#) (February – March 2023) states that many prisoners have substance misuse disorders which pre-dated their placement in prison, including 88 of the 171 prisoners in the Dóchas Centre prison; it then notes that the level of addictions service is challenged because of the low numbers of psychology staff and lack of input from addiction specialists, p.31. In July 2024, in [a written answer in the Dáil](#), the then Minister for Justice indicated that there was a waiting list of 24 women for access to addiction counselling services. [The Health Research Board Health-promoting interventions in prisons: an evidence review](#) (April 2025) considers the evidence base for non-pharmacological interventions to promote health and well-being among women prisoners.

⁶⁴² Brian Harvey, [The Traveller Community and Homelessness](#) (2021: Pavee Point) p. 23. This overrepresentation must be seen in the context of research highlighting Traveller's negative experiences in the criminal justice process, including their strong perceptions of not being treated fairly by An Garda Síochána, judges and the courts, as well as high levels of perceived disrespect and stricter treatment from the police and judges. S. Joyce, O. O'Reilly, M. O'Brien, D. Joyce, J. Schweppe, and A. Haynes, [Irish Travellers' Access to Justice](#) (European Centre for the Study of Hate, (2022)). M. Pierce, P. Kennedy, [Minority Women Incarcerated: The Vulnerabilities of Traveller Women in the Irish Criminal Justice System](#) (Sage Journals, Race and Justice, January 2023). Irish Traveller women are stated to be 22 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Traveller women.

⁶⁴³ Issue raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum. [Chaplaincy Annual Report for Limerick Prison 2021](#) (March 2022) identified the vulnerability of transgender prisoners in Limerick prison on their committal and throughout their sentence, p.6. [Covid-19 Thematic Inspection of Limerick Prison](#), the Office of the Inspectorate of Prisons (April 2021) identified similar concerns, pp. 33-34. LGBT Ireland, [Progress made, renewed efforts required: A shadow report of Ireland's first National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy](#) (2024), states that the policy on transgender prisoners must consider the principles set out in Committee on the Prevention of Torture's prison standard on transgender persons in prison, including in relation to prison placement; ill-treatment by staff and prisoners; regime conditions; body searches; transfers; and access to healthcare, p.58. Committee on the Prevention of

mental health services in women's prisons.⁶⁴⁴ There needs to be a greater focus on the imprisonment of pregnant women,⁶⁴⁵ and the impact of maternal imprisonment on women, their children, their family and the broader community.⁶⁴⁶

The permissibility in Irish law to place women immigration detainees within the general population in prisons and Garda stations remains a concern;⁶⁴⁷ particularly in the context of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum which provides for an expansion of immigration detention.⁶⁴⁸ These new procedures may have a particular impact on structurally vulnerable women, including victims of trafficking, minors, and survivors of torture. There are

Torture, [Prison Standard: Transgender persons in prison](#) (2024). [Irish Penal Reform Trust Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth consultation on the next National Strategy for Women and Girls](#) (October 2024) expressed particular concern about the treatment of transgender women in prison in Ireland and referred to a stated intention of the Irish Prison Service to finalise a transgender policy which as of the publication of that submission had not been finalised, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁴⁴ Department of Justice, [High Level Task Force to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of those who come into contact with the criminal justice sector: Final Report](#) (2022). Studies indicate that between 50-60% of women in custodial settings have experienced physical or sexual abuse. Irish Penal Reform Trust, [Progress in the Penal System: A framework for penal reform 2022](#) (2023) p. 18. Dr Susan Finnerty, Inspector of Mental Health Services, [Access to Mental Health Services for People in the Criminal Justice System](#) (2021) pp. 28-29. Office of the Inspector of Prisons Inspection [Report on the Provision of Psychiatric Care in the Irish Prison System](#) (February – March 2023) found that mental health service provision at Limerick Prison was totally inadequate and indicated a disimprovement in recent years, p.22. The supports at the Dóchas Centre were not sufficient for women with health and social problems and there was insufficient staffing to meet the clinical demand (p.37, p.21). Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁶⁴⁵ Irish Penal Reform Trust, [The Sunday Times: Number of Pregnant women in Irish jails at record high](#) (December 2024).

⁶⁴⁶ Irish Penal Reform Trust, [Maternal Imprisonment in Ireland: A Scoping Study](#) (2023) pp. 15, 18. Issue also raised at our CEDAW Civil Society Forum.

⁶⁴⁷ See IHREC, [Ireland and the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (2024). Applicants for international protection can be detained in a number of circumstances under the *International Protection Act 2015*, as amended (see Section 20 for example). Detention is permitted to facilitate deportation and return orders, subject to a number of criteria. Under the European Union (Dublin System) Regulations 2018, an applicant may also be detained for the purposes of facilitating a Dublin transfer. Broader immigration legislation, including the *Immigration Acts 1999-2004*, allows for detention of non-nationals in a number of circumstances, including to facilitate a deportation order, or for persons refused leave to land, amongst others. According to 2021 research, the main prison used for immigration-related purposes was Cloverhill Prison, which is primarily a remand prison and only for male prisoners. The main prison for immigration detention for women was the Dóchas Centre. Women international protection applicants were detained in police stations: Emily Cuniffe, [Detention and alternatives to detention in international protection and return procedures in Ireland](#) (2021) p. iii. There is a lack of updated research and data available as of 2025.

⁶⁴⁸ [General Scheme of the International Protection Bill 2025](#) (April 2025).

shortcomings in special care provision noting the particular vulnerability of detained children, including girls.⁶⁴⁹

The Commission recommends that the State proceeds with the immediate ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.

The Commission recommends that the State prioritises the use of alternative non-custodial measures for women such that imprisonment is used as a last resort.

The Commission recommends that the State urgently addresses persistent overcrowding in women's prisons and prioritises timely, gender-sensitive provision of mental health and addiction supports.

The Commission recommends that the State uses immigration detention for women only in exceptional circumstances, for the shortest possible time. The Commission recommends that any legislative measures introduced to transpose the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum do not expand the use of immigration detention and embed adequate safeguards for women seeking protection.

Disabled women

Disabled women encounter challenges in realising their right to independent living, due to a profoundly lacking system of personal assistance ('PA'),⁶⁵⁰ underpinned by an absence of a

⁶⁴⁹ Special care units are residential facilities for children in care aged between 11 and 17 years detained pursuant to a High Court order. In a recent [written answer](#) in the Dáil, the Minister for Children referred to capacity challenges in provision of such care (March 2025). The Health Information and Quality Authority ('HIQA') inspects such facilities and identifies instances of non-compliance, for example: [Designated Centres SCU Inspection Report](#) (March 2024). The Supreme Court in *Re M McD, A Child: Child and Family Agency v McD and others* [2024] IESC 6 (28 February 2024) commented on the State's failure to provide adequate care for vulnerable minors as discussed in Bar Council of Ireland, [No Room at the Inn: Supreme Court Decision & Systemic Issues with Care for Vulnerable Minors](#) (March 2024).

⁶⁵⁰ Article 19 of the UNCPRD ensures the right to independent living, including entitlements to a range of in-home, residential and community support services, including personal assistance.

legislative framework for the grant of PA services,⁶⁵¹ insufficient budgetary allocations,⁶⁵² and insufficient coordination resulting in anomalies across the life cycle.⁶⁵³ Financial supports for disabled women are lacking⁶⁵⁴ and efforts at social protection reform have not adequately involved disabled people.⁶⁵⁵ Disability services in the community are insufficient and many services and housing remain inaccessible.⁶⁵⁶ Evidence shows that for disabled women

⁶⁵¹ IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(2024\)](#) (2024) p. 120; The National Women's Council has called for recognition of the key role PA services play in independent living and has recommended legislating to provide a statutory right to PA. National Women's Council, [What Disabled women Want for 2022](#) (2021) p. 2. Compounding the absence of a statutory right to PA, PA is often conflated with long-term care, which contributes to the conceptualisation of disabled women as passive recipients of care rather than as autonomous individuals exercising their right to make independent choices. IHREC, [Policy Statement on Care](#) (2023) pp. 14-15. Due to the absence of adequate PA services, many disabled women have to accept this ableist framing and access care support instead. The Irish Wheelchair Association estimates over 60% of individuals currently receiving PA services require significantly more hours than they are receiving. Irish Wheelchair Association, [Personal Assistance Services](#) (2023).

⁶⁵² IHREC's [Disability Advisory Committee \('DAC'\)](#) has expressed concerns regarding the 'charity model' associated with personal assistance, and the need for an attitudinal shift towards a rights-based approach, and this has been echoed by civil society. ILMI, [A manifesto for change: Disabled People taking control of state funded disability services](#) (2024); Disability Federation of Ireland, [Personal Assistance Services: Position Paper](#) (2024). Budgetary allocations should include ring-fenced funding for assistive technology. National Women's Council, [What Disabled women Want for 2022](#) (2021) p. 2.

⁶⁵³ Stakeholders have advised us of significant difficulties in accessing services at transition points in their lives. For example, there is no right to a PA within older people's services, meaning that disabled women struggle to access services once they reach 65. Eamonn Carroll and Selina McCoy, [Personal Assistance Services in Ireland: A Capability Approach to Understanding the Lived Experience of Disabled People](#) (2022) *Disabilities* Vol 2, 694–714, p. 695. The State committed to publishing the next National Disability Strategy in 2024, promising "supports for disabled people in Ireland to live independent, autonomous lives of their own choosing." Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Eighth periodic report submitted by Ireland under article 18 of the Convention](#) (November 2024) para. 213.

⁶⁵⁴ Households with a disabled member in Ireland face significant financial burdens related to disability and have very high at risk of poverty ('AROP') rates, and are more likely than other household types to be at risk of poverty. IHREC has called on the State to actively support and resource disabled people to live independently, including through the provision of person-centred financial supports. IHREC, Karina Doorley, Theano Kakoulidou and Agathe Simon [Adjusting Estimates of Poverty for the Cost of Disability](#) (2025); IHREC, [Disabled households forced to spend majority of disposable income on disability](#) (2025).

⁶⁵⁵ In September 2023, the Government published a consultation paper on disability reform, which was heavily criticised by civil society. Department of Social Protection, [Green Paper on Disability Reform: A Public Consultation to Reform Disability Payments in Ireland](#) (2023); IHREC, [Letter to the Minister for Social Protection regarding the Green Paper on Disability Reform – A Public Consultation to Reform Disability Payments in Ireland](#) (2024); Independent Living Movement Ireland, [ILMI Summary of the Green Paper on DA Consultations](#) (2023).

⁶⁵⁶ Accessibility requires not only access to the physical environment, but also access to transportation, information and communication services, and to other facilities open to the public. CRPD, [General comment on Article 9: Accessibility](#) (25 November 2013) para. 1. The UNCRPD requires States to provide training to all stakeholders on accessibility, including those who design and build buildings, urban planners, transport authorities and service providers, and has emphasised that it is unacceptable to use public funds to perpetuate new inequalities. CRPD, [General comment on Article 9: Accessibility](#) (25 November 2013) paras. 16, 29. Our engagements with key stakeholder groups have highlighted significant difficulties in accessing services at

experiencing gender-based violence in domestic settings, dependence on the perpetrator for movement, personal assistance and economic support often prevent them seeking safety or redress.⁶⁵⁷

We continue to have grave concerns about the significant levels of institutionalisation⁶⁵⁸ and the systemic failings of institutions providing educational, health and social care services to disabled women. Against the backdrop of so-called ‘historical’ abuse,⁶⁵⁹ more recent incidents of violence and neglect, including in Aras Attracta,⁶⁶⁰ the Grace case,⁶⁶¹ the Brandon

transition points in the lives of disabled people, including transitioning from child to adult disability services; from college into employment; from one Community Health Organisation to another; and disability services to older people’s services at the age of 65. IHREC, [Policy Statement on Care](#) (2023) p. 64; Irish Wheelchair Association [Social Housing](#). IHREC’s DAC has raised significant concerns regarding insufficient provisions of Irish Sign Language interpretation, limiting the ability of deaf people to access public services, and have linked inability to access services with increased risks of domestic and gender-based violence (IHREC, Disability Advisory Committee, February 2025).

⁶⁵⁷ Women’s Aid, [Disabled Women’s Experiences of Intimate Partner Abuse in Ireland: Research Project Report](#) (2024).

⁶⁵⁸ IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (2024) pp. 120-121. Further to the groups discussed below, we note that children in care may be subject to institutionalisation in private care centres due to a lack of Tusla-operated group homes and foster care settings. These institutions are not subject to independent oversight. Empowering People in Care, [Pre-Budget Submission 2024](#) (2023) p. 7.

⁶⁵⁹ Recalling the [Oireachtas \(Irish Parliament\) debate](#) on the publication of the Ryan Report on the Commission to inquire into child abuse (2009), the Ryan Report identified institutions in which disabled people were abused. See [Volume 3](#) section (for example: Chapter 13 Special Needs Schools and Residential Services; Chapter 16 Hospitals).

⁶⁶⁰ In 2014, the national broadcaster aired an investigative documentary on abuse at a residential care facility for people with intellectual disabilities in Mayo. Undercover footage showed a number of staff members physically and psychologically abusing and neglecting residents in the facility. A subsequent investigation by An Garda Síochána resulted in criminal charges against 6 people, 5 of whom were found guilty. National Disability Authority, [Overview of UNCPRD Article 16 in Ireland: Freedom from exploitation violence and abuse](#) (2022) p. 54.

⁶⁶¹ See ‘Violations of women’s rights’ section.

case⁶⁶² and Mary's case⁶⁶³ are of grave concern, as is the failure to hold perpetrators of abuse, services and professionals⁶⁶⁴ to account. There is an urgent need to tackle the non-prosecution of offences involving people with intellectual disabilities, including addressing credibility issues faced by women who are victims and survivors.⁶⁶⁵

The State has committed to publish and fund a new National Disability Strategy which will adopt a whole-of-government approach and advance the implementation of the UNCRPD.⁶⁶⁶ It is essential that a coordinated approach is taken to the implementation of the Disability Strategy and the new NSWG to realise the rights under CEDAW and UNCRPD.

The Commission recommends that the State actively supports and resources disabled women to live independently, including delivery of person-centred financial supports, a legal right to personal assistance, and seamless and flexible services across the life cycle. The right of disabled women and girls to direct and choose the support services to meet their needs must also be recognised.

⁶⁶² An investigation by the HSE's National Independent Review Panel (NIRP) found that at least 18 people with intellectual disabilities in care settings in Donegal were sexually abused by Brandon, another resident, on multiple occasions by between 2003 and 2016. Between 2003 and 2011 Brandon 'engaged in a vast number of highly abusive and sexually intrusive behaviours' against other residents. Staff and management were fully aware of this abuse occurring, but victims' family members were only informed about the abuse in December 2018. Both NIRP and previous HIQA inspections identified failings regarding the governance and management of this particular service. The review team believed a key contributing factor enabling this abuse to continue was the clinical-like environment of the setting which treated residents as patients and promoted a situation where they were completely reliant on staff to protect them. Brandon spent 20 years in this service and there was never a holistic assessment of his needs, or a more specialised placement considered for him. National Disability Authority, [Overview of UNCRPD Article 16 in Ireland: Freedom from exploitation violence and abuse](#) (2022) p. 55; National Independent Review Panel, [Independent Review of the Management of Brandon](#) (2021).

⁶⁶³ In 2017 a report on the case review of Mary's case was published, in response to delays in removing Mary from a foster care placement between 2014 and 2016, despite concerns about abuse by her foster carers. The report highlighted the lack of reliable safeguarding measures and misunderstandings regarding the role and function of post holders from different agencies. HSE and Tusla, [Case Review Mary](#) (2017).

⁶⁶⁴ Observation from IHREC's Disability Advisory Committee that the current State 'learning lessons' approach means that service providers and professionals are not appropriately held to account.

⁶⁶⁵ IHREC, [Access to Justice: Implementation of Article 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (2024) p. 29. A report prepared by HIQA shows that of the 298 pieces of unsolicited information received in 2017, none were passed on to the Ombudsman and only one was passed to An Garda Síochána. Irish Times, [Hiqa received 4,600 allegations of abuse of disabled residents in 2017](#) (2018). For further information see IHREC, [Ireland and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (2022) pp. 89-90.

⁶⁶⁶ Government of Ireland, [Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future](#) (January 2025) p. 92.

The Commission recommends that the principles of universal design, community living and participation are embedded, including through procurement processes, in the development of new facilities, products, technologies and services and in the removal of existing barriers to independent living for disabled women and girls.

The Commission recommends that the State takes action to address the systemic factors enabling violence and neglect of disabled women and girls in institutional and community settings, including steps taken to ensure professional and organisational accountability, oversight and inter-agency coordination, and addressing failures in the criminal justice system, inspection bodies and the care system.

The Commission recommends that State mainstreams intersectionality and gender equality in the new National Disability Strategy by ensuring a coordinated approach to the implementation of the Strategy and the new national strategy for women and girls.



**Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas**
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