



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

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

### **Eighth periodic report submitted by Ireland under article 18 of the Convention, due in 2024\*\*\*\***

[Date received: 1 November 2024]

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\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

\*\* The present document was submitted pursuant to the simplified reporting procedure. It contains the responses of the State party to the Committee's list of issues prior to reporting ([CEDAW/C/IRL/QPR/8](#)).

\*\*\* The annex to the present document may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.



## I. Introduction

1. This document is the eighth periodic report of Ireland to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The report contains responses to the list of issues and questions raised by the Committee prior to its publication.

2. This report contains contributions from all relevant Government Departments. A consultation was held with civil society organisations on the 7th October 2024, and a report of that consultation will be published on the Department website along with the State report.

### A. Reply to paragraph 1 of the list of issues and questions

#### General

##### *Situation of women in Ireland*

3. Between Census 2011 and Census 2022 the number of women in Ireland increased by 12.5 per cent to 2.605 million or 50.6 per cent of the total population of 5.149 million. The largest proportional increases were in the age groups 70–74 years and 75–79 years. In the same period, the number of males increased by 12 per cent. 1 in 8 women in Ireland has non-Irish citizenship. These trends reflect increased internationalisation and overall growth in the Irish population. Please see Tables 1 and 2 in the Annex.

##### *Health*

4. The 60,575 births recorded in Ireland in 2021 represent an annual birth rate of 11.9 per thousand population. This is a decrease of 8 per cent on births recorded in 2015. The fertility rate<sup>1</sup> for women in Ireland in 2021 was 1.7, a decrease since 2015 when it was 1.9. The average age of first-time mothers in 2021 was 31.7, an increase of a year since 2015 (30.6).

5. For first time mothers outside of marriage, the average age was 30. Overall, this indicates that though the overall population continues to grow, the rate at which it is growing is decreasing. This is partly attributable to the fact that women are having fewer children, later in life, a phenomenon seen in many of Ireland's peer countries. Please see Tables 3-5 in the Annex.

6. Life expectancy at birth increased since the last CEDAW report and was at 80.9 for males and 84.2 for females in 2022. The life expectancy of females in Ireland is higher than the EU27 average of 83.3. In 2021, cancers were the leading cause of death for women, followed closely by diseases of the circulatory system. Please see Tables 6-7 in the Annex.

##### *Education*

7. Girls and women represent 49.3 per cent of all students in full-time education and 53.8 per cent of those in bachelor's level education or equivalent. The rate of early school leaving for girls has fallen from 5 per cent in 2015 to 3 per cent in 2023 and is one of the lowest among the EU27 countries. Please see Tables 8 and 9 in the Annex.

<sup>1</sup> The total period fertility rate, TPFRR, represents the projected number of children a woman would have if she experienced current age-specific fertility rates while progressing from age 15–49 years.

8. At Leaving Certificate level<sup>2</sup> in 2023, about 3 in 5 students taking Biology and Chemistry and over a quarter of students taking Physics are female. Females and males are in higher education in the fields of agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary, business administration and law, natural sciences, mathematics and statistics, and services in similar numbers. There are a higher proportion of females than males in fields such as arts and humanities, education, health and welfare, and social sciences, journalism, and information.

9. Though educational attainment in Ireland ranks as some of the highest in the EU27, a gendered pattern in the uptake of certain subjects, such as STEM subjects, endures. Addressing this remains an area of focus in Irish Equality policy. Please see Tables 10 and 11 in the Annex.

### *Employment*

10. The participation rate of women in the labour market at the beginning of 2024 was 60 per cent, an increase of over 5 per cent since 2016. Though overall participation of women in the labour market has increased, this is most pronounced amongst younger cohorts. Labour market participation is highest among single women aged 25-34 years, at 86.9 per cent, while for married women of the same age, the rate is 76.2 per cent. The number of women principally engaged in home duties has continued to decrease throughout the period 2016–2024. This reflects changing attitudes towards gender roles with women increasingly engaging in work outside of the home. Please see Tables 12-14 in the Annex.

11. Though overall participation in the labour market has increased amongst women, a gendered pattern in the types of work which women participate in remains. At the beginning of 2024, almost half of all women currently in employment are concentrated in three economic sectors: health, wholesale and retail trade, and education. The number of women in nearly all sectors has increased since 2016, except for agriculture, forestry and fishing and arts, entertainment and recreation. The biggest proportional increases were in the sectors of public administration and defence/compulsory social security, construction and professional, scientific and technical activities. These patterns of uptake are highly salient, as types of work engaged in act as a strong indicator for lifetime earnings. Please see Tables 15 and 16 in the Annex.

12. In 2024, the average number of hours worked per week for females was 32.2 and for males was 38.2. This represents a slight increase for females and a slight decrease for males since 2016. There are considerably more females than males working part time. However, the proportion of females working part time has been reducing, from 34.9 per cent in 2011 to 32.4 per cent in 2016 and was at 30.3 per cent in 2023. As women are more likely to have caring responsibilities and engage in other forms of unpaid labour, this has consequences for both the types of work women participate in as well as their availability to participate in the labour market. Please see Tables 17 and 18 in the Annex.

13. In 2023, families in Ireland availed of formal childcare or education for 22 per cent of children aged less than 3 years and 94 per cent of children aged between 3 years and school age. These figures were lower than the EU27 average regarding children aged under 3, and higher than the EU27 average for children aged between 3 and school age. The provision of high-quality childcare as a means to enhance female participation in the labour market has been recognised by the Irish government and steps have been taken to expand access through initiatives such as the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme. Please see Table 19 in the Annex.

<sup>2</sup> Senior cycle at second level.

14. The gender pay gap in Ireland has fallen to 9.3 per cent in 2022. The gender pay gap is highest for those aged 55-64 years. Ireland's pay gap has been consistently lower than the EU27 average since the last CEDAW report. In order to increase both visibility and accountability amongst organisations regarding the gender pay gap, mandatory reporting has introduced for those with over 150 employees. Please see Tables 20 and 21 in the Annex.

15. The proportion of women in employment with supplementary pension cover was at 67 per cent, almost on a par with males at 68 per cent. Please see Table 22 in the Annex.

16. The number of complaints referred to the Workplace Relations Commission under the Employment Equality legislation and on the grounds of gender, was 286 in 2022, down 9 per cent since 2021. Please see Table 23 in the Annex.

#### *Poverty Reduction*

17. The current national target for poverty reduction is to reduce consistent poverty<sup>3</sup> to 2 per cent or less. In 2023, the rate of consistent poverty was slightly higher among females at 3.7 per cent, compared to males at 3.5 per cent. This represents a decrease from 2016 when the rate of consistent poverty was at 8.7 per cent for females and 7.6 per cent for males. Please see Table 24 in the Annex.

18. Since the last CEDAW report, Ireland's economy has grown substantially, despite the challenges represented by the Covid-19 pandemic and more recently, a cost-of-living crisis. This growth in the economy has enabled the government to take steps to address rates of poverty such as increasing the national minimum wage and increasing social welfare payments for at-risk groups. The Irish welfare system played a central role in protecting workers impacted by Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. The main areas of expenditure by the Department of Social Protection in 2022 were Pensions, Illness, Disability and Caring benefits, and Working Age Income Supports. Please see Table 25 in the Annex.

19. The at risk of poverty rate in Ireland in 2023 was slightly higher for males than females, at 10.8 per cent for males and 10.4 per cent for females. This reflects an improvement, especially for females since 2016, when the at risk of poverty rate was higher for females at 16.6 per cent than males at 15.9 per cent. Please see Table 24 in the Annex.

20. Data from 2016–2023 show a decline overall in poverty levels since the last CEDAW report. Despite a spike in 2022 across all three poverty measures, 2023 shows the downward trend continuing. Please see Table 24 in the Annex.

21. The strong growth in the economy in Ireland since the last CEDAW report is highlighted by the decrease in the unemployment rate from 8.8 per cent at the beginning of 2016 to 4.1 per cent at the beginning of 2024. The unemployment rate is slightly higher for females at 4.2 per cent than males at 4.0 per cent. The social impact assessment of the welfare and income tax measures in Budget 2024 shows bigger gains for the bottom 20 per cent of the income distribution. Lone parent families proportionally benefit the most, with income increasing by 3.8 per cent for this group. The gender impact analysis found that women benefitted more in the lowest three income quintiles.<sup>4</sup> Please see Table 26 in the Annex.

<sup>3</sup> Consistent poverty is the overlap of two component indicators: at-risk-of-poverty, which measures individuals whose household income is below 60 per cent of the median, and basic deprivation, which captures individuals lacking 2 or more of 11 basic necessities. A person is in consistent poverty if he or she is both income-poor and deprived.

<sup>4</sup> See [Social Impact Assessment](#).

*Collection and analysis of data relevant to the Convention*

22. Under national and EU law, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) has a formal coordination role across the public service in relation to official statistics. The gathering and use of data for statistical purposes in the Public Service is governed by the Irish Statistical System Code of Practice for Official Statistics,<sup>5</sup> published in 2013.

23. Since 2004, the CSO has published eleven editions in its Women and Men in Ireland series.<sup>6</sup> This report used 70 indicators to identify the relevant gender differences. The Women and Men in Ireland series was replaced by the Women and Men in Ireland Hub,<sup>7</sup> which was launched in March 2024. The Women and Men in Ireland Hub provides timely information. CSO data in the Hub is updated as new publications are released, while data from other sources will automatically be updated once it becomes available.

24. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth's (DCEDIY) Statistical Spotlight Series<sup>8</sup> brings together information on a specific topic of interest. The publications include a short commentary that details trends and outlining any relevant comparisons. The Data and Analytics unit are planning to publish a Statistical Spotlight on the State of the Nation's Women and Girls in Q4 2024. This publication aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current status of women and girls in Ireland, as well as changes over time, by focusing on several key areas that influence women's lives and well-being.

25. The Central Statistics Office and the DCEDIY are developing a National Equality Data Strategy that will put in place a strategic approach to improving the collection, disaggregation and use of equality data. It is intended that the Strategy will be in place from 2024–2029 and that it will provide a general approach for identifying and filling current gaps in Equality data, as well as develop standard practices in classification. The Strategy is intended to improve the collection of equality data across all equality grounds and will improve the ability of public bodies to monitor the impact of policies and initiatives and will complement the Equality Budgeting initiative led by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

## **B. Reply to paragraph 2 of the list of issues and questions**

### **Women's rights and gender equality in relation to the pandemic, recovery efforts and global crises**

#### *Covid-19 and its long-term impact*

26. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic proved a significant challenge. The disproportionate impact that the pandemic had on women and girls in Ireland was factored into the Government's robust policy response, to ensure an equal future and recovery from the crisis.

27. Notably, women are overrepresented in the healthcare sector, and this is the group who were most exposed to Covid-19 infections. According to an analysis prepared by the CSO in 2020, of the ten occupation groups with the greatest exposure to the disease, six were female dominated, and two were gender-balanced.

28. The Women's Health Action Plan 2022–2023 was launched in March 2022, within the context of the experiences of the pandemic, and laid the groundwork for

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.isscop.ie/>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/womenandmeninireland/>.

<sup>7</sup> [Women and Men in Ireland Hub - Central Statistics Office](#).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c2a87f-the-statistical-spotlight-series/>.

significant progress in women's health. It acknowledged that female carers form the majority of carers in Ireland, are more likely to have worse health and to live with financial disadvantage than the general population; this group experienced disproportionate challenges to their resources, resilience and human capital during the COVID-19 pandemic.

29. Furthermore, evidence has shown that the pandemic impacted women's participation in the labour market to a greater degree, as they were more likely to have reduced working hours, suffer job losses, or leave the labour market. A Labour Force survey for Q3 2020 showed that female unemployment rose from 5 per cent to 7.6 per cent, while male unemployment rose from 5.5 per cent to 6.7 per cent.

30. Concrete actions were taken to support women in the labour market. Notably, Ireland is developing a new Pay Related Benefit support for Jobseekers which will closer align the rate of payment with previous earnings. The intention is to counter the cliff edges that individuals experience on becoming fully unemployed. The need for such a pay-related system became evident during the Covid emergency in Ireland whereby income specific supports had to be put in place.

31. The pandemic also posed difficulties for working families. The National Women's Council of Ireland published a report on Women's Experience of Caring in Covid-19 in November 2020. Of respondents, 71.5 per cent were providing care within their own home and over 30 per cent providing care outside their own home. 85 per cent of the women surveyed indicated that their caring responsibilities had increased with COVID-19, and that responsibilities were not shared within their household.

32. To alleviate the pressures on working families and the disproportionate pressures on women, further actions were taken to increase family leaves to support working families.

33. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated domestic violence, which became more prevalent during the periods of lockdown, with Women's Aid highlighting that they had seen a 43 per cent increase in access to their services in 2021, compared to the same period in 2019. The Government has taken a range of measures within the framework of the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence to address domestic and gender-based violence., and the introduction of 5 days paid Domestic Violence Leave.

34. The pandemic also highlighted the obstacles that women with disabilities, as well as the wider disability population, face. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) showed that Covid-19 outbreaks were common in congregated settings.

#### *Response to current and future crises*

35. Women continued to be victims of trafficking during the period in question. In November 2023, a specialised accommodation centre (Rosa's Place) opened for referrals of female victims of trafficking supported and funded by DCEDIY. This is operating as a pilot programme in 2024. Rosa's place is a specialist accommodation centre for female victims of trafficking. It is an 8-bed accommodation unit, providing specialist, individualised support for women who are identified as victims of trafficking, including those trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. In addition to the supports provided by the Health Service Executive Anti Human Trafficking Team, each service user will have an assigned case worker providing individualised assessment and psychosocial supports.

36. International Protection applicants who are eligible for accommodation via the International Protection Accommodation Service, who do not meet the criteria for Rosa's place are accommodated within the broader IPAS accommodation network.

Accommodation is assigned to best meet the needs of individuals within the network, depending on availability at the time, particularly where the victim of trafficking is recovering from sexual violence.

37. The Ukraine war caused large numbers of Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BOTPs) to move to Ireland. The Irish Government had to develop a new accommodation system for this group of refugees. To date, more than 107,406 Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BOTPs) have arrived in Ireland. Women form the majority of BOTPs. As of June 2024, 65,005 female BOTPs arrived from Ukraine, compared to 42,401 males. 13,719 of the female arrivals were under 18 years of age.

## C. Reply to paragraph 3 of the list of issues and questions

### Reservations

#### *Ireland's policy on reservations*

38. While Ireland's reservations to human rights treaties to which we are party are kept under continuous review, there are no proposals at present to withdraw these reservations to CEDAW.

#### *Efforts undertaken to amend article 41.2 of the constitution*

39. A Citizens' Assembly and Joint Oireachtas Committee recommendation to amend the Irish Constitution in a number of areas. These included a recommendation to remove the reference to the woman's role 'within the home' in Article 41.2 of the Constitution and to replace it with language that is not gender specific, and which provides recognition for care.

40. A referendum was held on 8 March 2024 on proposals for amendments to the Constitution based on the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality. The proposed amendments to the Constitution were:

(a) To amend Article 41 of the Constitution to provide for a wider concept of Family; and

(b) Delete Article 41.2 of the Constitution to remove text on the role of women in the home, and to insert a new Article 42B to recognise family care.

41. Neither proposal was accepted by the public.

#### *Review of the Equality Acts*

42. The ongoing review of the Equality Acts is examining the functioning of the Acts and their effectiveness in combatting discrimination and promoting equality.

43. In July 2021, Ireland undertook a public consultation process as part of this review. A report summarising the key issues raised in the public consultation was published last year and can be accessed on the Department's website.

44. Officials are currently finalising the legislative proposals arising from the review. This ongoing work includes further engagement with stakeholders and seeking legal advice on relevant matters. It is planned that these legislative proposals will be brought to Government for approval and publication in the coming months.

*Complaints and prosecutions in relation to discrimination on the grounds of sex in the last five years*

45. Complaints under the Equality Acts on Gender for the past five years are published on the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) Website ([workplacerelements.ie](http://workplacerelements.ie)) and are set out below:

- 2019: 431;
- 2020: 278;
- 2021: 316;
- 2022: 286;
- 2023: 322.

46. In 2023, 1,045 complaints were referred under the Employment Equality legislation citing 1,458 specific grounds of discrimination. It is possible for a complainant to choose more than one ground of discrimination. The majority of referrals were under the Gender ground (322) with 54 referrals under the Sexual Orientation Ground. The Employment Equality Acts prohibit discrimination, both direct and indirect, on nine grounds. The WRC issues decisions which are available and searchable on the WRC website at <https://www.workplacerelements.ie/en/search/?advance=true>.

47. The Employment Equality cases are appealable to the Labour Court and the Equal Status cases are appealable to the Circuit Court.

#### **D. Reply to paragraph 4 of the list of issues and questions**

##### **Women's access to justice**

###### *Magdalene Laundries*

48. In light of recommendations made by the Ombudsman, the Minister for Justice and Equality appointed Ms Mary O'Toole, Senior Counsel, to carry out a review in relation to the administration of the Magdalen Restorative Justice Ex-gratia Scheme. The review included (1) an assessment of all cases where the length of stay in the institution concerned was assessed as being shorter than that claimed by the applicant, thus resulting in a lesser award than that originally claimed, (2) to identify and consider any available relevant evidence which may not have been taken into account in the assessment, and (3) to recommend any changes to awards arising from any revised assessment of length of stay. The Review began in April 2018 with 216 applications reviewed. Of these applications, 133 received an increase to their award, 61 awards remained the same and 22 applicants withdrew from the Review. A total of €1,276,500 was paid in increased awards. The Review concluded in March 2023. The Magdalen Ex-Gratia Scheme, established in 2013, remains open. To date, some €33.3 million, including awards under the Review, has been paid to 831 applicants who also receive pension and health benefits. The Scheme has been advertised extensively in many countries as well as in Ireland.

###### *The Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and County Homes*

49. The Final Report of the Commission of Investigation setting out its detailed analysis and findings was published in January 2021. The Irish Government immediately accepted its recommendations and issued a full State apology to survivors and committed to a suite of 22 Actions aimed at addressing the needs and concerns of former residents, survivors and their families. Key commitments that



have been delivered to date include: (1) The passing of legislation in June 2022 guaranteeing access to birth and early life information and an accompanying birth information and tracing service. (2) The opening in March 2024 of a payment scheme to provide financial payments and health supports in recognition of harms endured in these institutions. (3) The appointment of a Special Advocate for survivors of institutional abuse. (4) The provision of funding to support survivor-centred advocacy organisations in commemorating their experiences. (5) The appointment of a Director of Authorised Intervention to lead an intervention at the site of the former Mother and Baby Institution in Tuam. (6) The creation of a scholarship in memory of children who died in Mother and Baby Institutions, to fund research in the area of childhood disadvantage. In addition, a key commitment concerns memorialisation and Government has approved plans to develop a National Centre for Research and Remembrance.

*Allocated budget for restorative justice and payments scheme*

50. To date €33.3 million has been spent on the Magdalen Restorative Justice Ex-gratia Scheme. The Scheme is demand led. To date 13 applicants have been refused entry to the Magdalen Ex-Gratia Scheme as they were not resident in a relevant institution covered by the Scheme.

51. The Ex-Gratia Scheme originally established in 2015 was put in place to provide those who had instituted legal proceedings against the State in respect of day school sexual abuse, and subsequently discontinued those proceedings following rulings in the domestic courts, with an opportunity to apply for an ex gratia payment. The scheme was designed to ensure implementation of the European Court of Human Rights judgement in *O’Keeffe v Ireland*, by providing compensation to individuals falling within the scope of the judgment.

52. Following a review of the scheme in 2019, a revised Ex-Gratia scheme was approved by Government in July 2021. The scope of the scheme was expanded to provide for a more straightforward process for making an application under the scheme, as well as allowing others who were not included in the original scheme to apply. The Scheme, administered by the State Claims Agency, provided for an ex-gratia payment in the amount of €84,000 to be made to those who satisfy the criteria set out in the terms of the scheme. To qualify for a payment, an applicant must have demonstrated that the facts of their case come within the parameters of the *O’Keeffe* judgment. In particular, an applicant had to satisfy the following criteria; (1) was sexually abused while a pupil at a recognised day school and that this occurred before November 1991 in respect of a primary school or before June 1992 in respect of a post primary school and (2) that had the Guidelines for Procedures for Dealing with Allegations or Suspicions of Child Abuse, Department of Education, 1991/1992, been in place at the time the sexual abuse occurred there would have been a real prospect of altering the outcome or mitigating the harm suffered as a result.

53. The Revised Scheme opened for applications on 21st July 2021 and remained open until July 2023. A total of 193 applications were received under the scheme: 128 applicants were approved and 65 refused. Of the 128 successful applicants who received Ex Gratia payments, 24 were female and 104 were male. A total of €31 million was provided for the implementation of the revised Ex-Gratia scheme.

54. Total expenditure under the scheme was €11.079 million, of which €10.75 million issued to applicants as ex-gratia payments, with the remainder providing for legal costs and the appeals process. Applicants whose application were rejected by the Scheme Administrator could appeal that decision to an independent Appeals Officer. 45 appeals were received and 2 appeals were successful. Of the appeals refused, the

majority were refused due to legal proceedings not having been issued against the state prior to July 2021, which was one of the terms of the scheme.

55. Finally, Ireland has submitted regular updates (Action Plans) to the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers setting out how it is addressing the European Court of Human Rights O'Keeffe judgement. The 17th Action Plan was submitted in January 2024.

*Capacity-building on gender-responsiveness for law enforcement officials*

56. The application of gender-specific guidelines and a gender sensitive interpretation of the International Protection Act 2015 is explicitly referenced in action 2.1.8 of Ireland's Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. The Irish International Protection Office (IPO) is committed to handling applications involving vulnerable applicants, including women, children, survivors of torture, and those facing gender-based violence with great care and respect. This includes: (1) Gender-related persecution. The IPO adheres to UNHCR guidelines on gender-related persecution. Female genital mutilation (FGM) is considered persecutory, and applicants at risk are recommended for refugee status. (2) LGBT claims. Guidance and regular training are provided for assessing LGBT claims. (3) Support for survivors of trauma. This includes collaboration with the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre to train staff on handling disclosures, understanding trauma, and interviewing techniques. (4) If requested in advance and based on vulnerability, "Silent supporter" (trained counsellors) can also attend at interview on a case-by-case basis.

## **E. Reply to paragraph 5 of the list of issues and questions**

### **National machinery for the advancement of women**

*Overview of national machinery*

57. The National machinery for the advancement of women is advanced by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, and is headed by a full Cabinet Minister.

*National Strategy for Women and Girls*

58. Gender equality has been promoted and advanced in Ireland under a whole-of-government policy framework provided by the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017–2020 (NSWG), which was extended, due to Covid-19, for a further year to end 2021.

59. The National Strategy for Women and Girls provides the policy framework for the Government's agenda and priorities in relation to the advancement of equality for women and girls. It represents a whole of Government approach to improve outcomes for women and girls, recognises the shared responsibility for achieving these results, and the importance of taking measures to the maximum of available resources.

60. The overall goal for the Strategy was "to change attitudes and practices preventing women's and girls' full participation in education, employment and public life, at all levels, and to improve services for women and girls, with priority given to the needs of those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, the poorest outcomes".

61. The strategy had the following six high level objectives underpinned by 139 individual actions:

- (a) Advance socio-economic equality for women and girls;
- (b) Advance the physical and mental health and wellbeing of women and girls;

(c) Ensure the visibility in society of women and girls, and their equal and active citizenship;

(d) Advance women in leadership at all levels;

(e) Combat violence against women; and

(f) Embed gender equality in decision-making.

62. As the Covid-19 pandemic significantly affected the strategy's implementation, the Government extended the term of the outgoing strategy to the end of 2021 to enable the strategy's actions to continue to be implemented and to facilitate the preparation of a new strategic policy approach in this area.

63. The Programme for Government, "Our Shared Future" (2020), includes a commitment to develop and implement a new Strategy for Women and Girls. In 2021, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth commissioned an independent report (from the Centre for Effective Studies) to examine and evaluate the effectiveness of the processes for the implementation of equality strategies, with a view to informing how the Department develops and implements a whole-of-government equality policy in the future with a strong outcomes-focused approach. The evaluation study was published in July 2023.

64. Work has now begun on the development of the successor Strategy to the National Strategy for Women and Girls, starting with a consultation exercise which is currently underway. A meeting of the National Youth Assembly was held on 25 September 2024 to get the views of its youth representatives on the successor Strategy. This reflects the importance attached to ensuring that the successor Strategy takes account of youth needs and perspectives. Further regional and remote consultations will also take place later in the autumn.

#### *Public sector equality and human rights duty*

65. All public bodies in Ireland have responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This is a legal obligation, called the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, and it originated in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014.

#### *Gender equality training for national and local government officials*

66. Multiple educational supports and training opportunities are available to national and local government officials regarding gender equality. As part of its Equality Budgeting initiative, the Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform offers training and support to Departments on choosing good metrics to facilitate equality budgeting. Additionally, the Equality Budgeting Expert Advisory Group provides guidance and informed insights on the future direction and areas of focus for equality budgeting and works to ensure a coherent, cross-government approach to maximise equality impacts.

67. An EU commission funded Technical Support Instrument (TSI) project is currently underway to further progress gender mainstreaming and gender responsive budgeting in Ireland. Commenced in 2022 and expected to run until late 2024, this project will provide extensive training and guidance on all aspects of gender and equality impact assessment, piloting new processes to enhance gender and equality mainstreaming throughout the budgetary cycle.

68. The ultimate goal of the TSI project on Gender Mainstreaming is to build the capacity to integrate gender equality into the budgetary and the policy making process across all the government departments. As a longer term impact the project can

contribute to reducing gender disparities and to a wider use of gender mainstreaming and budgeting tools in public policy in the participating beneficiaries. These in turn can bring considerable economic benefits due to more efficient use of the available human capital.

## **F. Reply to paragraph 6 of the list of issues and questions**

### **National human rights institution**

#### *Ireland's national human rights institution*

69. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) is Ireland's independent national human rights and equality institution. It is an independent public body that accounts to the Oireachtas, with a mandate established under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 (IHREC Act 2014) to protect and promote human rights and equality. Additionally, it seeks to promote the development of a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding in the state and to work towards the elimination of human rights abuses, discrimination and prohibited conduct.

70. The Chief Commissioner and other Members of the Commission are appointed by the President following an open and transparent selection process by the Public Appointment Service, and the passing of a resolution in both Houses of the Oireachtas (Parliament). Commission members independently determine the Commission's policy and activity.

71. The UN Paris Principles are the international standards for National Human Rights Institutes (NHRIs) to promote and protect human rights effectively and in an independent manner. The Paris Principles, established in 1993 through a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, set out the main criteria that NHRIs are required to meet.

72. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission has retained accreditation as an 'A' National Human Rights Institution under the UN Paris Principles following the most recent evaluation by the Global Alliance of NHRIs in 2021. 'A' status accreditation means that the NHRI has demonstrated full compliance with the Paris Principles. 'A' status NHRIs have specific participation rights in UN processes and mechanisms and have an important position in EU and other regional mechanisms.

## **G. Reply to paragraph 7 of the list of issues and questions**

### **Temporary special measures**

#### *Gender-balance in senior leadership*

73. In response to concerns over many years about a lack of participation by women in politics in Ireland, Part 6 of the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 linked the provision of Exchequer funding to political parties to the achievement of a specified gender balance in candidate selection at general elections. This first came into effect for the 2016 general election in which parties were required to put forward 30 per cent women candidates, in order to receive full state funding. This requirement will increase to 40 per cent women candidates for the next general election which is currently scheduled to take place in 2025. It is intended that this requirement will act as an incentive mechanism to encourage political parties to apply a more gender equal perspective to their candidate selection processes.

74. In the private sector, the representation of women in key decision-making positions in companies has been advanced in Ireland through the Balance for Better Business initiative. Balance for Better Business is a business-led Review Group, supported by Government, which advocates, sets voluntary targets for, and monitors gender representation on the boards and senior leadership teams of private companies and in key roles such as Chair and CEO. Significant progress has been achieved through this voluntary target approach since Balance for Better Business was launched in 2018.

75. The promotion of gender equality in education is an area that the Government has prioritised. The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science has been responsible for many key initiatives including The Second Higher Education Authority (HEA) National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions; support of the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI); Athena Swan; Framework for Consent to end Sexual Violence and Harassment in HEIs.

*Cases of non-compliance with quotas*

76. Legislative quotas are only in place for elections to Dáil Éireann, and no case has been taken for non-compliance with the quota.

## **H. Reply to paragraph 8 of the list of issues and questions**

### **Stereotypes**

77. Over the past 8 years, Ireland has worked actively to promote equality for women and girls. The National Strategy for Women and Girls was the framework for action in this area. The work done under its auspices was designed to address barriers and to empower women and girls to participate as fully equal members in society. This has encompassed many different things such including fighting harmful stereotypes.

78. Concrete efforts have also been made to improve young peoples' education on gender equality, gender stereotypes, and sexual and reproductive health among other key issues. An updated Junior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) specification, incorporating Relationships and Sexual Education (RSE), was published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in May 2023 and was rolled out in schools last September for all first year Junior Cycle students. This followed on from an extensive public consultation on a draft specification, which took place in 2022. An updated Senior Cycle SPHE specification has been made available to schools from September 2024. Schools have until 2027 to introduce the new specification for all students, to allow time for the necessary planning and preparatory work, including classroom resources and teacher professional learning.

79. In line with good communications protocols, efforts are always made to demonstrate diversity in the materials created or endorsed by the Government. This includes the balanced portrayal of genders particularly in roles such as teachers or parents.

80. The first Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for the Irish audio and audio-visual sector was published in July 2024 by Coimisiún na Meán. The Strategy will apply to those involved in film, television, radio, audio and animation production. Among the actions outlined within the Strategy is the need for all audio and audio-visual media and media associations to publish their own Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI) policies, plans and strategies. Under the Strategy, Coimisiún na Meán expects media service providers to take steps to facilitate greater inclusion in the sector, including facilitating the provision of training for staff on

disability awareness and unconscious bias, enhancing the accessibility of workplaces and content, and examining the provision of paid internships and strategic mentorships for minority groups.

81. On 21 October 2024, Coimisiún na Meán adopted its first Online Safety Code,<sup>9</sup> which sets binding rules applying to video-sharing platforms who have their EU headquarters in Ireland. The code introduces obligations on these platforms to protect their users from harmful content, including prohibiting the uploading or sharing of harmful content on their services including cyberbullying, promoting self-harm or suicide and promoting eating or feeding disorders as well as incitement to hatred or violence, terrorism, child sex abuse material, racism and xenophobia.

## I. Reply to paragraph 9 of the list of issues and questions

### Gender-based violence against women

#### *Research and data collection*

82. A strategic objective of Ireland's Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence is to develop a research and data plan that identifies immediate priorities and outcomes for 2024 and 2025 and incorporates a mechanism to support the collation of DSGBV data across government departments and agencies. Currently, this is on track and is projected to be delivered by end of 2024. To support this work, Cuan has been active in engaging with key research stakeholders. For example, Cuan is represented on the CSO/DOJ Data Analytics Steering Group and is actively engaged with CSO on scoping and planning for the commencement of the DV/GBV survey. Cuan is also collaborating with the ESRI to develop a one-year joint research programme.

83. Cuan will consider GREVIO recommendations and analysis in its reporting and monitoring framework for Ireland's Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and its next implementation plan.

#### *The national statutory agency for DSGBV*

84. Cuan, is a statutory agency under the remit of the Department of Justice dedicated to tackling and reducing domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV). Cuan was established in statute via the Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency Act 2023. The Act sets out a range of statutory functions for Cuan which can be summarised as follows: (1) Delivering excellent services to victims of DSGBV, including delivering on the number of safe and accessible accommodation spaces available, as well as ensuring that helpline and other supports are available to anyone requiring them. (2) Putting in place a robust set of national service standards and governance arrangements to ensure adherence to the appropriate standards for such supports. (3) Leading on consistent and ongoing research to inform DSGBV policy development, working with others such as the CSO who have data projects underway. (4) Leading on awareness-raising campaigns designed to reduce the incidence of DSGBV in Irish society as well as ensuring that all victims know how to access the supports they require. (5) Coordinating all Government actions set out in the Third National Strategy and reporting on their delivery to the Minister for Justice. Political oversight of the strategy will be provided by the Cabinet Committee on Social Affairs and Equality.

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.cnam.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Coimisiun-na-Mean\\_Online-Safety-Code.pdf](https://www.cnam.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Coimisiun-na-Mean_Online-Safety-Code.pdf).

*Familicide and domestic and family violence*

85. A team has been formed in the Department of Justice to review the recommendations from a study on Familicide. Three groups have been established to analyse and consult on the recommendation to establish a domestic and family violence death review process; a cross functional Interdepartmental Group to examine how to bring forward agreed priority actions, an advisory group of relevant NGOs and a family consultation group as a forum for engagement with the families. These groups are convening once a month with the aim of achieving consensus on a set of recommendations in relation to the domestic and family violence death review process that are feasible for implementation.

*Review of the Domestic Violence Act 2018*

86. The Government is committed to combatting all forms of domestic violence and to ensuring we have an effective legislative response to tackle this heinous crime. While there are currently no plans to review the Domestic Violence Act 2018, all criminal legislation is kept under review and any necessary changes are considered to ensure our legislation remains effective, proportionate, and fully compliant with due process and the Constitution. We are committed to strengthening legislation in this area and to broadening the scope of how we define domestic violence, to ensure that more forms of abuse are recognised and punishable under the law.

87. Under the Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023, the maximum sentence for assault causing harm was increased from five to ten years. This is one of the most commonly prosecuted offences in domestic and gender-based violence cases. This act also introduced new stand-alone offences of stalking and non-fatal strangulation, both offences are common ways in which abusers target victims. The act also widens the existing offence of harassment to include any conduct that seriously interferes with a person's peace and privacy, or causes alarm, distress, or harm. This new approach extends protections currently available to certain victims under the Domestic Violence Act 2018 to all victims of stalking behaviour, regardless of their relationship with the perpetrator.

**J. Reply to paragraph 10 of the list of issues and questions***The National Strategy for Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*

88. The second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence was in place from 2016 to 2021 and included a detailed programme of actions designed to facilitate the ratification by Ireland of the Istanbul Convention which was ratified in 2019 during the lifetime of the second Strategy. The implementation and impact of the detailed actions to support Istanbul is subject to periodic evaluation and benchmarking by international experts from GREVIO.

89. In 2021, work began on the development of the third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (2022–2026). This Strategy, in line with the Istanbul Convention, recognises that while both men and women can be victims/survivors, women and girls are affected disproportionately, as a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women. As a result, there is an emphasis within the Strategy on meeting the needs of women and girls while supports and services for male victims/ survivors are also addressed.

90. The Strategy also recognises and acknowledges the need to provide support for all victims/survivors of gender-based violence, irrespective of any characteristics they might have, acknowledging the intersectionality between sex, gender and sexuality-based violence and ethnicity, ability and age.

91. A monitoring and reporting framework for the implementation of the Strategy will set out clear reporting processes to the Minister for Justice and all other stakeholders. This structure will be underpinned by the principle of co-design. Where necessary, local structures will be resourced to connect at the national level. A 2025 Implementation Plan will be developed and following agreement by Government, will be published in January 2025.

*Legal definition of rape*

92. The main law applicable to rape and sexual violence is the 1981 Rape Act, with subsequent legislation expanding on this. Section 2 of the 1981 Rape Act defines rape as sexual intercourse without consent; this relates to vaginal penetration (only). The Rape (Amendment) Act 1990 complements this by defining “rape under section 4”, which involves penetration of the anus or mouth by the penis, or penetration of the vagina by an object. Lack of consent applies under the common law and is made explicit in section 48 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 which specifies that consent to a sexual act must be freely and voluntarily given. Section 48 also sets out a (non-exhaustive) list of circumstances where consent is not present and specifies that consent to a sexual act may be withdrawn at any time.

*Capacity-building for prosecutors and police*

93. A strategic objective of the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence is to ensure that all professionals and frontline workers involved in DSGBV work with adults and children in the courts and in the justice, legal and policing systems have the skills and understanding of DSGBV to equip them with the necessary expertise they require.

94. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) has its own Training Unit and an active Legal Training Steering Committee. This committee meets regularly throughout the year to ensure that the legal training needs of staff are addressed. Domestic Violence has been a training topic, among others, for many years. While training is provided on a broad range of topics, it includes Prosecution of breaches of domestic violence orders, coercive control, communicating clearly with the victim and trauma informed work. The ODPP also provides training to NGO’s who support the victim to explain clearly the role of the ODPP in the prosecution of offences. This enables the victim to have a clear understanding of the prosecution system in Ireland. Training is also provided by ODPP to the Garda Síochána on the effective prosecution of domestic violence cases.

95. The Judicial Appointments Commission Act 2023 now requires the Judicial Appointments Commission to consider what training or continuous professional development all candidates for judicial office have undertaken in making recommendations to Government regarding their appointment to judicial office. Recent programmes include a training course for serving criminal trial judges which ensures that they develop a deeper awareness of the victim’s experience in court in sexual offence cases. Another initiative was a pilot programme on coercive control, introduced in 2022, designed with the assistance of the NGO Women’s Aid. This collaboration focused on deepening the understanding of the concept of coercive control for the participating judges.

96. All Gardaí are trained as first responders so they are equipped to deal with victims, including of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. Within the Foundation Training Programme Trainee Gardaí cover Domestic Abuse including AGS Policy, relevant legislation, developments arising from the National Strategies on the prevention DSGBV and to comply with the Istanbul Convention and the EU Victims Directive (2012/29/EU). Divisional Protective Service Units (DPSUs) have



been established in every Garda division across the country and lead on investigations of specialised crime types, including sexual crime, child abuse and domestic abuse. This ensures that vulnerable victims of crimes, such as domestic abuse and sexual violence, presenting to Gardaí are met with a consistently high standard of specialist, sensitive, professional and expert assistance. Officers attached to DPSUs receive a range of specialist training.

*Information and training for frontline workers*

97. The HSE National Social Inclusion Office (NSIO) is developing a National DSGBV training programme in collaboration with the HSE DSGBV Training working group. Additionally, The HSE NSIO carried out a quality improvement assessment of Irish maternity units' protocols for survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. Recommendations have been drawn and pathways of implementation are being explored.

98. In March 2023, the Legal Aid board held a half day event "Domestic Violence – Recognise, Respond and Refer". This was aimed at staff providing services to victims of domestic violence in connection with civil applications (for barring/safety/protection orders). The board encourages solicitors to obtain appropriate training on an individual basis and funds its solicitors to do so. This can include continuing professional development courses in domestic violence.

*Financial resources allocated to NGOs*

99. A key aspect of the response to tackling DSGBV has been a year-on-year increase in funding for support services. Prior to 2024, funding for organisations to prevent and respond to DSGBV was split between Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and the Department of Justice. Tusla were the primary State funder of services supporting victims of domestic and sexual violence including the provision of funding for rape crisis centres, refuges and other support service to victims of such crimes. In 2020, a total of €25.3m was made available to Tusla to fund DSGBV services. In 2021, a total of €30m was made available, €30m in 2022 and €38.5m in 2023. The Department of Justice provided funding for DSGBV Prevention initiatives and other supports for victims through the Criminal Justice system such as court accompaniment. In 2020, a total of €4.5m was made available. In 2021, a total of €8.2m was made available, €13m in 2022 and €11.9m in 2023.

100. Following an Audit of DSGBV structures, in 2021 the Irish Government agreed that the Department of Justice would be the lead Department with responsibility for responding to DSGBV, and that responsibility for policy, accommodation and services will also sit within the Department of Justice. It further agreed that a new dedicated agency for DSGBV will be established under the Department of Justice. In 2024, with the establishment of Cuan, the responsibility for funding for DSGBV services now falls to that Agency, with the Department of Justice retaining provision of funding for organisations who support non-DSGBV victims of crime. Cuan's overall budget for 2024 is €59.049m. This is a significant increase of €30m in the last three years. The budget for funding DSGBV services and prevention measures in 2024 is €54.21 Million. It includes perpetrator programmes and awareness raising campaigns. Cuan provides funding to services for 80 organisations in addition to funding for all Cuan actions in the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence.

## K. Reply to paragraph 11 of the list of issues and questions

### Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

#### *Mechanisms to identify victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation*

101. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking) Act 2024, enacted on 17 July 2024, provides the legislative basis for a new National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for victims of human trafficking. Currently, An Garda Síochána is solely responsible for identifying victims of human trafficking. The Act will allow a designated Competent Authority (defined as specified Government Departments and agencies) or Trusted Partner (civil society organisations supporting victims of trafficking) to refer applications to an Operational Committee for a determination that the person is a victim of human trafficking. The Operational Committee will comprise representatives of the Competent Authorities and Trusted Partners.

102. By partnering with civil society organisations, the new NRM will make it easier for victims to come forward, to be officially recognised as victims of human trafficking, and to receive the appropriate supports. The Act provides for the sharing of information between agencies to identify victims. Accommodation, medical services, legal aid and advice and other supports will be provided to the victim. The Act also provides that a victim of trafficking will not be deported for immigration offences committed whilst being trafficked or prosecuted for their role in their own trafficking. Putting the new NRM on a statutory basis is a clear demonstration of Ireland's commitment to identify and support victims of this abhorrent crime and will also strengthen Ireland's international reputation in this area.

#### *Data on trafficking victims*

103. Data on individuals recognised as victims of human trafficking is laid out in the following table for the years 2019 to 2023:

	<i>Total for Year</i>	<i>Prostitution</i>		<i>Forced Labour</i>		<i>Forced Criminality</i>		<i>Organ Removal</i>		<i>Other</i>	
		<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
2023	53	28	0	8	8	6	3	0	0	0	0
2022	42	23	1	3	12	0	2	1	0	0	0
2021	44	24	1	4	15	0	0	0	0	0	0
2020	38	24	2	8	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
2019	42	33	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	1

#### *Measures taken to improve investigation and prosecution of trafficking crimes*

104. In 2024, greater alignment between National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and the new Human Trafficking Action Plan will be developed through improved collaboration with persons involved in the sex trade. This will include continuation of safeguarding checks of persons and premises known for involvement in the sex trade and taking part in national and internationally co-ordinated days of action targeting organised prostitution, brothel-keeping and the purchase of sex. In addition, one of the actions of the Strategy is to complete scoping and research to inform a communications strategy regarding prostitution, and its impact on wider gender equality and links to trafficking.

105. As part of the measures taken to improve investigation, awareness raising of the indicators of human trafficking has been highlighted. The Department of Justice

continues to maintain the 'Blue Blindfold' website, [www.blueblindfold.gov.ie](http://www.blueblindfold.gov.ie), which provides a user-friendly overview of how the crime of human trafficking manifests in Ireland, how members of the public can spot and report the signs of trafficking, and how the State supports these victims once identified. The Blue Blindfold website was updated in 2020 with a new user friendly interface, revised and updated information and contact details. Further contact information for NGO frontline service providers in the domestic and sexual violence sector were also added.

106. In relation to raising awareness of FGM, Operation Limelight operated in Dublin Airport on the October 2023 Bank Holiday – chosen as victims of female genital mutilation tend to be more likely to travel during the holidays. A similar operation was put in place in Kerry Airport in December. All ages and genders were targeted, with leaflets, talking screens and QR codes to be scanned.

#### *Redress and reparations*

107. The state funded Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme in place in Ireland may pay compensation to victims in respect of personal injury where the injury is directly attributable to a crime of violence. Compensation available under the Scheme is intended to cover vouched out of pocket expenses experienced by the victim of crime, such as the need for medical or dental treatment or loss of earnings to date and into the future, which were incurred as a result of the criminal injuries sustained. There were no compensation awards made to victims of trafficking under the Scheme in 2023, albeit a number of claims relating to this offence remain to be finalised. The Health Service Executive are aware of two VOT's supported by HSE who received compensation through Workplace Relation's Commission.

#### *Support services available for victims of trafficking*

108. Support for victims of trafficking is provided by a range of State agencies and organisations including An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive, TUSLA and the Legal Aid Board. Victims of trafficking are entitled to the following supports when identified and entered into the National Referral Mechanism framework: (1) crime prevention advice, (2) accommodation, (3) medical care, (4) material assistance, (5) access to the labour market, (6) free legal aid, (7) voluntary return, (8) residency permissions, (9) translation and interpretation services. International organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner (UNHCR) for Refugees also assist victims by providing information on rights and other services including assisting with voluntary return if the victim wishes.

109. The Department of Justice also provides funding to NGOs who are active in the field of human trafficking. These NGOs play a crucial role in assisting victims of human trafficking to access the necessary supports to aid their recovery from their ordeal. For 2023 The Department of Justice allocated funding totalling €5.8 million for more than 60 organizations for 2022 to support victims of crime including victims of trafficking. In 2022 €4.6 million was made available, and in 2021 the figure was €3.8 million.

110. As referenced in Paragraph 35, the establishment of a dedicated accommodation shelter pilot, Rosa's Place, for victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation has taken place.

## **L. Reply to paragraph 12 of the list of issues and questions**

### *Impact of the Sexual Offences Act 2017*

111. Section 27 of the 2017 Act provides for a review of Part 4 of the Act, 3 years after its commencement. The terms of reference for this review, among other points, include: describing the objectives of [s.7A] in the 1993 Act; assessing the extent to which the objectives of the Act have been achieved, assessing the extent to which the Act's objectives have not been achieved and make recommendations to address the barriers, if any, uncovered in that regard; and assessing the impact of the Act's operation on the safety and well-being of persons who engage in sexual activity for payment. The review is close to finalisation and the report which will address the terms of reference will be completed in the coming weeks.

### *Measures taken to support women who wish to leave prostitution*

112. Pillar 2 of the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, Protection and Support, focuses on actions designed to protect the safety and meet the support needs of adults and children who have experienced DSGBV. One of the objectives for this pillar is to ensure those in prostitution have access to safety, healthcare, support and exit routes.

113. The HSE Women's Health Service (WHS) and Anti-Human Trafficking Team (AHTT) is a statutory service provided by the Health Service Executive. The WHS operates sexual health clinic services and outreach support to women/trans women involved in the sex industry. The AHTT has responsibility for care planning for both female/male victims of trafficking in all areas of exploitation. In line with action 5c of the Women's Health Action plan (WHAP) the HSE developed and put forward a proposal to resource and rethink how we support women in prostitution within the HSE Women's Health Service. For 2024, the HSE will build capacity of the WHS to respond to the needs of marginalised women – especially sex workers – and strengthen the service's online presence to ensure its ability to reach relevant groups.

114. In addition, the Department of Justice provides funding to Ruhama, an Irish NGO and registered charity that offers nationwide support to women impacted by prostitution, sex trafficking and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation. This organisation has extensive expertise in providing a wide range of specialist, holistic support services. They offer a person-centred model of support based on each woman's personal needs and priorities.

### *Actions taken to expunge convictions for 'sale of sex' from criminal records*

115. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 provided for a review of Part 4 of the Act which is close to finalisation. The Department of Justice will carefully examine any recommendations of the review and progress appropriate actions. The legislative work to expunging previous convictions will be taken forward in the overall context of the recommendations of the review.

## **M. Reply to paragraph 13 of the list of issues and questions**

### **Participation in political and public life**

#### *Measures taken to promote equal representation of women in political and public life*

116. Ireland's independent Electoral Commission was formally established on 9 February 2023. An Coimisiún Toghcháin (the Electoral Commission) now plays a central role in the administration and development of Ireland's electoral processes,

and in safeguarding and strengthening democracy in the State. An Coimisiún has a new and significant research role in electoral policy and procedures and has the ability to make recommendations to the Government. Included in An Coimisiún's inaugural Research Programme for 2024–2026 are proposals for a comprehensive review of the Electoral Act 1997 which provides for, among other matters, the State funding of political parties and the gender balance provisions that apply in respect of Dáil elections. In addition, An Coimisiún plans to conduct research to inform its approach to its education and public engagement remit – to encourage the electoral participation of under-reached groups and increase representation of women, people with disabilities and those from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

117. In recognition of the need to promote gender equality in local government, the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) introduced a funding scheme in 2019 to incentivise political parties to increase the number of women and diverse candidates taking part in local elections. Following review in 2021, the scheme is now open to all registered political parties and in the interests of inclusivity, to official representative groups of independents.

118. In early 2021, DHLGH provided funding to the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) to undertake research entitled "Women doing politics differently – development of local or regional caucus for women councillors – identifying interest and examining possible supports". To support the findings of this research, funding is made available annually to local authorities to assist with the establishment and running of such caucuses. DHLGH also continues to support local authorities in their endeavours to encourage the participation of women and wider diversity in local government with funding provided to local authority initiatives for projects such as building general awareness of local government and participation in local decision-making structures, particularly among women, and minority and diverse communities.

119. The Local Government (Maternity Protection and Other Measures for members of Local Authorities) Bill 2022 introduced maternity leave for councillors, and provides a choice to elected members to appoint an individual as a temporary substitute in their place while on maternity leave. In 2023, an additional administrative support allowance was introduced for councillors who avail of maternity leave.

*Data on women in appointed political positions, local bodies, the judiciary, senior academic and foreign service positions*

120. At the 2020 general election, a total of 162 women stood for election, representing 31 per cent of the 531 candidates. At this election, a total of 36 women were elected to the Dáil representing 23 per cent of the total membership, compared with 35 women elected in 2016 or 22 per cent of the total membership. In accordance with the provisions of the Part 6 of the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012, for the next Dáil election and for all future Dáil elections a quota of at least 40 per cent women candidates and at least 40 per cent men candidates will apply to qualified political parties who wish to receive full State funding under the Electoral Act 1997.

121. In 2024, a record number of women ran for local election – 681 women or 31 per cent of all candidates. This resulted in a modest increase in the number of women elected, i.e., 247 women councillors, representing 26 per cent of the total number of councillors.

122. As of 7 August 2024, the gender breakdown across the court jurisdictions is as follows: in the Supreme Court 3 out of a total of 9 judges are women; in the Court of Appeal 8 out of a total of 17 judges are women, in the High Court 19 out of a total of 50 judges are women, in the Circuit Court 19 out of a total of 44 judges are women, and in the District Court 32 out of a total of 70 judges are women. Upon its full

commencement, the new judicial appointments process under the Judicial Appointments Commission Act, 2023 will help to ensure the gender balance and further increase diversity across the highest legal offices of the State.

123. The Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI) was launched in 2019 and supports the creation of new and gender specific posts at appropriate levels. In 2021 seven institutions were successful under the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI) call, securing an additional 10 senior academic posts. This brings the total number of posts awarded under SALI to 30. A total of 45 senior academic leadership initiative posts will be provided across sectors (e.g. university and institute of technology) over three cycles of awards.

124. Athena Swan launched in Ireland in 2015 with a specific remit to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) employment. The charter has since been expanded to include arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law (AHSSBL) and staff working in professional, managerial and support roles (PMSS). The objective of the Athena Swan Ireland 2021 charter framework is to support higher education institutions, academic departments, and professional units in impactful and sustainable gender equality work and to build capacity for evidence-based equality work across the equality grounds enshrined in Irish legislation. There are currently 118 award holders in Ireland (113 Bronze; 5 Silver). 19 institutions hold awards, including 4 legacy awards.

*Data on the extent of online harassment*

125. The Online Safety and Media Regulation (OSMR) Act 2022 was commenced March 2023 and established a new online safety regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, putting it at the heart of Ireland's Online Safety Framework, which includes the implementation of the EU Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Terrorist Content Online Regulation (TCOR). On 21 October 2024, An Coimisiún adopted its first Online Safety Code under this framework, which will hold designated online services to account for how they tackle the availability of defined categories of harmful online content, including serious forms of cyberbullying.

126. Among other obligations, the DSA requires the largest online platforms to complete risk assessments and implement mitigation measures in respect of illegal content. This includes content related to existing criminal offences, like certain abusive, threatening or offensive communications as detailed in Coco's Law (the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act, 2020). Coimisiún na Meán, as Ireland's Digital Services Coordinator under the DSA, supports the European Commission in enforcing these obligations.

127. In addition to its regulatory role, under the OSMR Act An Coimisiún has a role in the development of guidance materials and educational initiatives, and a research function in relation to online safety issues. In September 2023, An Coimisiún published an Online Harms Evidence Review which included information from various sources, such as a 2020 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights survey. Among other findings, the survey reported that 14 per cent of women aged 16–29 said they had experienced cyber harassment in the past 12 months.

128. In May 2024, the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life published a report on how to safeguard and support participation and promote civil discourse in political life, which, among other things, recommended increased support networks for women involved in political life, removing the requirement to publish the home addresses of candidates, and that An Coimisiún should utilise its regulatory powers to protect political figures, including women, from harmful online abuse.

## **N. Reply to paragraph 14 of the list of issues and questions**

### **Non-governmental organisations**

#### *State funding for women's organisations*

129. The Scheme to Support National Organisation (SSNO) provides multi-annual core funding to a number of organisations that have a specific focus on women's rights and gender equality. In addition, other organisations funded under the SSNO, while not having a specific focus on women's rights and gender equality, provide related supports and advocacy.

130. Ireland provides funding to a number of women's organisations to advance the objectives contained in the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017–2020. Core funding is granted to the National Women's Council of Ireland to support the advancement of gender equality as the national representative body for women in Ireland.

131. Funding to the National Women's Council of Ireland has been as follows over the past four years:

- 2024 – €678,000;
- 2023 – €642,000;
- 2022 – €611,000;
- 2021 – €556,000.

132. Under the European Social Fund (ESF) Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) which ran from 2014–2020 funding was made available for initiatives targeted at women currently detached from the labour market but wish to take up paid employment. Funding was also made available for projects to support women's entrepreneurship. The funding was provided to organisations under two open calls, one in 2016, and the second in 2019. The gender equality projects aimed to support women's entrepreneurship and participation in the workforce through a range of training and mentoring initiatives.

## **O. Reply to paragraph 15 of the list of issues and questions**

### **Education**

#### *Combating gender stereotypes and sexism through education*

133. The Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) curricula have been undergoing a process of significant reform. An updated Junior Cycle SPHE specification was published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in May 2023 and has been implemented in schools for all first years from September 2023. The Junior Cycle SPHE specification, which was introduced into post-primary schools in September 2023, includes under Strand 1: Understanding Myself and Others, that students should be able to: (1) reflect on gender equity and how gender stereotypes impact on expectations, behaviour and relationships; (2) discuss experiences/situations of bias, inequality or exclusion and devise ways to actively create more inclusive environments. The updated Senior Cycle SPHE specification which was made available to schools in September 2024 includes under Strand 2: Relationships and Sexuality, that students should be able to: (1) examine how both positive and harmful attitudes around gender are perpetuated in the media, online, and in society and discuss strategies for challenging and changing harmful

attitudes and narratives; (2) recognise when people are experiencing discrimination and demonstrate the skills needed to express solidarity in a range of situations.

*Promotion of women's and girls' choice of non-traditional fields of education*

134. A Gender Balance in STEM Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) was established by the Department of Education with representation from schools, students, parents, initial teacher education, third level, organisations working to improve female participation in STEM, STEM representative organisations as well as the Department. Informed by a literature review commissioned by the Advisory Group, the Gender Balance in STEM recommendations were published in March 2022 and subsequently these recommendations were incorporated into the new STEM Education Implementation Plan to 2026 which was published in February 2023. Implementation of these actions is underway.

135. Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), a competitive research funding agency under the aegis of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, has set an ambitious target of attaining at least 35 per cent women by 2025 as research leaders (within its Strategy 'Shaping Our Future 2025'), to ensure a more equal, diverse and inclusive research ecosystem, and to reflect the diversity of Ireland's Higher Education Institutions. In 2022, 29 per cent of SFI grant holders, reflecting both Principal and co-Principal Investigators, were women, while 42 per cent of SFI grant team members were women. The six SFI Centres for Research Training which train postgraduate students in Ireland have supported over 700 postgraduate students to-date. 42 per cent of students are women researchers. 135 PhD students were recruited and €13.6 million was invested in the programme in 2023.

*Development of a gender-sensitive approach to apprenticeships*

136. Ireland has taken measures to increase the historically low percentage of women in apprenticeships. In 2022, the Irish Government announced a gender-based apprenticeship bursary for employers. The bursary, worth €2,666, is available to employers who employ apprentices in the minority gender on any national apprenticeship programme with greater than 80 per cent representation of a single gender.

137. Employers of 230 apprentices were deemed eligible for the gender bursary in 2023. This compares to 200 apprentices in 2022. As of end-June 2024, there were 2,156 female apprentices, approximately 8 per cent of the overall apprentice population. This has almost doubled since 2021, when there were 1,321.

138. Women also feature more strongly in apprenticeships in the hospitality, healthcare, property, sales, biopharma and ICT sectors. Participation in industrial areas such as manufacturing and engineering is also increasing.

*Results of the Gender Equality Task Force Action Plan 2018–2020*

139. There is a statutory requirement for Irish higher education institutions to promote gender balance among staff and students, and for the Higher Education Authority (HEA) to promote the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education. Two policy documents were developed in recent years to inform the implementation of a gender equality framework in Irish higher education.

140. In 2016, the HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions, produced a set of recommendations to ensure the achievement of gender equality in Irish higher education (HE).



141. In 2017, the Minister of State for Higher Education established the Gender Equality Taskforce to identify significant measures, drawing on the work of the HEA Expert Group, that could accelerate progress in achieving gender equality in Irish higher education institutions (HEIs). Their Gender Action Plan endorsed the recommendations of the HEA Expert Group and developed some additional actions to advance gender equality across the sector. To ensure sustainable progress towards gender equality, both the HEA Expert Group and the Gender Equality Taskforce recommended reviews of progress at the end of the lifespan of their recommendations. In line with these timelines, the HEA undertook a Second National Review of Gender Equality in Irish HEIs.

142. In December 2022 the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science launched the Higher Education Authority's Second National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education. The Expert Group made a number of recommendations under the following headings: national requirements; leadership; organisational culture; teaching and learning, resource and quality assurance; intersectionality; career development; precarity; and data capture, analysis and reporting.

## **P. Reply to paragraph 16 of the list of issues and questions**

### *Steps to overcome low educational attainment among girls of linguistic and ethnic minority groups*

143. The Department of Education together with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science published the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES) 2024–2030, alongside the initial plan for implementation and action for 2024–2026, on 16 July 2024. This strategy sets the strategic direction for Traveller and Roma education policy over the next six years, encompassing educational pathways from early learning and childcare, primary and post-primary school through to further and higher education. The strategy was developed in collaboration with the Traveller and Roma communities and other stakeholders which aims to improve educational outcomes and address barriers faced by these groups. The strategy was informed by an extensive consultation process. The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Education (DEIS) programme is Ireland's main policy instrument to address educational disadvantage at school level. In 2022 the programme was extended to 322 additional schools, meaning approximately 1,200 schools are supported in the programme. The model used to identify schools for inclusion in the programme specifically included Traveller or Roma ethnicity as an indicator. This now means that almost 2/3rds of all Traveller and Roma children and young people are supported under the programme. The OECD Education for Inclusive Societies Project were invited in 2023 to review school resourcing in Ireland to address educational disadvantage. This review was published in July 2024 and finds that Ireland has a comparatively equitable education system but that some differences in outcomes remain for the most disadvantaged children and young people. The findings and recommendations of this review will inform future policy.

144. The Migrant Integration Strategy published in 2017 sets out the Government's commitment to the promotion of migrant integration as a key part of Ireland's renewal and as an underpinning principle of Irish society. One of the key elements of the strategy's vision is for migrants, and particularly their children, to benefit fully from the education system. Actions relevant to the Department of Education under the Migrant Integration Strategy continue to be progressed and engagement will continue with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), which has responsibility for the Strategy. DCEDIY is in the process of

developing the new strategy, and the Department of Education will continue to engage with all relevant stakeholders in relation to its development and implementation.

145. The National Access Plan 2022–2028 (NAP) has a number of initiatives which are aimed at increasing the participation of underrepresented groups in Higher Education. These groups include: (1) Students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, (2) students who are members of Irish Traveller and Roma communities, (3) students with disabilities including intellectual disabilities.

*Training and support for educators delivering relationship and sexuality education*

146. Oide is a professional support service for teachers in Ireland and has Primary and Post-Primary Wellbeing teams which provide professional learning experiences and in-school support in the areas of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). This professional learning aligns with the principles of gender equality, equal access, and intersectionality. Specifically, in the area of RSE, the Primary Wellbeing team offers events such as “A Whole School Approach to RSE” and supports RSE during in-school support visits. The Post-Primary Wellbeing team provides events such as “Teaching RSE across the strands of the Junior Cycle SPHE Specification” and “Senior Cycle RSE”.

147. These professional learning experiences aim to: (1) enhance confidence and competence, (2) explore pedagogical approaches, (3) utilise diverse resources. Feedback from school leaders and teachers on the effectiveness and relevance of these professional learning experiences is actively encouraged. Such feedback is instrumental in identifying areas for improvement, ensuring that the offerings remain responsive to the evolving needs of school leaders and teachers.

*Measures to ensure the inclusion of a mandatory and standardised school curricula on sexual and reproductive health*

148. An updated Junior Cycle SPHE specification, incorporating RSE, was published by the NCCA in May 2023 and was rolled out in schools last September for all first year Junior Cycle students. This followed on from an extensive public consultation on a draft specification, which took place in 2022. The ‘Relationships and Sexuality strand learning outcomes include that students should be able to ‘identify signs of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships’ and to ‘appreciate the importance of seeking, giving and receiving consent in sexual relationships, from the perspective of building caring relationships and from a legal perspective’.

149. An updated Senior Cycle SPHE specification has been published following a public consultation which took place between July and November 2023. While it has been made available to schools from September 2024, schools have until September 2027 to introduce it for all students. This is to allow time for work which is ongoing in regard to the necessary planning and preparatory work, including classroom resources and teacher professional learning. The learning outcomes of the ‘Relationships and Sexuality’ strand include that students should be able to ‘examine how both positive and harmful attitudes around gender are perpetuated in the media, online, and in society and discuss strategies for challenging and changing harmful attitudes and narratives’ and to ‘explore the root causes and consequences of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV), and outline the supports and services available, and protections under the law.

## Q. Reply to paragraph 17 of the list of issues and questions

### Employment

#### *Gender pay-gap reporting*

150. A range of measures have been taken to promote gender equality in the workplace. Reducing the gender pay gap is key to promoting gender economic equality and, through a suite of measures, the gender pay gap in Ireland has reduced from 14.4 per cent in 2017, to 9.6 per cent in 2022.

151. Ireland introduced gender pay gap reporting in 2022, which requires organisations to report on their gender pay gap across a range of metrics, encouraging them to reflect on their gender pay and the drivers behind it. Reporting began in 2022 for organisations with over 250 employees and the reporting obligation was extended to organisations with over 150 employees in 2024. This reporting obligation will extend to organisations with over 50 employees in 2025.

152. A centralised reporting database is currently being developed, which will make information on organisations' gender pay gaps more accessible to the public.

#### *EU Pay Transparency Directive*

153. The Pay Transparency Directive (Directive (EU) 2023/970) came into force in June 2023. Member States have three years from that date to transpose it into national law.

154. Ireland's Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021 already complies with the basic requirements of the Directive. The implementation of this Act and associated regulations require employers to report their gender pay gap each year, and the measures that are being taken to eliminate or reduce the gap.

155. Department officials are currently examining the best approach to transpose other elements of this Directive into Irish law, in advance of the transposition deadline of June 2026.

#### *Oversight by the Labour Inspectorate of the private sector*

156. The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) encompasses a number of roles in Ireland. These include inspection, adjudication, conciliation, and information/outreach functions. With respect to employer's equal pay obligation, the WRC Information and Customer Service provides information on equal pay obligations to employers (and employees) through its various information channels, including via telephone information line.

#### *EU directive on improving the gender balance on company boards*

157. Officials are currently developing Regulations under Section 3 of the European Communities Act 1973 in order to transpose the directive on improving the gender balance on listed company boards (Directive (EU) 2022/2381). This work is being prioritised in advance of the transposition date of the 28th of December 2024.

## R. Reply to paragraph 18 of the list of issues and questions

#### *Women in management positions in the private sector in the past five years*

158. Launched in 2018, Balance for Better Business is a business-led Review Group, supported by Government, which advocates, sets voluntary targets for, and monitors gender representation on the boards and senior leadership teams of leading private

companies in Ireland. In the five years between 2018 and 2023, Balance for Better Business has recorded that the representation of women on the boards of listed companies in Ireland has increased by 21 percentage points and on leadership teams by 8 percentage points. For large non-listed companies, there were respective increases of 5 percentage points for boards, and 2 percentage points for leadership teams. This progress means that Ireland now performs well in international perspective for the representation of women in management. The European Institute for Gender Equality's Gender Statistics Database records that, for the indicator H2, in 2023, Ireland ranked 3rd in the EU for the representation of women executives, and 9th in the EU for the representation of women board members in its largest listed companies.

*Mechanisms for filing complaints of sexual harassment in the workplace*

159. The Employment Equality Act 1998 (Code of Practice) (Harassment) Order 2012 states that “sexual harassment and harassment on the eight other grounds “... pollute the working environment and can have a devastating effect on the health, confidence, morale and performance on those affected by it”. The numbers of specific complaints citing sexual harassment are small in the overall volume of complaints submitted for adjudication. Approximately 54 per cent of these complaints are withdrawn by the complainants before, during and post adjudication/mediation. The numbers of such complaints submitted between 2019 to 2023 are as follows: Specific Complaints where ‘Sexual Harassment’ is cited as discrimination; 2019, 90 complaints, 2020, 54 complaints, 2021, 53 complaints, 2022, 61 complaints, 2023, 59 complaints.

*Childcare facilities created in the past five years*

160. Ireland recognises the importance of increased investment in childcare to facilitate women's labour force participation and to support families. Investment in childcare increased by €763m (or 221 per cent) between 2016 and 2024. Between 2019 and 2023, 1,064 services were opened (418 early learning and care services and 646 school-age childcare services) and year to date (January to August 2024), a total of 264 services were opened (64 early learning and care services and 200 school-age childcare services). Between 2019 and 2023, 911 services were closed (790 early learning and care services and 121 school-age childcare services) and year to date (January to August 2024), a total of 103 services were closed (76 early learning and care services and 27 school-age childcare services). Overall, there was a net increase of 153 services between 2019 and 2023, and a net increase of 161 services year to date (January to August 2024).

## **S. Reply to paragraph 19 of the list of issues and questions**

*Measures to reduce horizontal and vertical occupational segregation*

161. To reduce vertical segregation in a private sector context, Ireland launched the Balance for Better Business initiative in 2018, as referenced in paragraph 158. The Review Group has issued guidance to companies on effective measures to increase female representation in leadership, which include succession planning, mentoring and sponsorship, and gender-balanced family leave policies. This guidance has also issued recommendations for companies to reduce horizontal occupational segregation in key pipeline functions, as this can in turn contribute to vertical segregation. The Central Statistics Office tracks, in its Gender Balance in Business Survey, whether companies have set gender representation targets, and whether they have separated these by function.

*Shared parental leave and flexible leave systems*

162. Family leave entitlements have also been significantly extended. Each parent of a child under the age of 2 is now entitled to 9 weeks paid Parent's Leave – an extension of 7 weeks since the leave was introduced in 2019. With paid Maternity Leave at 26 weeks and paid Paternity Leave at 2 weeks, this means that a 2-parent family now has an entitlement to 46 weeks paid leave.

163. Unpaid parental leave has also been extended from 18 weeks to 26 weeks. The age of the relevant child was extended from 8 years to 12, or 16 if the child has a disability or long-term illness. A new short-term form of unpaid leave for medical care purposes has also been introduced, which enables parents and carers to avail of 3 days leave with no notice period.

164. In addition, breastfeeding breaks can now be taken for up to 2 years after the birth of the child, which is an important support for women returning to work after having a child.

165. The right to request flexible working for parents and carers, and the right to request remote work for all employees, have also been introduced and can support working families and those with caring responsibilities. Technical amendments to existing legislation to ensure that diverse families can access maternity and adoptive leave have also been made since 2019.

*Ratification of relevant international treaties and conventions*

166. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment will consider Conventions 156 and 183 when reviewing unratified Conventions.

**T. Reply to paragraph 20 of the list of issues and questions****Health***Strategy for universal healthcare*

167. The Sláintecare Implementation Strategy & Action Plan 2021–2023 Final Progress Report was published by the Minister for Health on 30 April 2024, highlighting the unprecedented progress being made in transforming our health and social care services to provide the Right Care, in the Right Place, at the Right Time. During the period from 2021 to 2023, there were notable improvements in access and expanding capacity, including waiting lists, which in 2023 recorded an 11 per cent reduction in patients breaching Sláintecare Max Wait Times between February and December 2023. This was the second year waiting lists fell since 2015. The number of critical care beds have increased to 329, a 27.5 per cent increase since 2020; acute beds have been increased by 1126 over the same period. The GP Access to Community Diagnostics scheme has been highly successful with 904,857 GP directly-referred community diagnostics carried out between 2021 and 2023. Over the course of 2021–2023, the Enhanced Community Care (ECC) Programme has seen service delivery increasingly reoriented towards primary care, enhanced GP services, and community-based services. By end 2023, all 96 Community Healthcare Networks (CHNs) were established and operational and 24 Community Specialist Teams (CSTs) for Older People and 24 CSTs for Chronic Disease Management (CDM) were operational. Over 2800 staff were recruited and a total of €540 million was allocated to the ECC Programme over the three-year period. Several key initiatives related to public health reform, safety, and prevention saw substantial progress, including the Public Only Consultant Contract (POCC) which was launched in March 2023 and, as of June 2024, 2,316 Consultants have signed the new contract.

168. In December 2022, Business Cases for the development of new elective hospitals at Cork and Galway were approved and are now moving to design phase. The site identification process for Dublin reached an advanced stage. To increase acute capacity in the interim, new surgical hubs are also being delivered in Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick, and Waterford. The new Digital Health & Social Care Strategic Roadmap (2024–2030), which has been developed through extensive stakeholder engagement, was published in May 2024 and sets out a roadmap to digitally transform health services in Ireland and improve access for patients.

169. Universal Healthcare is being advanced, building on the significant reform progress made to date, with a focus on achieving better outcomes and faster access for patients and service users. Waiting times are falling and outcomes are improving. The next phase of Universal Healthcare is focused on achieving the highest possible standards of quality health and social care for the people of Ireland when they need it, where they need it, and at minimal cost or free at the point of service. This advancement provides for the continuation of a number of national reform programmes and initiatives already underway to move us towards a universal healthcare service. This includes women's health, disabilities, mental health, and urgent and emergency care.

*Implementation of the O'Shea abortion services review*

170. The final Report of the review of the operation of the health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 was submitted to the Minister in February 2023. The Report made a number of recommendations in relation to increasing access to services. As requested by Government the Health Service Executive (HSE) established a Service Improvement Group to progress the operational recommendations of the Review. In this regard significant progress has been made, with six additional hospitals starting to provide termination services in 2023, an increase of 55 per cent. Termination services in early pregnancy (up to 12 weeks) are now provided in 17 of the 19 maternity hospitals, with the remaining two expected to come on board in 2024. There has also been a small but sustained increase in community providers.

171. Furthermore, the revised model of care introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has now been approved as the enduring model of care. Under this blended approach, it is possible for one of the two consultations required for termination in early pregnancy to take place remotely. The cumulative effect of these measures, now in place, will substantially reduce barriers and increase access to services for those who need it.

172. The Safe Access Zones Bill was signed by the President on the 7th of May 2024 and came into effect on the 17th of October 2024. The proposals, arising from the Review, which recommended legislative changes were referred to the Joint Committee on Health for consideration. The Joint Committee on Health submitted a report on the proposed legislative recommendations in December 2023. Further consideration of this issue will take place at the Cabinet Committee on Health.

173. The number of women residents in Ireland who travelled outside the country to access termination of pregnancy services are as follows; 2017: 3,053, 2018: 2,897, 2019: 392, 2020: 203, 2021: 247, 2022: 214. At the time of writing, statistics had not yet been published for 2023.

*Status of new national maternity hospital*

174. The relocation of the National Maternity Hospital (NMH), to a co-located site with an adult acute hospital, St Vincent's University Hospital, (as per international best practice) will be the greatest infrastructural investment by the Irish State, to-date, in the area of women's health. The relocated facility will provide a comprehensive

model of maternity, gynaecological and neonatal care to the highest international standard, for women, girls and babies in Ireland for generations to come.

175. In 2017, planning permission was granted for the relocation of the NMH to the St Vincent's University Hospital campus. In May 2022, the Irish Government approved the legal framework to underpin the ownership and governance arrangements for the new NMH and, in July 2023, it gave its approval for the project to proceed to tender. This tender process began in September 2023 and was programmed to run over a period of c.18 months. In parallel to the tender and procurement process, further enabling works are taking place to relocate and decant existing services away from the future hospital site. It is expected that this procurement process and the completion of the enabling works will be completed by mid-2025. This should allow construction of the main works to begin, subject to the conclusion of a successful tender process.

*Gender-sensitive approaches to women's mental health*

176. The National Implementation Monitoring Committee (NIMC) Specialist Group on Women's Mental Health was established by the Department of Health in August 2021, at the request of the NIMC Steering Committee, to progress recommendation 3 of Sharing the Vision. This recommendation was that the Department of Health, the Women's Health Taskforce and the NIMC will undertake a joint project to outline an effective approach to the mental health of women and girls, ensuring that mental health priorities and services are gender sensitive and that women's mental health is specifically and sufficiently addressed in the implementation of the Sharing the Vision policy. To support the work of the Specialist Group, a diverse Consultation Panel was established, involving a wide range of professional and civil society perspectives to inform the process. The outcome of this work was the publication of the Embedding Women's Mental Health in Sharing the Vision report in March 2023 which emphasises that all health services need to take steps to strengthen gender awareness and contains details of proposals and an implementation plan to achieve these goals.

*Budget spent on women's health*

177. A total of €17m was allocated in Budget 2021. Funding of €12m to ensure a renewed impetus to the implementation of the National Maternity Strategy and the new model of maternity care, and to improve gynaecology services. Building on the work of the Women's Health Taskforce, a €5m Women's Health Fund was introduced to improve women's health outcomes and experiences of healthcare.

178. Budget 2022 ring-fenced €31m in funding for new Developments for Women's Health. This included: €8.66 million additional funding for the National Maternity Strategy. €9 million to fund the free contraception scheme for women aged 17–25, which was launched on the 14th of September, 2022 and expanded to include 26 year olds on January 1st, 2023. €5.3 million to grow access to “see and treat” gynaecology clinics; specialist menopause clinics; and specialist endometriosis services. €1.34 million to support initial establishment of a perinatal genetics service. €0.71m investment in tackling period poverty for the first time, increased to €0.81m in 2023. €0.54million to establish an expert Obstetric Event Support Team to support services and sites that report severe maternity incidents. €0.25m additional investment in Sexual Assault Treatment Units. An additional €5 million for the Women's Health Fund.

179. Budget 2023 saw an allocation of €26.8 million for women's health, including: €10 million to provide access to publicly funded IVF treatment. Elimination of VAT on HRT and period products. Expansion of the Free Contraception Scheme to cover

women aged 30 and under by 1st September 2023. €10 million investment in the Women's Health Fund to continue support for women's health priority areas. €0.9 million investment in the development of Women's Health Hubs, for the holistic provision of women's healthcare.

180. In 2024, an additional €11.5 million of new development funding was allocated to women's health under Budget 2024. With an initial allocation of €1.47 million for measures, including: €1.3 million for expansion of the Free Contraception Scheme to cover women aged 31 and under, from January 1st, 2024. An additional €0.1 million, bringing total funding for period poverty mitigation to €914,000 in 2024. A further €0.07 million for Medical Social Workers in the Sexual Assault Treatment Units.

181. A further package of €10 million was secured in late 2023. This will support the development of the Women's Health Action Plan 2024–2025 Phase 2: An Evolution in Women's Health with measures, including: €4 million from July 2024 to expand the Free Contraception Scheme from ages 32 to 35. €0.8 million for the expansion of the National Venous Thromboembolism Programme (VTE). €0.25 million to expand scalp cooling services. €1.8 million for the BreastCheck programme expansion to deliver the National Screening Service Equity Framework. €0.1 million for additional staffing for the Diabetic Retina Screening pregnancy pathway to meet increased demand. €0.6 million to develop the first National AHR Centre. €0.54 million to increase the capacity of endometriosis services. €0.17 million to increase Menopause Clinic opening hours. €0.25 million to expand termination of pregnancy services. €0.1 million to add an additional ambulatory gynaecology unit bringing the total to 21 clinics nationwide. €0.45 million to establish 4 post-natal hubs bringing the total to 9. €1.2 million ring-fenced to develop innovative proposals through the Women's Health Fund.

## **U. Reply to paragraph 21 of the list of issues and questions**

### **Economic empowerment of women**

#### *Gender impact assessments of fiscal policies*

182. The Pensions Commission was established in November 2020 to examine sustainability and eligibility issues in respect of the State Pension and the Social Insurance Fund, in fulfilment of a Programme for Government commitment. The Pensions Commission's Report was published on 7th October 2021, and it established that the current State Pension system is not sustainable into the future and that changes are needed. It set out a wide range of recommendations in this regard including providing access to the State Pension Contributory for long-term carers of incapacitated dependents and endorsed the move to a fairer system of pension calculation (the Total Contributions Approach) as the sole method of calculation. The Total Contributions Approach provides generous periods for absence from employment for caring duties. These measures have now been legislated for. Under the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2024, long-term carer's contributions are available since 1st January 2024 and the 10-year transition to TCA will commence from 1st January 2025.

183. Proposals in the Pensions Commission's Report were gender, equality and poverty proofed. In advance of settling the final design of the Automatic Enrolment (AE) Retirement Savings System, a gender impact of assessment was conducted to assess the policy objectives and outcomes for women in implementing the AE system.

184. The Department of Social Protection provides a number of employment support measures which encourage female participation in, or a return to, the workforce, including several supports targeted at parents. In terms of overall labour market



participation, there are over a record high 1.3 million women in the Irish labour force, on a seasonally adjusted basis.

*Measures to address the adverse impact of business activities on women and girls*

185. The Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Employment, Enterprise and Trade jointly commenced policy development on Ireland's second National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, to implement commitments made in the current Programme for Government. Following a public consultation and a number of meetings with stakeholders and other Government Departments, work is underway on creating Ireland's second Plan. The new Plan is expected to cover a multi-annual timeframe, as was covered in the first Plan. It is intended to build on the achievements of the first National Plan, while reflecting new developments in the international understanding of business and human rights, including new EU instruments. The ambition is to finalise and publish the new plan in 2024.

186. The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive 2022/2464 was given effect in national legislation in S.I. No. 336/2024 – European Union (Corporate Sustainability Reporting) Regulations 2024. While the directive and the underpinning European Sustainability Reporting Standards do not impose due diligence obligations on companies, companies in scope will be required to report on a depiction of their processes.

187. Ireland's first National Plan on Business and Human Rights (2017–2020), included the actions to be carried out across Government: share information about challenges and good practices on business and human rights with partners in the EU and the UN, including promoting coherence in the implementation of the EU's action Plan on Human Rights and democracy (2015–2019) and the EU's gender action Plan (2016–2020); Promote the inclusive economic growth policy priority set out in "one World, one Future: Ireland's Policy for international development", by encouraging and supporting partner governments to ensure that business and economic regulation and legislation implements national and international commitments to human rights such as those relating to gender equality – in particular promoting women's access to formal employment, decent work, and the rights of marginalised groups.

*Supports for women entrepreneurs*

188. Enterprise Ireland (EI), the State indigenous enterprise development agency, is committed to fostering female entrepreneurship in Ireland. EI have a dedicated Women in Business Strategy, aiming to increase the number of women entrepreneurs and leaders. This strategy includes initiatives like "The Level Project" and various capability development programs such as "Inspiring Women Entrepreneurs" and "Going for Growth". In 2022, 37 per cent of the start-ups EI invested in were women-led, a significant increase from 8 per cent in 2012. Enterprise Ireland's efforts are focused on creating a diverse entrepreneurial ecosystem and supporting women in achieving their business ambitions.

189. Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are actively engaged in encouraging and inspiring an increase in women-led businesses through initiatives such as the annual National Women's Enterprise Day and the Women in Business Networks. Women entrepreneurs are continuing to show strong numbers within the Local Enterprise Office network for accessing training and mentoring. They outnumber men when it comes to upskilling with double the number of women than men accessing LEO training.

*Gender equality budgeting*

190. Introduced as part of a pilot programme for the 2018 budgetary cycle, Equality Budgeting is a way of approaching and understanding the budget as a process that embodies long-standing societal choices about how resources are used, rather than simply a neutral process of resource allocation. Equality Budgeting focuses on the impacts to different cohorts of society based on the individual rather than the household. An Equality Budgeting Expert Advisory Group was established in Ireland in 2018. Comprising key Government Departments, public bodies, stakeholder groups and academic experts, this Group is Chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform. The role of the expert group is to offer advice on best practice in developing Equality Budgeting policy and further embedding this into the Budgetary Cycle. The Public Service Performance Report published by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform reports on Equality Budgeting activities and the relevant equality metrics on outputs derived from public funding and delivered in the preceding year.

191. In addition to its recommendations regarding budgeting, the Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality also advised that public bodies be required to actively and visibly demonstrate clear application of the public sector equality and human rights duty in respect of departmental budgets, public procurement and the contracting of services. This action is currently in progress. It is the responsibility of each public body to comply with The Public Sector Duty. The Duty has been taken into consideration in the drafting of the departments Statement of Strategy and contracting of services.

*Supports provided to low-income families and single-headed households*

192. Several measures have been taken to ensure an adequate standard of living for low-income families and single-headed households. These measures include the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP), a payment for lone parents under 66, who are not cohabiting, and whose youngest child is under seven. Additionally, the Jobseekers Transitional Payment (JST) is a special arrangement under the Jobseeker's Allowance scheme for lone parents under 66 who are not cohabiting and whose youngest child is between seven and fourteen years old. There have been several changes to these schemes since 2017 which have had a positive impact for those in receipt of the payments, the vast majority of whom are women. Since 2017 access to both of these schemes has been expanded through augmenting income limits and the rates of payment have been increased. In 2021, the earnings threshold of €425 was removed from the One-Parent Family Payment meaning the payment tapers off as earnings increase. As of 2024 the personal rate of payment was €232 per week.

193. Persons in receipt of the above two payments also receive an additional weekly payment for each child, called an 'Increase for Qualified Child' (IQC). This can be paid until the child turns 18 or to age 22 in certain circumstances where they are in full-time education. The weekly rate has increased a number of times since 2019 – for children under 12 from €34 to €46 per week and for children aged 12 and over from €37 to €54 per week as of 2024.

194. Child Benefit is a universal monthly payment made to families with children up to the age of 16 years or it continues to be paid in respect of children until their nineteenth birthday if they are in full-time education, or if they have a disability. Since 2017, the standard monthly rate of €140 Child Benefit applies to each child. Twins are paid at one and a half times (150 per cent) the standard monthly rate for each child. All other multiple births are paid at double (200 per cent) the standard monthly rate for each child. These increased payments continue for as long as all the children remain qualified.

195. In 2019, the Parent's Leave and Benefit Act, introduced two weeks of paid Parents' Leave and Benefit for each parent to be taken in the first year after the birth or adoptive placement of a child. As of 2024, the number of weeks of Parent's Leave and Benefit available to eligible parents has been increased to nine weeks. The weekly rate of payment has increased from €245 in 2019 to €274 in 2024.

196. Regarding Maternity and Paternity Leave, two weeks of Paternity Leave and Benefit have been available since 2016. The weekly rate of payment has increased from €235 in 2017 to €274 in 2024. Maternity Leave and Benefit is available for 26 weeks. From October 2017 new measures were introduced to provide for additional Maternity Leave and Benefit in the case of a premature birth. The extended period of benefit is equivalent to the duration between the actual date of birth of the premature baby and the date when the maternity leave was expected to commence (i.e. ordinarily two weeks before the expected date of birth). The weekly rate of payment has increased from €235 in 2017 to €274 in 2024. 16 weeks unpaid Maternity Leave continues to be available.

197. The Working Family Payment is a tax-free payment which provides an income top-up for employees, with children, with low earnings. It is a targeted measure that is directly linked to household income and therefore directly supports low-income working families. The payment made is 60 per cent of the difference between weekly household income and the Working Family Payment income threshold that applies. Over half of recipients are single adult households.

198. The Back to Work Family Dividend is a financial support for people who move off the One-Parent Family Payment or Jobseeker's Transitional Payment into employment. This scheme is payable for two years. In year one, the rate of payment is 100 per cent of the person's previous Increase for each Qualified Child/ren payment (subject to a maximum payable rate equivalent to four children). In year two, 50 per cent of this sum is paid.

199. As of 2024 several changes have been made to Government treatment of child maintenance payments. Further detail on these changes is described in Reply No. 213, paragraph 216 to 219.

## **V. Reply to paragraph 22 of the list of issues and questions**

### **Rural and disadvantaged groups of women**

#### *The overall situation of rural women*

200. The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), is Ireland's primary social inclusion intervention. This is a national programme that is delivered in both rural and urban areas by Local Development Companies to help those in the greatest need. SICAP aims to address high and persistent levels of deprivation through targeted and innovative, locally-led approaches. It targets and supports those who are disadvantaged in Irish society and less likely to use mainstream services.

201. The Community Development Pilot Programme (CDP) aims to trial community led interventions that address poverty, social exclusion and inequality and promote human rights.

202. The Local Enhancement Programme (LEP) provides funding to assist community groups across the country. The funding may be used, but is not limited to; improved access for persons with a disability; enhancing community participation for disadvantaged and marginalised groups, and improving energy efficiency of community facilities to reduce ongoing costs. The LEP 2024 included a special ring-

fenced capital fund of €1 million to provide support for Women's Groups and built on the €100,000 ring-fenced for community groups known as 'Women's Sheds' under the 2022 Community Support Fund. Since 2018, under the Community Enhancement Programme (CEP), over 200 Women's Shed projects received over €310,000 in funding.

*The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy*

203. The Government of Ireland is committed to improving the lives of the Traveller and Roma Community in Ireland. The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021 (NTRIS), represented a whole of Government approach to bring meaningful change and progress for the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland, including women. NTRIS contained 149 actions, grouped under ten themes including Cultural Identity; Anti-Discrimination and Gender Equality; Education; Employment; Health and Accommodation. Progress on these actions was monitored by a Steering Committee which included both Traveller and Roma representatives and Civil Society organisations. In line with NTRIS Actions under the "Gender Equality" objective, targeted supports are provided by Government to facilitate Traveller and Roma women's engagement in key areas including education, employment and economic development. Funding is provided to the National Traveller Women's Forum and other organisations to support and progress Traveller and Roma women's inclusion and equality in Irish society.

204. An independent evaluation on the processes for implementation of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy and two other equality strategies (the National Strategy for Women and Girls and the Migrant Integration Strategy) was completed and the report was published in July 2023. The learning from this evaluation informed the development of the successor National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024–2028. The successor strategy was developed in collaboration with relevant Government Departments and was approved by Government on 16 July 2024. It was published on 31 July, 2024.

205. The new Strategy provides for improved oversight structures to ensure greater clarity and accountability for the delivery of key actions. A high level Steering Committee comprising representatives from the Traveller and Roma communities, statutory and non-statutory bodies, and chaired by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, will oversee the implementation of the Strategy. A secretariat will be established in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to ensure regular and intensive monitoring of progress towards the agreed strategic outcomes of the Strategy. The Steering Committee will have a more strategic role than previous and will have scope to call for discussion at Steering Committee meetings of any issues in the delivery of actions encountered across any of the nine themes of the Strategy. There will be transparent quarterly public reporting on progress in delivering actions under NTRIS II across all Departments, State Agencies, and Traveller and Roma organisations charged with delivering such actions. An annual forum will be arranged at which the Traveller and Roma communities and their representatives will have the possibility to raise questions and to seek further information.

*Women's conditions in places of deprivation of liberty*

206. The Government approved the Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022–2024 in August 2022. This Review provides for a number of actions to progress penal reform across a broad range of areas, including building on the joint Irish Prison Service (IPS)/Probation Service Strategy "An Effective Response to Women Who Offend" and responding to increasing rates of pre-trial detention.

207. On 1 July 2024, a total of 266 female prisoners were in custody; 69 were on trial/remand and 197 were serving sentences. Of those under sentence, 44 per cent were in the 30-40 age-group, 38 per cent in the 40+ age-group and 18 per cent in the 18-30 age-group. The highest proportion of these (25 per cent) were serving sentences of 1-2 years. Yearly sentenced committals of women has decreased in the last ten years, from a high of 2,918 in 2015 to a low of 487 in 2021. 630 women were committed to prison in 2022.

208. Notwithstanding this decrease, the Irish prison estate is currently experiencing a sustained period of overcrowding, including in the two dedicated women's prisons. A cross-agency response group was established to address this, with a number of actions progressed to date and further options recently approved by the Minister for Justice. Approximately 200 extra prison spaces were delivered in 2022 and 2023, including the opening of a new state-of-the-art female prison in Limerick which provided an additional 22 spaces.

209. Most women who offend pose a low risk to society but present with a high level of need. The joint IPS/Probation Service Strategy provided the starting point for focused interventions for females. Arising out of this, implementation of the Probation Service's 'Towards a Best Practice approach to working with Women Who Offend' continues. Planning is advanced and resources have been identified to pilot a specialised community supervision and support programme for women who offend from Limerick and adjacent areas. The Probation Service is working closely with the IPS on referral criteria and scope. Engagement with statutory and community-based services and programmes also forms part of the planning and development. The Probation Service offers a distinct response when working with female offenders, focusing on a model which is underpinned by social work values and approaches. The Department of Justice recognises the high number of individuals being held in pretrial detention. As a part of the work being done to increase the use of alternatives to remand, the Department will commence the scoping of a Women's Supported Bail Service in Q4 of 2024.

210. The Office of the Inspector of Prisons (OIP) carries out regular inspections of all prisons in Ireland and presents reports on each institution inspected to the Minister for Justice. The OIP's Inspection Framework is informed by the statutory underpinning of the Inspector in legislation, national legislation relating to prisons and prisoners' rights, and international obligations owing to prisoners. It also draws upon relevant international human rights standards, in particular the preventive approach and standards set by the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In accordance with IPS' Prisoner Complaints Policy, a prisoner can make a complaint verbally to any officer, or in writing. Complaint Forms are also available to all prisoners on their prison landing.

211. A new Prisoner Complaints System, which aims to fully align the prisoner complaints process with recommendations made by the former Inspector of Prisons, is currently under development. In addition to this, the Department of Justice carried out a review of Prison Visiting Committees (PVCs). PVCs are made up of individuals from across society. They visit the prison to which they are appointed and hear any complaints made to them by a prisoner, as well as looking at the quality of prison accommodation and the facilities and services available to prisoners. Each committee reports annually to the Minister for Justice on their findings. The Department's review of the existing functions, powers, appointment procedures and reporting processes of PVCs, completed in 2023, aimed to identify gaps and opportunities to bring PVCs in line with the norms and expectations of such a body operating today, and to ensure PVC members are adequately equipped, supported, and empowered to do their work.

*Alternative prison arrangements for female offenders*

212. As part of their joint strategy, consideration was given to developing an open centre for women by a Joint Probation Service/Irish Prison Service working group. This group acknowledged the Report on the Strategic Review of Penal Policy which recommended a greater focus on step-down facilities, supported accommodation, use of more community-based open conditions for female offenders as well as the provision of an open centre for women. The conclusion reached by the working group was that it was more appropriate to develop and use step-down facilities, and this approach has been and is being progressed. The Outlook Programme, run in joint partnership with the Probation Service and managed by Focus Ireland, provides accommodation and structured community supports for women leaving prison or on Probation Service supervision. In addition, Tús Nua, managed by De Paul Ireland (an NGO), works closely with the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service to support female offenders' reintegration into the community on their release from custody and also provides accommodation for 15 women.

*Supports for women with disabilities to live independently*

213. Work is ongoing to develop the next National Disability Strategy, in fulfilment of a Programme for Government commitment to deliver a plan for the further implementation of the UNCRPD in Ireland. A robust and extensive public consultation process has concluded which included a wide range of focus groups, interviews, as well as large-scale consultation events and a national survey. Engagement is ongoing across government and with disability stakeholders to determine actions under the strategy and independent living is an important area of policy action and incorporating intersectional concerns including gender. The Strategy is due for publication in 2024 and will advance supports for disabled people in Ireland to live independent, autonomous lives of their own choosing. Ireland is fully committed to ratification of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Optional Protocol will act as an important accountability mechanism for the State, and will strengthen Ireland's commitment to upholding the rights of persons with disabilities.

214. The necessary preparatory work is underway to deposit an instrument of accession with the Secretary-General of the United Nations in the coming weeks. The Optional Protocol will enter into force in Ireland 30 days after deposit.

215. The Department of Health published the Taskforce on Personalised Budget's report, Towards Personalised Budgets for People with a Disability in Ireland in July 2018. The report recommended that the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive (HSE) should establish demonstration projects to test the delivery of personalised budgets in an Irish context with a view to identifying the best approach to the wider roll-out of these models following the initial demonstration phase.

216. Additionally, a Personal Assistance (PA) Review Group has been established by the Health Service Executive. The purpose of the PA Review Group is to develop a protocol for the eligibility and allocation of personal assistance services based on a universally agreed definition, in collaboration with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, people with disabilities and providers.

## W. Reply to paragraph 23 of the list of issues and questions

### Marriage and family relations

#### *Child maintenance*

217. The Child Maintenance Review Group was established in 2020 to consider and make regarding the establishment of a State Child Maintenance Agency among other things. Its report was published in November 2022 and on foot of the report it was decided by government that (a) a State Child Maintenance Agency should not be established and (b) that the Department of Justice would undertake a review of the enforcement of child maintenance orders in the context of the wider reforms of family justice underway. Following a recommendation made in the Review of the Enforcement of Child Maintenance Orders, a Committee was established in February 2024 to produce a set of child maintenance guidelines. The work of the committee is underway and a set of guidelines are expected by early 2025.

218. The Social Welfare and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, provided for the exclusion of child maintenance payments from social welfare means tests, this change came into effect on the 4th of June 2024. As a result, child maintenance payments are no longer considered as part of the decision making process to award any social welfare payment, including the One Parent Family and Jobseekers Transitional Payments. Since late 2022, the Department ceased applying a rule whereby applicants for the One-Parent Family and Jobseeker's Transitional Payments had to make "efforts to seek maintenance" from their child's other parent. This was done on an administrative basis initially until Regulations were changed during 2023. This requirement had often involved applicants having to go to Court. The 'Liable Relative Provisions', which also applied to One-Parent Family Payment whereby the Department could seek a contribution from the child's other parent, has also been revoked – and has not been applied to new claims since late 2022.

#### *Rates of default in child support payments*

219. The Review of the Enforcement of Child Maintenance Orders was published by the Department of Justice on 7 January 2024. The Review examined how the current enforcement process works, the challenges associated with it and areas which may require reform. The Review put forward 26 recommendations focused on generating maximum compliance with child maintenance orders, to ensure security and stability for children and to aid poverty prevention. The recommendations, while mainly focused on strengthening provisions for court enforcement of child maintenance orders, also look at ways to encourage voluntary payment and to assist people to make private arrangements.

220. The key recommendations of the review include: (1) development of a set of child maintenance guidelines and the introduction of mandatory mediation information sessions. (2) Strengthening attachment of earnings orders and exploring the possibility of attaching an order to a PPS number rather than employing entities, so that orders do not lapse when there is a change in employer. (3) Introduction of a single enforcement procedure when the receiving parent makes an enforcement application, allowing the judge to choose the most appropriate enforcement option based on the circumstances of the case. (4) Simplification of the bench warrant process. (5) Placing the onus on paying parents to pay costs associated with enforcement proceedings. (6) Allowing for deductions from social welfare, the paying parent's bank accounts, from government grants and subsidies and allowing for the recovery of arrears from tax refunds. Work is underway to implement these recommendations.

*The economic consequences of divorce*

221. The economic impact of separation and divorce remains a developing area of research and study regarding social exclusion and poverty.

## **X. Reply to paragraph 24 of the list of issues and questions**

### **Climate change and disaster risk reduction**

222. Ireland recognises that gender inequalities mean there is an unequal distribution of climate risks across communities and society, and that the potential contribution of women to addressing the climate crisis is often overlooked and undervalued. Ireland's international action and its climate finance aim to strengthen women's voices and leadership in climate action. This recognition is embedded in Ireland's policy for international development, 'A Better World', as well as in Ireland's Climate Finance Roadmap, published in 2022.

223. The National Dialogue on Climate Action (NDCA) is Ireland's national programme to engage, enable and empower stakeholders and citizens across society to take climate action. Through the NDCA, over 12,000 people (a majority of whom have been female) have been involved in the annual 'Climate Conversations' and the NDCA has engaged over 1,000 stakeholders through five National Climate Stakeholder Forum events, three National Youth Assemblies on Climate, and active engagement with populations most impacted by the transition to a carbon-neutral future.

224. The report, Climate Conversations 2023 – From Individual Action to Collective Engagement (CC23), identifies the importance of a just transition across all sectors in order to ensure that our response to the climate challenge is equitable and inclusive. The findings also identify where barriers differ by demographics, including gender. Understanding gender as well as generational and relationship dynamics is key in terms of identifying which groups are best at driving positive change in relation to climate action.

225. Findings from the Climate Conversations 2023, show that there are differences between men and women when it comes to taking climate action across different climate areas. In 2023, under the NDCA, specific focus groups and workshops with men and women were carried out to gather insights into the specific vulnerabilities that they may experience.

226. In 2024, the NDCA has expanded its programme to engage communities and groups across Ireland to scale-up the work that they are doing through the Climate Actions Work programme. This Climate Actions Work focuses on hearing from, and working with, local communities – talking directly to people to help combat climate change.

227. COP 25 in 2019 saw the adoption of the enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan (2019–2024). The mid-term review of the Gender Action Plan started in June 2022 and concluded at COP27 in November 2022. The EU's team of experts was led by Ireland's National Gender and Climate Change Focal Points (NGCCFP), who was appointed as the EU's negotiator on gender and climate by the French Presidency to the EU. The current Gender Action Plan will conclude at the end of 2024 and work is underway to negotiate a new Plan.

228. To increase Ireland's engagement in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process, Ireland appointed an official of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications as NGCCFP in 2021. Between mid-2021 and mid-2023, 3 capacity-building workshops for civil servants and internal



International Women's Day event on gender-transformative climate action were organised and participated in by the NGCCFP. These workshops explored how gender inequality manifested in the just transition, health impacts of climate change, and climate-related conflict and security.

229. The Climate Unit in the Department of Foreign Affairs provides finance to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to support its work on gender mainstreaming in climate action.

230. Through the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, Ireland supports the project 'Feminist Communities for Climate Justice', a collaboration between the National Women's Council of Ireland and Community Work Ireland. Ireland also supports NGOs that work directly with grassroots and women-led organisations to strengthen women's participation and contribution to national and international climate discussions.

## **Y. Reply to paragraph 25 of the list of issues and questions**

### **Additional information**

231. The enactment of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Act 2022, which was signed into law by the President on 17 December 2021, gave effect for the abolition of wardship, the operationalisation of the Decision Support Service, and the introduction of a new system of tiered decision-making supports.

232. The 2022 Act amends the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015, which provides the legal basis for the abolition of wardship. The Act replaces the wards of court system with a new, progressive, rights-based system of assisted decision-making.