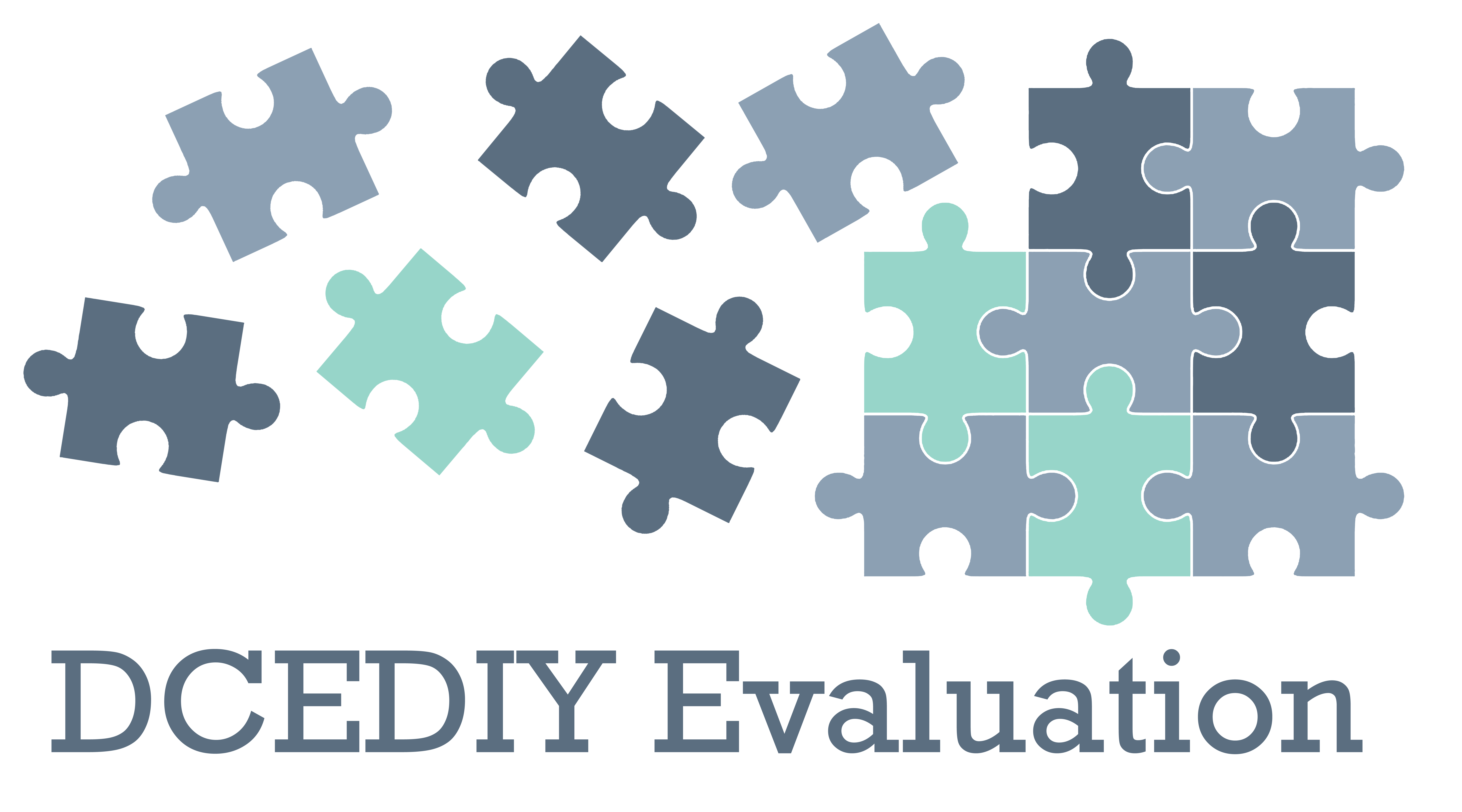


UPR Mid-Term Report 2024



Prepared by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Mid-Term Report to the UN Human Rights Council 2024

Universal Periodic Review

Part 1

Contents

[Introduction 1](#_Toc171766201)

[Section One: Government Initiatives to Protect and Promote Human Rights 1](#_Toc171766202)

[Establishment of a National Civic Forum 2](#_Toc171766204)

[National Action Plan Against Racism 3](#_Toc171766205)

[Migrant Integration Strategy 5](#_Toc171766206)

[National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 5](#_Toc171766207)

[LGBTI+ Rights 6](#_Toc171766208)

[National Action Plan on Human Trafficking 8](#_Toc171766209)

[National Disability Strategy 9](#_Toc171766210)

[Action Plan for Disability Services 10](#_Toc171766211)

[Gender Equality 12](#_Toc171766212)

[Women’s Health 13](#_Toc171766213)

[Accessible and Affordable Early Learning and Care 14](#_Toc171766214)

[Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence 15](#_Toc171766215)

[Social Inclusion 16](#_Toc171766216)

[National Policy for Children and Young People 17](#_Toc171766217)

[Children and Young Peoples’ Voices 18](#_Toc171766218)

[Section Two: Significant Legislative Developments …………………………………………………………………………20](#_Toc171766219)

[Family Leave 20](#_Toc171766221)

[Domestic Violence Leave 21](#_Toc171766222)

[Breastfeeding Breaks and Remote Working 21](#_Toc171766223)

[Gender Pay Gap Information 22](#_Toc171766224)

[Birth Information and Tracing 22](#_Toc171766225)

[Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme 23](#_Toc171766226)

[Assisted Decision-Making 23](#_Toc171766227)

[Discrimination and Equality 24](#_Toc171766228)

[Employment Rights 25](#_Toc171766229)

[Sick Leave from Work 25](#_Toc171766230)

[Safe Access Zones 26](#_Toc171766231)

[Hate Crime and Hate Speech 26](#_Toc171766232)

[Conclusion 27](#_Toc171766233)

# Introduction

This mid-term report is presented by Ireland to report on its implementation of the Universal Periodic Review since it was last reviewed by UPR Working Group 39, in November of 2021. Ireland received 260 recommendations at that time, 227 of which it supported or partially supported. Ireland’s decision to provide this mid-term review reflects the importance with which it regards its international human rights obligations.

The mid-term report is structured in two parts. Part 1 (this document) provides a narrative overview of Ireland’s progress on protecting and promoting human rights. This highlights key achievements over the reporting period as reflected in national policies, strategies and new or evolving legislation. Section One covers key Government initiatives and Section Two covers recent legislative developments.

Part 2 summarises in tabular form, the measures taken by Ireland over the reporting period specifically to address the supported recommendations from the last review.

# Section One

# Government Initiatives to Protect and Promote Human Rights

As part of its commitment to equality and human rights, Ireland has initiated and developed a suite of human rights-focused Government strategies and policy initiatives, which have involved coordinated governance and collaborative action across Government and the public sector.

In line with Ireland’s long standing commitment to civil society engagement, the development and implementation of these strategies has been underpinned by close consultation with civil society, in particular with individuals and groups affected by the issues addressed in these strategies.

This section of the mid-term report highlights key Government strategies and policy initiatives which aim to strengthen and protect human rights, sets out significant achievements to date and outlines the role of civil society in their development and oversight.

## Establishment of a National Civic Forum

In 2019, the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) in collaboration with the Community and Voluntary Sector published *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024*. This strategy supports participative and deliberative approaches for developing public policy, and led to the establishment of a Civic Forum for formal dialogue between the sector and local and central government. The first annual National Civic Forum for Dialogue with the Community and Voluntary Sector took place in 2022 and the second took place in 2023.

In 2023 the theme was ‘Bringing the Values and Principles to Life’, with delegates hearing examples of how the values and principles for collaboration and partnership working have been used in practice, in addition to joint presentations on policy co-design and inclusive engagement at local level. Participants were also invited to engage in discussions on recommendations for improvement. These included identifying means of strengthening citizen engagement and the engagement of civil society organisations in public policy making. This annual event is a part of a process intended to strengthen deliberative and participative approaches to policy-making and programming, complementing existing engagement fora.

A report has been published based on feedback and contributions received. The 2024 Annual Civic Forum will take place in December and preparations for the event are underway.

In addition to the Civic Forum, consultation and engagement with civil society stakeholders has become a core feature of policy development across Government, which is evident throughout this report.

Ireland also has a Citizens’ Assembly, an exercise in deliberative democracy, giving voice to people living in Ireland and placing them at the heart of important legal and policy issues facing Irish society. Over the last decade, citizens’ assemblies have become an important part of the Irish democratic process, playing a meaningful role in informing wider public debate on important issues. The Citizens’ Assembly brings together 99 randomly selected members of the public to discuss and debate a specific issue. People from all walks of life – not normally involved in policy development or legislative proposals – are brought together to deliberate and exchange views on a specific topic.

Members of the assembly are asked to consider a range of other views, examine reports and studies, consider experiences in other countries, hear from experts in their fields, as well as hearing the lived experiences of ordinary people affected by the subject matter. This allows the members of the assembly the opportunity to make an informed assessment of all perspectives on the topic. The discussions amongst the members of the assembly culminate in a series of recommendations for the Government and the Oireachtas (Parliament) to consider. Two recent assemblies generated important recommendations on the topics of the eighth amendment to the Constitution, and drug use.

## National Action Plan Against Racism

Ireland has an increasingly diverse population and the Government has taken action to strengthen protections against racial discrimination. The National Action Plan Against Racism (2023-2027) (NAPAR) launched on the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2023, represents a national level, State-led, co-ordinated approach to eliminating racism in all its forms in Ireland, including antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism that impacts the Traveller and Roma people and communities, and racism affecting people of African Descent.

The plan constitutes part of Ireland’s efforts to fulfil its obligations under the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the UN Durban Declaration and Programme of Action which Ireland signed up to in 2001. It follows the guiding principles set out in Developing National Action Plans Against Racial Discrimination: A Practical Guide, UN OHCHR (2014) and A Union of Equality: EU anti-racism action plan (2020-2025). The plan is rooted in a commitment to human rights values, democracy and the rule of law.

Within the NAPAR, the term ‘racism’ refers to a form of domination which manifests through those power dynamics present in structural and institutional arrangements, practices, policies and cultural norms, which have the effect of excluding or discriminating against individuals or groups, based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin. This understanding of racism is closely aligned with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

The plan acknowledges that racism often intersects with other forms of oppression, including oppression experienced by people based on gender, socio-economic circumstances, disability, sexuality and gender identity, thereby being rooted in a philosophy of intersectionality. NAPAR focuses on the following five objectives:

1. Being Safe and Heard: supporting people who experience racism and protecting people from racist incidents and crimes.
2. Being Equal: addressing ethnic inequalities.
3. Being Seen and Taking Part: enabling minority participation.
4. Being Counted: measuring the impacts of racism.
5. Being Together: a shared journey to racial equality.

The plan was developed by an independent committee of experts, including representatives of minorities, appointed by Government in 2020, having consulted widely with experts, civil society organisations, the business sector, members of the public and Government departments and duty bearers.

Over the five-year implementation period, a key principle of NAPAR is that affected groups should participate in the development and oversight of policy initiatives and targeted measures to address racism. An independent advisory committee on racial equality and racism was established in July 2024 to support the implementation of NAPAR and to assist the Special Rapporteur on Racial Equality and Racism, also appointed in July 2024. The role of the Rapporteur will be to independently monitor and report to the Minister on progress toward the objectives of NAPAR on an annual basis. This advisory committee is tasked with monitoring and helping to progress the implementation of NAPAR.

In addition to driving cross government actions on racism, the NAPAR also supports national and local anti-racism initiatives. The Ireland Against Racism Fund was established under NAPAR, to provide grants to national and local initiatives which aim to combat racism and foster racial equality and community cohesion. In the inaugural year of the fund, 2023, 24 projects were supported with grant funding totalling €1.3m.

## Migrant Integration Strategy

NAPAR builds on the Migrant Integration Strategy, a whole of Government strategy which concluded in 2021. Work is underway to develop a successor strategy, to enhance diversity, inclusion and equity for migrants in Ireland. This work is building on a national consultation held in 2023 to capture insights into the migrant experience in Ireland, and to enhance the State’s understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist to support and promote migrant integration.

As well as driving cross-government actions on migrant integration, the strategy has also supported and funded a range of positive action projects and community based responses.

The National Integration Fund (NIF), established in 2017, responds to Action 6 of the Migrant Integration Strategy, which called for funding to promote positive action initiatives to address areas where migrants find it difficult to avail of opportunities on an equal basis with other members of Irish society. Under the National Integration Fund 2023, €2.9m was made available in 2024 to 18 organisations over three years.

The Communities Integration Fund (CIF) was established in response to Action 51 of the Migrant Integration Strategy, which called for funding to local communities throughout Ireland to promote the integration of migrants and refugees. Since its inception in 2017, the CIF has supported over 820 community integration projects, with grant funding totalling €3.82m.

Now in its third year, the International Protection Integration Fund enables community based organisations across Ireland to support the integration of International Protection Applicants. Since its inception in 2022, the International Protection Integration Fund has supported 137 projects with grant funding totalling €2.8m.

## National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy

The Government has taken action over the past decade to promote equality for Travellers and Roma. In March 2017, the then Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Enda Kenny, recognised Travellers as an ethnic minority. The declaration was followed in June 2017 by the publication of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS), representing a whole-of-Government approach to improving the lives of Travellers and Roma and to ensuring their full inclusion in Irish society.

The strategy encompassed actions on cultural identity, education, employment, health, accommodation, and combatting racism and discrimination. Its implementation has been overseen by a Steering Committee, which is chaired by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and includes representation from Traveller and Roma organisations as well as Government Departments and state agencies, reflecting the ongoing collaboration between Government and civil society in advancing the human rights of Travellers and Roma. The NTRIS continues to be implemented while the successor strategy is being developed.

The consultation process to inform the successor NTRIS framework strategy has involved working closely with representatives of the Traveller and Roma communities as well as Government Departments and State agencies. The new strategy (NITRIS II) is due to be launched by Government in 2024. The NITRIS II will have a strong outcomes focused approach and will incorporate a robust implementation structure and monitoring system, with achievable actions and key performance indicators.

Other key initiatives that have been developed during the reporting period include the publications of the National Traveller Health Action Plan (Department of Health, November 2022), recent work commenced by the Heritage Council to draw up the first Traveller Heritage Strategy, and the development of a national Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES). The Department of Education is working on the TRES in close collaboration with a range of stakeholders, including Traveller and Roma representative organisations. This will set out Ireland’s strategic direction in relation to Traveller and Roma education policy to improve the experience of Traveller and Roma children and young people in school, including in relation to access to, and outcomes in, education.

## LGBTI+ Rights

Ireland has focused strongly on promoting LGBTI+ rights over the past three decades. Ireland become the first country in the world to agree by referendum that marriage equality should be enshrined in our Constitution, giving same-sex couples an equal right to marry in 2015. In 2018, Ireland became the first country to have an LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy aimed at creating a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people. The youth strategy was complemented by the publication of Ireland’s first National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy (2019-21), which provided a whole-of-Government framework for promoting the full equality of LGBTI+ people in Irish society.

The latter Strategy’s vision is that of a safe, fair and inclusive Ireland where people are supported to flourish and to live inclusive, healthy and fulfilling lives, whatever their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. It is working to create an Ireland where LGBTI+ people are visible and included, treated equally, healthy and feel safe and supported.

Both Strategies were developed with the active participation of civil society organisations. Ireland’s innovative youth participation model ensured that young people were centrally involved in the development of the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy. Equally, the consultation process for the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021 involved the voices of diverse LGBTI+ persons, from those in the international protection process to older persons living in rural areas. Drawing on the public consultation, four thematic pillars emerged providing a vision of an Ireland where LGBTI+ people are: Visible and Included; Treated Equally; Healthy; and Safe and Supported.

The first National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy was extended into 2023 and remains live as the successor strategy is being developed. The Steering Group for the strategy which is chaired by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and includes representation from civil society organisations, government departments and statutory bodies, continues to meet. Consultations are taking place to inform the successor strategy and an independent review of the Strategy is expected to be completed shortly. The plan is for the next LGBTI+ strategy, to be a whole of life strategy, building on the achievements of the inaugural LGBTI+ strategies and addressing the lessons arising from that experience.

Since 2020, €4,457,323 has been provided to LGBTI+ organisations to support 123 projects through the LGBTI+ Community Services Fund (CSF). This is in recognition of the need for greater access to LGBTI+ services across Ireland. Over the lifetime of the Strategy, the CSF has provided funding to organisations to help improve the quality of life for LGBTI+ people and to ensure they are supported in realising their rights. This provision of funding underscores the Government’s commitment to continuing to support the LGBTI+ community to enable them to participate fully in Ireland's social, economic, cultural, and political life.

## National Action Plan on Human Trafficking

The Third National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking 2023 – 2027 was launched in November 2023, building on the work of the two previous plans (2009, 2016). The overarching goal of this Action Plan is to strengthen further the whole-of government approach to combatting Human Trafficking in the State as a key element in building stronger, safer communities.

The plan is drafted with a victim-centred approach to identifying and supporting victims with actions under four pillars – prevention, protection, prosecution and policy coordination. While the majority of actions in the plan relate to both adult and child victims, there are also a number of child specific measures included under each of the pillars. The key objectives of the Plan include:

* working towards the abolishment of human trafficking and its demand;
* identifying and providing supports to victims of trafficking;
* enforcing the rights of the victim and bringing perpetrators to justice; and
* ensuring whole-of-government co-ordination in supporting victims and decreasing incidents of trafficking.

The actions in this plan fall under four preventative pillars:

* prevention of human trafficking by working towards stronger protections for vulnerable people and the elimination of the demand for the services of trafficked persons;
* identifying and providing supports to victims of trafficking;
* enforcing the rights of the victim and bringing perpetrators to justice;
* support evidence-based research on human trafficking.

Some key aspects of the plan include the development of a training framework for all who come into contact with potential victims of trafficking; awareness raising and information dissemination; and actions which seek to improve supports for victims.

The Government decided in 2021 to develop a new National Referral Mechanism (NRM) framework for the identification of victims of human trafficking. The development of new operational protocols for the NRM framework will be co-designed with State and civil society organisations active in this field. The National Action Plan will dovetail with the revised NRM framework to provide a more streamlined response, encompassing additional competent authorities and a further role for key NGO stakeholders. This will make it easier for victims of trafficking to come forward, be identified and access support; and will allow all agencies, both State and civil society, to co-operate, identify and share information about potential victims and facilitate their access to advice, accommodation and support.

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking) Bill 2023 was published on 5 July 2023 and will put the revised NRM on a legislative footing. The Bill passed all stages in the Oireachtas (parliament) in July 2024.

## National Disability Strategy

Ireland has continued the process of strengthening the rights of disabled persons. The National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 represented a whole-of-government approach to improving the lives and creating the best possible opportunities for people with disabilities to fulfil their potential. The strategy was the outcome of a broad and comprehensive consultation process and included 114 actions across the strategy themes: education; employment; health and well-being; person-centred disability services; housing; transport and accessible places; equality and choice and joined up services.

The strategy supported progress in delivering on the obligations in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The mid-term review published in 2020 recorded significant progress in a number of areas including:

* The 2018 ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
* The introduction of new ballot papers for referendum to facilitate private voting;
* The implementation of the Access and Inclusion model for children accessing early learning and care services;
* The enactment of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017;
* The publication of the Report of the Taskforce on Personalised Budgeting;
* Improvements in transport accessibility; and
* A reduction in the number of people with disabilities living in congregated settings.

Following the mid-term review, the opportunity was taken to refresh the strategy, with the addition of new actions and a structure around a number of key strands: raising awareness of the lived experience of people with disabilities; strengthening rights; expanding into new areas; implementing the UNCRPD and improving services via better implementation and collaboration.

A new National Disability Strategy is under development. In line with Article 4 (3) of the UNCRPD, the consultation process underway includes consultation with Disabled Persons Organisations and other stakeholders, to provide for a collaborative approach to the design of the new strategy due for publication in 2024.

## Action Plan for Disability Services

This Action Plan (2024-2026) provides for an ambitious programme of service expansion over the next three years in specialist community based disability services. These services provide supports to approximately 80,000 children and adults in the form of multidisciplinary therapy supports, respite and day services, personal assistance, home support, community neuro-rehabilitation and residential services. The Action Plan represents the first phase of implementing the recommendations of the Disability Capacity Review to 2032 which set out the scale of the challenge in terms of addressing unmet need in disability services. The plan outlines a range of actions designed to provide better access to disability services, to maximise the impact of service delivery through strategic change and to enable better planning and management through improved information and systems.

Key priorities for the 2024 to 2026 period include measures to increase capacity in children’s disability services, expand respite services, provide extra residential places, and provide extra home support and personal assistance services.

€2.9 billion in funding was allocated to specialist disability services in 2024, including €74 million to fund measures under the first year of the Action Plan. The planned improvements will require additional investment which would see current expenditure grow by 25% over 2023 levels over the three years of the plan.

The headline service improvements which are planned over the 2024-26 period include approximately 600 extra posts for Children’s Disability Network Teams 2024-2026 to address vacant posts, build capacity, deliver timely access to early intervention and multidisciplinary supports, and ensure continuity of services; an additional 222 posts in specialist adult therapy services; the development of a nationwide network of neuro-rehabilitation services including managed community rehabilitation networks as the community-based specialist tier; on average around 1,200 additional day service places each year to ensure places for school leavers who require them; 800,000 additional Personal Assistance hours, and 110,000 additional Home Support hours; the continued expansion of respite services, including alternative residential options; 500 new community-based residential care places to replace disability care in large institutional and campus-based settings; around 900 additional residential care places to tackle unmet need and ensure supply keeps pace with demographic change; increased support for people with disabilities to access supported independent living and the provision of supports to live at home, in order to phase out long-term care in a nursing home for younger people with disabilities.

Following the publication of the Capacity Review, the detailed Action Plan was developed in late 2021 and early 2022 by an interdepartmental working group with officials from the Department of Health, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Department of Social Protection, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Health Service Executive. The work was informed by an extensive public consultation, in which approximately 800 people participated.

Ireland has also significantly increased expenditure on supports to students with special education needs. Budget 2024 for instance, made the biggest-ever commitment, to students with special educational needs and their families. Measures have been designed to help support every pupil and student to thrive at school and realise the full extent of their potential. At over €2.7 billion of current expenditure, this level of investment in special education represents a significant increase on previous funding allocations.

## Gender Equality

Ireland is committed to promoting gender equality and the rights of women and girls and to addressing the barriers that can prevent the full enjoyment of such rights. In 2017, Ireland launched the National Strategy for Women and Girls as a whole-of-government approach to promoting equality for women and girls; and a successor strategy is under development, with extensive consultations planned.

The overall goal for the National Strategy for women and girls 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’. A report is currently being prepared on the outputs and outcomes of the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2021, and will be published in 2024 following consultation with stakeholders.

The strategy provided the framework for action to address gender equality in a range of areas, including the gender pay gap. Data from Eurostat indicate that the unadjusted gender pay gap in Ireland has reduced from 11.3% in 2018 to 9.3%[[1]](#footnote-1) in 2022. Ireland has strengthened its action on the gender pay gap with the introduction of the Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021. This act requires organisations to report on their gender pay gap, and the drivers behind it. The publication of this information is intended to incentivise employers to take action to reduce the gender pay gap and will provide evidence to inform Government policy on how best to address this gap. More information on this Act is provided in **Section Two Legislative Developments**.

Ireland has also made significant progress in relation to legislating for the provision of family related leave for employees to support working parents and encourage greater sharing of caring responsibilities between men and women. These achievements are described in **Section Two Legislative Developments.**

The strategy also provided the framework for action to promote greater gender balance in corporate decision-making. Since its establishment in 2018, Balance for Better Business, the Government-sponsored, business-led initiative to promote better gender balance on corporate boards and leadership teams, has driven significant progress in corporate leadership. The sixth report from Balance for Better Business in 2023 reflects significant change and progress over the five years, highlighting how 39% of board members of ISEQ20 listed companies were women in 2023, compared to 18% in 2018. Representation at leadership level for the same cohort of companies was 27%, up from 17% in 2019. By March 2024, 40% board members of ISEQ20 listed companies were women.

## Women’s Health

In relation to women’s health, Ireland has made considerable progress with improving women’s healthcare, including establishing a Women’s Health Taskforce in 2019 to improve women’s health outcomes and experiences of healthcare, and the publication of two Women’s Health Action Plans (Women’s Health Action Plan 2022 - 2023 and Women's Health Action Plan 2024 - 2025). One of the actions includes implementing and expanding a free contraception scheme (FCS). The FCS was originally open to women aged 17-25 but has been gradually expanded and, from July 20024, covers women aged 17-35 inclusive. In 2022, a period dignity scheme was initiated; free period products have been made available, through the HSE, local authorities, community health organisations, family resource centres and other community partners, to support people most at risk of period poverty.

Since the introduction of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act in 2018, reported in Ireland’s previous UPR report, an independent review of the operation of the Act has taken place. The review report contains a range of operational recommendations which are being progressed through a multi-disciplinary implementation group, and a draft implementation action plan has been developed. The Review’s recommendations on legislative change were referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health for consideration. See **Section Two, Legislative Developments** for detail on the safe access zones legislation.

## Accessible and Affordable Early Learning and Care

Early learning and childcare has undergone a transformative period in Ireland in the last ten years, which has improved access, affordability and quality. As a result, more children than ever are now accessing early learning and childcare. For example, in 2015/16 programme year, 73,964 children were funded through state schemes/programmes. In the 2022/23 programme year, 221,642 children were funded. Investment over the same period increased from €265m in 2015 to €1,109m (including capital) in 2024, a fourfold increase in investment or 318% over a 9-year period.

Together for Better, the new funding model launched in 2022, recognises early learning and childcare as a public good underpinned by more investment and involvement by the State and a closer working partnership with providers – with new responsibilities on both sides. This brings together existing and new schemes/programmes:

* The ECCE programme which offers up to two years of pre-school education to children, at no cost to parents. The programme enjoys uptakes rates in excess of 95 per cent and has removed barriers to accessing pre-school education, with data from a recent review of the programme showing that 70 per cent of low income families would not have been able to send their child to pre-school without this programme.
* The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) which offers a suite of supports to ensure children with a disability can access and participate in the ECCE programme. An extension of AIM beyond the ECCE programme is planned for September 2024.
* The National Childcare Scheme (NCS), introduced in late 2019 which provides a progressive series of subsidies for parents - both targeted and universal - with those on the lowest incomes receiving the highest levels of subsides.
* Core funding, introduced in 2022, which provides direct grants to services to support affordability, quality, and the sustainability of services.
* Equal Start, rolling out in September 2024, which aims to help children and their families who may be experiencing disadvantage to access early learning and childcare settings, through a range of supports, universal and targeted.

## Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence

Significant progress has also been achieved in relation to domestic, sexual and gender based violence. Zero Tolerance, the Third National Strategy cross government strategy on Domestic, Sexual, Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV) was launched in 2022. The €363 million strategy is built on the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention framework – Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and Policy Co-ordination. The implementation plan contains 144 detailed actions assigned to relevant lead departments and / or agencies, overseen and coordinated at central Government level.

The Strategy provided for the establishment of a statutory DSGBV agency under the aegis of the Department of Justice, which will drive this work and bring the expertise and focus needed. The new agency, ‘Cuan’ has been operational since 1 January 2024 and has responsibility for:

* Co-ordinating all Government actions set out within the Third National Strategy, and reporting on same to the Cabinet Committee on Social Affairs and Equality.
* Delivering excellent services to victims of DSGBV, which will include delivering on the number of safe and accessible short- and long-term accommodation needed, as well as ensuring that helpline and other supports are available to everyone requiring them.
* Ensuring a robust set of national service standards and governance arrangements are in place to ensure adherence to the appropriate standards for such supports.
* 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.
* Leading on consistent and ongoing research to inform DSGBV policy development, working with others, such as the CSO, who have research and data projects underway.
* Working with the Minister for Justice to ensure alignment in its work with overall Government DSGBV policy.

## Social Inclusion

The Irish Government is working to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive countries in the EU. The Roadmap for Social Inclusion (2020-2025) is a whole of Government strategy that builds on the work of its predecessors with the aim of reducing the number of people in consistent poverty in Ireland and increasing social inclusion for those who are most disadvantaged. Delivery of Roadmap goals, targets and commitments also contributes to Ireland’s implementation of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with commitments under the Roadmap aligned to relevant SDGs.

Since the launch of the Roadmap, 50 of the 81 commitments (revised up from 69 following a mid-term review in 2023) have been achieved, with work on the remaining commitments ongoing. In line with Ireland’s commitment to engagement with civil society, oversight of the implementation of the Roadmap is undertaken by a Steering Group, chaired by the Minister and comprising senior representatives of government departments and members from the Community and Voluntary Sector. The independent mid-term review of the strategy published in 2023 was informed by public consultations and input from the Social Inclusion Forum (a forum of people where people affected by poverty and social exclusion, and the community organisations that represent, are consulted on social inclusions policies and progress).

Linked to this the Government's employment services and activation framework, Pathways to Work (2021-2025), also aims to support those from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds to participate in the labour market. A formal mid-term review of the strategy was undertaken by the Labour Market Advisory Council in 2023, informed by public consultation, an analysis of labour market trends and engagement with relevant Government Departments and agencies, and submitted to the Minister for Social Protection. On foot of the Review, Department officials drafted an updated strategy of commitments and KPIs to be delivered to end 2025, reflecting the advice and recommendations of the Council, the Senior Officials Group on the Economy and Investment, and the relevant policy and operational areas across Government. Commitments include: providing supports tailored to the individual needs; reserving places on State Employment and Work Placement Experience Programmes for minority groups; making the higher rate of the JobsPlus recruitment subsidy available to employers who recruit a jobseeker of Traveller or Roma ethnicity or a person with a criminal conviction; provision of English language courses for migrants, upskilling opportunities which align with sectoral needs, and engagement by the Intreo Employment Service with the Traveller and Roma Customer Consultative Forum.

## National Policy for Children and Young People

Young Ireland, the whole of government national policy framework for children and young People (2023-2028), was launched in November 2023 and envisages an Ireland which fully respects and realises the rights of all children and young people, up to the age of 24. Young Ireland sets out the policy direction and key priorities for cross government action in respect of children and young people to the end of 2028. The framework was strongly informed by consultations with children and young people, by robust data and evidence on the lives of children in Ireland, and by inputs from the general public, civil society, service providers, practitioners, government departments and stage agencies.

Young Ireland sets out current issues impacting children and young people and seeks to create an environment which ensures that children and young people are a central part of everyone’s agenda. It includes a specific spotlight programme to focus on the most significant challenges for children and young people, with resources from across Government. These issues are presented in Young Ireland as Spotlights and the first three of which will be on

* child poverty
* mental health and wellbeing; and
* disability services.

Over the lifetime of Young Ireland, Government intends to improve the lives and outcomes of children and young people. In order to ensure that we can track progress in this area an updated Children and Young People’s Indicator Set has been developed.

Young Ireland also recognises that there are specific groups that face additional challenges and need additional support. Ireland is committed to addressing this disadvantage through a range of strategies including supporting parents, expanding early childhood care and education, inclusion in education, youth services, and addressing disadvantage in further and higher education.

Making sure that children’s rights are a central concern for everyone making decisions affecting children and young people is also a key concern of Young Ireland. That is why another major element of this framework is building an enabling environment, to make it easier to take children’s rights into consideration. This enabling environment includes the development of Child Rights Impact Assessments and a review of legislation for compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Strong governance structures for the Policy Framework will provide a forum for stakeholder engagement, drive implementation of existing policy commitments and ensure accountability in the development of further policies impacting children and young people. These structures include a Cabinet Committee on Children and Education, supported by the cross Departmental Senior Officials Group; a Children and Young People’s Policy Forum; a Young Ireland Advisory Council; and an implementation team located in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

## Children and Young Peoples’ Voices

The Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-Making: Action Plan 2024–2028 was published in April 2024. This is the second national plan to support children and young people to participate in decision-making. It builds on the ambition and achievements of the first National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making, 2015 – 2020, which set out and delivered on the government’s commitment to realise the right of children and young people to be heard when decisions that affect their lives are being made.

Much progress has been made towards realising the rights of children and young people to have a voice in decisions which have an impact on their lives. Ireland has developed a strong platform from which to develop and expand good practice in child and youth participation. However, more work remains to be done in order to ensure that the voices of children and young people are fully heard on the range of decisions affecting them. The overall aim of the Action Plan is to promote the inclusion of children and young people in decision-making at all levels: in the home, in school, in their community and at national level. This Action Plan provides a framework to support all Government Departments and State agencies to have meaningful engagements with children and young people when developing relevant policy, legislation, research and services. Areas addressed in this Action Plan include:

* gathering data on the scale, types of engagement and cohorts of children and young people involved in participative events;
* closing the feedback loop when a consultation is held with children and young people – as outlined in the National Framework for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making (DCEDIY, 2021) children and young people should be told where and how their input was used and what, if any, impact it had on the final decisions made;
* broadening the reach of government-funded participation structures to include the voices of children and young people who are not typically heard or empowered to participate;
* maximising the opportunities presented by technology for including children and young people safely in decision-making through online fora;
* supporting parents to include the voices of their children and young people in decision-making in the home;
* contributing to and supporting the international momentum for hearing and acting on the voices of children and young people;
* building capacity across all sectors and among all practitioners working with and for children and young people effectively and safely to consult them on issues relevant to their lives; and
* elevating training in participation to the status of formal training and continuing professional development for all professionals working with and for children and young people.

Implementation of the actions in the Participation Action Plan has begun and the publication of annual update reports on progress will commence in 2025.

# Section Two

# Significant Legislative Developments

Ireland has introduced legislation over the past decade to strengthen human rights and equality and to address legacy issues which have constituted barriers to equality for specific groups. This section of the mid-term report highlights a range of legislation which aims to support work life balance, address gender equality and inequality, provide entitlements to birth information, establish a mother and baby institutions payment scheme, support adults with capacity issues in line with UNCRPD, strengthen anti-discrimination laws, secure employment rights, create safe zones around services for the termination of pregnancy and further criminalise hate crime and hate speech.

## Family Leave

Over the last decade, Ireland has put a greater emphasis on the expansion of family leaves to support working families and encourage sharing of caring responsibilities between men and women.

Two weeks paid Paternity Leave was introduced in 2016 to enable the father or other parent of a child to take time off from work in the earliest weeks of their child’s life.

The enactment of the Parent's Leave and Benefit Act in 2019 introduced a form of paid parental leave for the parents of a young child. Initially a two-week entitlement, parents can now avail of 7 weeks paid Parent’s Leave to be taken within the first two years of their child’s life, or in the case of adoption, within 2 years of the placement of the child with the family. This will be increased to 9 weeks from August 2024.

This entitlement under the 2019 Act is for each parent in their own right and it is not an allocation per family. In other words, the leave is non-transferable between parents and each parent is entitled to take the full period of leave. This ensures that both parents are supported to take leave to spend time with their child.

Parental Leave (unpaid) was also extended through the Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2019, and parents can now avail of 26 weeks’ unpaid parental leave for each eligible child, to be used before the child’s 12th birthday.

## Domestic Violence Leave

In a ground breaking move, a new entitlement to domestic violence leave for employees who are victims of domestic violence was provided for in the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 and commenced on 27 November 2023.

This provides for up to five days’ domestic violence leave in any 12-month period, during which victims receive their full pay. Women’s Aid, the main NGO supporting women who experience domestic and gender-based violence, were commissioned by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to develop supports for employers to develop their own domestic violence workplace policies, and these are now available at a dedicated website.

## Breastfeeding Breaks and Remote Working

Under the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 Act, Ireland also extended breastfeeding breaks for employees to two years after the birth of the child, and introduced leave for medical care purposes so that parents and carers can access short-term, flexible, leave when they need it.

The final provisions of the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act were commenced in March 2024, bringing into effect the right for workers to request flexible leave for parents and carers, and the right to request remote working for all workers.

## Gender Pay Gap Information

The Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021 requires organisations to report on their gender pay gap across a range of metrics, and to recognise and reflect on their gender pay gap, the drivers behind it and how to address them.

Since 2022, organisations with more than 250 employees have been required under the Act to report on their gender pay gap. This statutory obligation extends this year to organisations with more than 150 employees. Relevant employers are required to publish their report and statement in a manner easily accessible to the public, such as on their website. A centralised reporting database where the information will be collated and amenable to analysis is currently being developed by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, and will contribute to enhancing our understanding of these data and inform effective responses.

## Birth Information and Tracing

The landmark Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022 resolves decades of legal obstacles in order to provide a full and clear right of access to birth certificates and birth and early life information for all persons who were adopted, boarded out, nursed out, the subject of an illegal birth registration or who resided in a mother and baby or county home institution as a child. It also allows for access to information by a child of a relevant person where their parent has died, and for access by the next of kin of children who died in an institution, as well as legislating for a statutory tracing service and a new Contact Preference Register.

This legislation provides a clear right of access for adopted persons to the entirety of their identity information, including information which is also the personal data of another person, and certain defined categories of third party information. Since the enactment of the Act in October 2022, over 10,000 releases of full, unredacted information have been made possible.

The Act further provides for the safeguarding of identity information by legislating for the obligations of both public bodies and private individuals to retain and maintain records pertaining to the birth and early life of relevant persons, and to inform the Adoption Authority of Ireland of the records’ existence.

Also in 2022, legislation was enacted to support the excavation, exhumation and where possible identification of the remains of the infants at the site of the former institution in Tuam, Co. Galway, so they can be reburied with dignity. The hope is that this process can bring some solace and closure to the families and survivors who have been so deeply affected.

## Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme

In 2023, the legislation required to establish a Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme, which will provide financial payments and health supports to eligible persons, was enacted. Following intensive preparations, the Payment Scheme opened early in 2024. Government has also approved a master plan for a National Centre for Research and Remembrance - a national memorial and site of conscience to honour the lived experiences and dignity of all those who have endured institutional trauma.

Continued dialogue with survivors will take place with a view to healing relationships and rebuilding trust with those who still suffer the awful weight of their experiences. The State is aware of the urgency of this work and it is an absolute priority for the Government.

## Assisted Decision-Making

In 2023, Ireland commenced the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) legislation which represents a major milestone for persons lacking capacity in the State, by returning control to them of their right to take decisions affecting their everyday lives. The legislation abolished ‘wardship’ in the State, and introduced a new tiered decision-making supports for those who need them. A new agency, the Decision Support Service, has been established to support persons with capacity difficulties to exercise their rights to take their own decisions and to ensure that service providers respect those rights.

Commencement of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 completes a major reform for closer UNCRPD compliance.

## Discrimination and Equality

Since 1998, rights have been enshrined in legislation in Ireland providing protections against discrimination. The Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts prohibit discrimination across nine equality grounds: gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, and membership of the Traveller community, with the addition of a tenth equality ground, housing assistance, in the Equal Status Act.

The legislation prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination in the areas of employment and access to goods and services, including housing, healthcare and education.

In June 2021, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth commenced a review of the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 and the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 (Equality Acts). The Review aimed to examine the possibility of introducing new grounds; to examine how the Acts function; and to assess if there were any barriers preventing people from pursuing redress.

A public consultation to inform the review was opened in July 2021 and remained open for submissions until December 2021. Submissions were invited on a range of issues including, the functioning of the Acts and their effectiveness in combatting discrimination and promoting equality; awareness of the legislation; and whether there were obstacles to taking an action under the Acts. Submissions were also invited on the scope of the existing nine equality grounds, and whether new grounds should be added.

Work is now progressing on legislative proposals to reform the equality legislation. The Programme for Government made a commitment to consider adding an additional protected ground of ‘disadvantaged socio-economic status’. This proposal is being considered as part of the process of developing legislative proposals. The next step will be to finalise the proposals and bring them to Government for consideration as soon as possible.

## Employment Rights

The Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018 came into effect in 2019 and introduced a number of measures to strengthen employee rights and address issues caused by the increased casualisation of work, including prohibiting zero-hour contracts in most circumstances.

The Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018 also introduced a new right for employees whose contract of employment does not reflect the reality of the hours they habitually work. Such employees are entitled to request to be placed in a band of hours that better reflects the hours they have worked over a 12-month reference period. Where the request is disputed or refused, the employee can refer a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission. The act also requires the provision of more precise information on hours of work and other core terms of employment to employees at an earlier stage in the employment relationship.

In 2022 the Government announced the transposition of EU Directive 2019/1152 on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions. This added to Ireland’s suite of employment protections and complemented new workers’ rights introduced over the previous period.

## Sick Leave from Work

The Sick Leave Act 2022, commenced on 1 January 2023, introduced a new statutory entitlement to sick leave. The entitlement was initially set at 3 days per year in 2023, planning to rise incrementally to 10 days by 2026. From 1 January 2024, the statutory sick leave entitlement was increased to 5 days’ statutory sick leave for the calendar year 2024.

Paid sick leave ensures that all employees are entitled to a minimum level of financial compensation if they are unable to work due to illness or injury. Sick leave is paid at 70% of gross earning, up to a cap of €110. It is primarily intended to provide sick pay coverage to those employees, often in low-paid and precarious roles, who do not have access to a company sick leave scheme. The scheme offers a floor level of protection and does not interfere with existing, more favourable, company sick pay schemes.

## Safe Access Zones

In 2022 the Government agreed to legislate for the designation of safe access zones around healthcare premises to safeguard access to termination of pregnancy services and published the General Scheme of the Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services (Safe Access Zones). The Bill will create Safe Access Zones of 100 meters from an entrance or exit to a premises where obstetricians/gynaecologists and general practitioners provide services. The Zones will also apply to hospitals that provide inpatient services within the meaning of Section 51 of the Health Act 1970. Within those zones, certain conduct aimed at impeding access or influencing decisions in relation to termination of pregnancy services will be prohibited. By May 2024 the Bill had completed all stages in the Dáil and the Seanad, and was signed into law on May 7th.

## Hate Crime and Hate Speech

The Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill is currently before the Oireachtas and is expected to be enacted in 2024. This sets out to protect those who are most vulnerable to hate crime and hate speech. This new legislation is intended to criminalise intentional or reckless communication or behaviour that is likely to incite violence or hatred against a person or persons because they are associated with a protected characteristic.

The provisions of the new legislation will also capture hate speech in an online context. There has also been significant engagement between officials in the Department of Justice and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to ensure that the provisions dovetail with the regulatory framework for online safety proposed by the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill. That Bill will link closely with these provisions on incitement to hatred, particularly in a social media environment, and the role that companies will play in managing hate speech on their platforms.

# Conclusion

Ireland has worked actively since its last UPR review to strengthen and promote human rights. Its record has been characterised by cross government collaboration, robust data and analysis, partnership with civil society and a focus on hearing the voices of children and young people, and those with lived experience of inequalities and disadvantage. As outlined in this mid-term report, Ireland has learned from the lessons of the past, is building on the achievements of a suite of whole of Government policies designed to drive and enhance cross governmental action, in collaboration with civil society and other stakeholders, and is embedding human rights within its legislative framework.



1. The Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO) figure for the gender pay gap (GPG) in 2022 is 9.6%. Some variances between the GPG figures sent to Eurostat and those published by the CSO are mainly due to the exclusion of some firm sizes and economic sectors in the Eurostat figures. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)