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EUROPEAN SOCIAL CHARTER

Responses to IHREC's submission on the
21st National Report on the implementation of the European Social Charter

submitted by

THE GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND
Articles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 20

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CYCLE 2026

Ireland's Response to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's Parallel report on the implementation of the revised European Social Charter.

7th August 2026

This is Ireland's response to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's (IHREC) parallel report on the implementation of the revised European Social Charter. The IHREC submission responds to Ireland's National Report (2025) on Articles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 20 of the Revised European Social Charter.

Introduction

IHREC has submitted commentary in its' report focussing on the State's full employment narrative (page 10), the potential risks associated with the green and digital transitions (page 11) and ensuring competitiveness does not erode workers rights' (page 12).

While true that employment levels alone are not a sufficient measure of labour market outcomes or compliance with labour rights contained with the Social Charter, it is important to acknowledge that Government policy does not focus solely on employment numbers and consistently emphasised the importance of quality and sustainable employment. This is reflected in recent measures including statutory sick pay, expanded gender pay gap reporting, the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, the Right to Disconnect Code of Practice, and the National Healthy Workplace Framework, which are all referenced in Irelands' National Report.

Ireland has reached historically high employment levels, with approximately 2.8 million people in work and unemployment around 5% and female labour force participation at near record levels (60.7% in Q1 2026, up from 56.4% pre-Covid in Q4 2019). These outcomes have been supported by targeted activation, skills and inclusion measures aimed at improving participation among groups that have traditionally faced barriers to employment. This approach is underpinned by the Governments Pathways to Work and Roadmap for Social Inclusion Strategies.

In response to IHREC's comments on the green and digital transitions, the Government recognises both the opportunities and challenges associated with the transitions. As acknowledged by IHREC, these transitions have the potential to support the creation of high-quality employment and productivity gains. Ireland's response has been to focus on skills development, lifelong learning, workforce adaptability and social dialogue, while progressing implementation of relevant EU legislation, including the Platform Work Directive.

Skills initiatives delivered through SOLAS, the National Training Fund and wider workforce development measures are intended to ensure that workers can benefit from emerging opportunities while maintaining strong workplace protections and supporting a just transition.

IHREC’s commentary on competitiveness largely reflects a broader policy concern rather than an assessment on the implementation of the European Social Charter. Competitiveness, quality employment and strong labour standards are mutually reinforcing objectives. Ireland's approach has been to combine economic competitiveness with strong worker protections, recognising that a competitive economy helps to support high employment, quality jobs, rising wages and strong labour standards.

Article 2: Right to Just Conditions of Work

Recommendation
IHREC recommends that the State clarify what legislative and administrative processes are in place to prevent dangerous levels of overwork among employees exempt from the OTWA/Working Time Directive, including Gardaí, Defence Force personnel, civil protection workers, and family employees and workers deemed to control their own hours.

Response
Civil protection workers, family employees and workers deemed to control their own hours are not exempt from the Act in its entirety, and provisions such as annual leave continue to apply.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 provides provisions to secure the safety, health and welfare of persons at work. Section 8(2)(b) of the 2005 Act provides that the employer's duties extend to '*managing and conducting work activities in such a way as to prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, any improper conduct or behaviour likely to put the safety, health and welfare at work of his or her employees at risk*'.

Section 19 of the Act also requires that employers identify the hazards in the place of work under his or her control, assess the risks presented by those hazards.
The Health and Safety Authority provides guidance of managing the risk of work-related fatigue, stating that the employer has a duty to identify the hazards in their workplace; assess the risks to employees and put in place appropriate control measures to protect employees.

Defence Forces
In relation to IHREC's comment under Article 2.1 regarding the defence forces, following the removal of the blanket exemption from the Organisation of Working Time Act (OWTA) for the Defence Forces, due to their specific nature a number of military activities continue to be exempted from the provisions of the Working Time Directive. However, a range of additional health and safety protections, for those

involved in such tasks, have been agreed, including prescribed compensatory rest periods, which are incorporated into Defence Force Regulation.

One such additional measure includes the provision of one return commercial home-reunion flight to Ireland in respect of an operational tour of duty of six months, where the security assessment by the military authorities determines that the individual cannot avail of leave in-theatre.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends that the State provide updated information on civil protection workers, including whether there is intention to bring this category of worker under the remit of the OWTA/Working Time Directive.

Response

Civil protection workers are under the remit of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997. Section 3(3)(b) of the Act enables the Minister, by regulation, to exempt persons employed in specified classes of activity, including civil protection services, from the application of specified provisions of the Act where the application of those provisions would adversely affect the efficient operation of the service.

S.I. No. 52/1998 - Organisation of Working Time (Exemption of Civil Protection Services) Regulations, 1998 – exempts specified persons employed within specified activities of the civil protection services from the application of certain provisions of the Act. S.I. No. 52/1998 does not exempt civil protection workers from the Act in its entirety, and provisions such as annual leave continue to apply.

The Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment keeps the Act under ongoing review to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends that the State take steps to raise awareness of labour rights, including right to reasonable working hours and rest periods, among migrant workers who are at higher risk of labour exploitation.

Response

Ireland's Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) delivers a comprehensive programme of information, education and outreach services to employees, employers and stakeholder groups. These services provide guidance and support on a wide range of areas, including employer obligations and employee rights under employment legislation, employment equality and equal status legislation, the obligations of service providers, industrial relations matters, and employment permit requirements. Through these activities, the WRC seeks to promote awareness, understanding and compliance with workplace rights and obligations across all sectors. Information, education and outreach is provided through a number of channels including:

- A telephone "Infoline" operated by experienced Information Officers (64,648 calls dealt with in 2025),
- The WRC website (www.workplacerelations.ie)
- An Online Enquiry Form on the WRC website,
- Tailored outreach and education presentations to stakeholders (73 events delivered in 2025)

The WRC has identified, as a key strategic objective in both its Statement of Strategy 2025–2027 and Work Programme 2026, the delivery of information, outreach and education initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of WRC services among the public, employers, employees, stakeholder groups, specific sectors, and vulnerable cohorts, including migrant workers.

In support of this objective, the WRC will deliver a number of targeted initiatives during 2026. These include a webinar in partnership with the Brazil Ireland Association (BRIA) and an information and outreach event, delivered in collaboration with the European Labour Authority (ELA), to provide members of the Brazilian, Romanian and Moldovan migrant communities in Ireland with information on their rights and obligations under Irish employment law. These initiatives are intended to enhance awareness, promote compliance, and improve access to employment rights information among migrant workers.

Such initiatives form part of the WRC's broader commitment to engage with vulnerable workers and groups that may face barriers to accessing information on workplace rights and protections. The WRC seeks to work collaboratively with all vulnerable worker cohorts, including migrant communities of all nationalities, to promote awareness of employment rights and responsibilities, encourage compliance with employment legislation, and improve access to information and services that support fair and lawful employment practices in Ireland.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends that the State clarify the working time protections applicable to seafarers, including whether the legislative framework continues to permit working hours up to 72 hours per week, and what steps are being taken to address risks of exploitation on Irish and foreign-flagged vessels operating in Irish waters.

Response

The working time protections applicable to seafarers are set out in the European Communities (Merchant Shipping) (Organisation of Working Time) Regulations 2003 (S.I. No. 532 of 2003), as amended by the European Communities (Merchant Shipping) (Organisation of Working Time) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No. 245 of 2014) and the European Union (Merchant Shipping) (Organisation of Working Time) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 (S.I. No. 59 of 2023).

These legislative provisions ensure that working hours may not exceed 14 hours in any 24 hour period or 72 hours in any seven-day period, subject to minimum rest requirements. Limited exceptions apply where additional work is required to ensure the immediate safety of a ship, persons on board or cargo, or to assist another ship or persons in distress at sea. Compliance of these working hours limits are monitored through inspections from surveyors and inspectors.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends that the State take proactive measures to prevent bogus self-employment and misclassification of being in control of own working hours, where such practices are used to avoid obligations under the OWTA and Working Time Directive, as well as other employer obligations.

Response

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) continues to work closely with the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social Protection to identify and help prevent bogus self-employment. Through inspections, adjudication, enforcement and public guidance, the WRC can identify cases where individuals have been wrongly classified as self-employed in order to avoid employment law obligations.

Its risk-based inspection model also enables activity to be directed towards sectors or arrangements where misclassification may present a risk, while individual workers may bring complaints to the WRC where employment status is disputed.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends that the Workplace Relations Commission adopt a permanent practice of conducting targeted inspections of sectors at high-risk of human trafficking, as these are high-risk for breaches of working time legislation and other forms of labour exploitation, and could operate to screen for and detect possible cases of human trafficking.

Response

The WRC notes the recommendation made by IHREC and will endeavour to expand its inspection activity in sectors deemed high-risk for human trafficking. While the WRC has no statutory function or responsibilities in relation to human trafficking the WRC provides regular training to inspection staff on the identification of potential victims of human trafficking and the indicators of labour exploitation. It also continues to work with stakeholders including An Garda Síochána's Human Trafficking Investigation and Co-ordination Unit (HTICU) for training and joint inspections as part of targeted campaigns or risk identified joint inspections.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends that the State establish strengthened and clearly communicated ‘fire-walls’ between labour inspections conducted by the Workplace Relations Commission and immigration enforcement, to encourage complaints from victims and facilitate early detection of cases of exploitation, forced labour and human trafficking.

Response

The WRC remains satisfied that there are sufficient firewalls in place in terms of any joint inspection activity that it carries out in conjunction with the State’s immigration enforcement authorities (namely, the Garda National Immigration Bureau).

The WRC implements a policy of not initiating prosecutions against an employee when they are detected working without a valid employment permit. In such circumstances, any prosecution proceedings are initiated against the employer.

Article 3: Right to Safe and Healthy Working Conditions

Recommendation
IHREC recommends that the State publish the results of public consultation on the EU Directive on Platform Work without delay.

Response
Ireland notes IHREC's recommendation. The results of the public consultation are currently with the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment for consideration and will be published and publicly accessible on the Department's website in due course.

Recommendation
IHREC recommends that the State ensure that draft legislation transposing the EU Directive on Platform Work provides robust protections for platform workers' health and safety and that this draft legislation is published with sufficient time to allow for proper pre-legislative scrutiny.

Response
Ireland notes IHREC's recommendation and reiterates that these obligations will be transposed and enforced through the existing occupational safety and health framework, principally the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and the statutory role of the Health and Safety Authority.

IHREC comment under Article 3.1
There is no detail in the State response on how inspection and enforcement bodies are currently addressing risks arising within the platform work sector, nor any future plans for inspection and enforcement under the EU Directive. We also remain concerned that lobbying efforts at the EU level aimed at diluting some aspects of the Directive could see planned legislation weakened before transposition.

Response

While the Platform Work Directive does not prescribe a specific inspection regime, it contains a number of provisions that directly facilitate regulatory oversight and enforcement. Government remains committed to fully and faithfully transposing the Directive and its protections therein.

- **Article 6** requires Member States to put supporting measures in place to ensure the effective implementation and enforcement of the legal presumption of employment.
- **Article 9** requires digital labour platforms to inform national competent authorities, upon request, of the use of such systems and to provide them, at any time on request, with comprehensive and detailed information on those systems, thereby facilitating regulatory oversight and enforcement.
- **Article 10** requires platforms to ensure human oversight and periodic evaluation of those systems, and provides that the resulting evaluations be made available to competent national authorities on request, thereby facilitating regulatory oversight and enforcement.
- **Articles 16 and 17** ensure that competent authorities have access to reliable and up-to-date information on the scale, organisation and characteristics of platform work performed within the territory of the Member State, so as to support effective monitoring, inspection and enforcement of the Directive.
- **Article 21** ensures that competent administrative and judicial bodies can order platforms to disclose relevant evidence within their control during proceedings under the Directive, so that authorities have access to the evidence needed to support enforcement.

  Article 24 provides for the supervision of enforcement, assigning responsibility for the data-protection provisions (Articles 7 to 11) to data-protection authorities and the remaining provisions to labour-competent authorities, which are required to cooperate with one another.

Taken together, these provisions provide a clear statutory basis for inspection and enforcement, and Government will give effect to them through transposing legislation.

Finally, in relation to the concern regarding lobbying at EU level, the Directive is now adopted EU law, in force since 1 December 2024, with a binding transposition deadline of 2 December 2026. The core protections of the Directive are settled and are not subject to renegotiation. The transposition process concerns how those obligations are given effect in national law, not whether they apply, and Government is committed to transposing them faithfully.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends that the State consider adopting specific health and safety measures to address growing climate-related workplace risks, including during periods of extreme weather, particularly for essential workers and those that cannot work from home.

Response

Vulnerable Workers

The Health and Safety Authority provides information to duty holders, employees and stakeholders on managing health and safety. Health and safety legislation requires the employer to assess the risks to safety and health at work for all workers, to avoid workplace accident, injury, and ill health. Risk assessment is the first step in the prevention of occupational accidents and ill health. A risk assessment looks at what can cause harm to people. It identifies if control measures are adequate, or if additional measures are required, to reduce injury and ill health.

Employers are required to develop a safety statement detailing how the safety, health and welfare of employees is protected. The safety statement includes all risk assessments and should be produced in consultation with employees and their representatives.

- Employees, whether they are Irish nationals or migrant workers, have equal rights under Irish health and safety law.
- Temporary or causal workers, whether they are Irish nationals or migrants, have equal rights under Irish health and safety law as fulltime permanent employees.

- Employers have specific obligation to 'Sensitive Risk Groups' as defined in the Safety, Health, and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007.
- Employers have specific obligation for persons with disabilities as defined in the Safety, Health, and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007.
- Workers have a legal right to be represented by Safety Representatives / Trade Unions on Health and Safety issues in the workplace and these representations must be acted upon.

Further information may be found at https://www.hsa.ie/topics/vulnerable_workers/

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is actively engaged in the national transposition of the Platform Work Directive on occupational health and safety matters through its participation in the interdepartmental group led by the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (DETE).

Occupational Health and Safety & Climate Change

The Health and Safety Authority's role is to secure the safety, health and welfare of workers through the enforcement of health and safety legislation, the provision of guidance and information, and the promotion of preventive approaches to workplace risk. Extreme weather and temperature related hazards are addressed within the existing occupational safety and health legislative framework.

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, employers are required to identify hazards, assess risks and put appropriate control measures in place to protect workers. Extremes of temperature, storms, flooding, and related impacts on work activities are recognised occupational hazards and must be assessed and managed accordingly, taking account of working methods, physical demands and the characteristics of the workplace. In addition, employers are required to prepare and regularly review plans and procedures for emergencies and situations of serious and imminent danger, which includes severe and extreme weather events.

More detailed requirements are set out in the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations and sector specific regulations, including for construction, mines and quarries. These place explicit duties on employers to ensure appropriate workplace temperatures, protection for outdoor workers against adverse weather, access to shelter and rest facilities, and measures to mitigate excessive heat or cold. While no maximum workplace temperature is prescribed in legislation, employers must assess risks and take all reasonably practicable steps to prevent harm.

The Authority supports duty holders in meeting these obligations through guidance, tools and targeted communications. This includes guidance on risk assessment, thermal comfort, indoor air quality, driving for work, outdoor work, sun exposure, winter readiness and severe weather management. The Authority also issues safety alerts and reminders to workplaces during extreme weather events and participates in national emergency coordination arrangements to ensure consistent safety messaging during such events.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends that the State provide data, disaggregated by demographic characteristics and employment sectors, on the use to date of the Code of Conduct on the Right to Disconnect, including complaints, inspections, decisions, and remedies by the WRC.

Response

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) has developed a number of Codes of Practice under the relevant provisions of the Industrial Relations Act 1990 and the Workplace Relations Act 2015, including the Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect. These Codes of Practice are developed through a consultative process and provide practical guidance to employers and employees on compliance with employment rights and obligations. While Codes of Practice do not have the force of law, they may be taken into account in proceedings before the Labour Court, WRC Adjudication Officers and other relevant adjudicative bodies.

The WRC does not currently compile or publish data specifically on the use of the Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect, including data on complaints, inspections, decisions or remedies linked to the Code. As a consequence, the disaggregated information referred to in this recommendation is not currently available.

The WRC notes the recommendation made by IHREC and will consider, within the context of its statutory functions, reporting frameworks and available resources, whether and to what extent the collection and reporting of such data may be developed in the future.

Recommendation IHREC recommends that the State place the right to disconnect on a legislative footing, with enhanced monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.

Response

Ireland introduced a Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect in April 2021. The Code has been placed on statute (S.I. No. 159/2021) and is admissible in evidence in workplace dispute proceedings before the labour authority and the Courts.

Recommendation IHREC recommends that the State address gaps in protection arising from platform work, bogus self-employment, and other non-traditional working arrangements, to ensure that all workers have an enforceable and effective access to health and safety protections, regardless of employment status.

Response

Ireland notes IHREC's recommendation and reiterates that these obligations will be transposed and enforced through the existing occupational safety and health framework, principally the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and the statutory role of the Health and Safety Authority.

In this regard, it notes that the general framework of occupational safety and health duties under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 is not confined to the employer–employee relationship.

Recommendation
IHREC recommends that the State review the employment permit system to empower migrant workers to report unsafe or exploitative working conditions and leave exploitative employers without risking their immigration status.

Response
As a new provision introduced under the Employment Permits Act of 2024, employment permit holders may now move their permit to a new employer after a period of nine months has passed since commencing their first employment permit in the State.

This change of employer provision eliminates the need for the permit holder to apply for a new permit. General employment permit holders may change to the same occupation with a new employer, and critical skills employment permit holders may change within the broader category of employment. This measure is intended to provide greater flexibility to permit holders to move more freely between employers. Where the change in employer is for a different role a new employment permit is required. In this circumstance, the minimum requirement of nine months with the original employer remains. However, in both cases, the Act provides discretion prior to the nine-month period in cases evidencing a change of circumstances or instances of exploitation.

The 2024 Act further supports the employment opportunities of permit holders by facilitating internal promotion or transfer within their current employment as long as the skills, qualifications or experience required for the proposed new role are the same, or substantially the same. Allowing workers to change employers can lead to a more dynamic and competitive labour market, benefiting the economy as a whole. It encourages employers to maintain high standards and good working conditions to retain their staff, which can lead to increased productivity and job satisfaction. The provisions relating to change of employer are currently being reviewed by the

Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment to ensure they provide a suitably accessible mechanism in line with employment permit holder and labour market needs.

The Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment is currently developing sector specific Action Plans, a new workstream to promote and uplift labour conditions where sectors have significant General Employment Permit dependence or have high concentrations of particularly vulnerable migrant workers. This workstream will include greater provision of information and targeted interventions to facilitate migrant workers reporting unsafe or exploitative working conditions, with further details of the specific actions being made available in the coming months.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends that the Workplace Relations Commission develop targeted inspection and enforcement strategies for sectors at high-risk of labour exploitation or in which structurally vulnerable workers are overrepresented.

Response

The WRC Inspectorate continues to play a significant role in protecting vulnerable workers and addressing potential exploitation risks with an increase in emphasis on employment permit compliance which by extension involves sectors deemed high risk for labour exploitation of migrant workers. Each of over 5000 WRC labour inspections annually feature controls on employment permits.

Since 2024 rapid inspections have been deployed that specifically target sectors that are historically susceptible to employment permit and migration issues. Additionally, National Minimum Wage campaigns in ’24, ’25 and ’26 were conducted alongside European Labour Authority and National Week of Action campaigns with other stakeholders that focus on sectors that can be vulnerable to low pay and poor working conditions.

Recommendation
the State publish the Code of Practise on Reasonable Accommodation in the workplace, to ensure the health and safety of disabled people in the workplace.

Response

The Department of Children, Disability and Equality has advised that following engagements between officials, the Director of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission submitted an updated version of the draft Code of Practice on the Nature and Extent of an Employer's Obligations to Provide Reasonable Accommodation to Employees with Disabilities (the "Code") under section 31 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 (the 2014 Act).

The Department has recommended the updated version of the Code to the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality for approval. The Code is expected to be finalised and published in due course following the Minister's consideration of the matter.

IHREC comments under Article 3.3
The State's response also does not sufficiently address the supervision of health and safety risks in digital platform work. While the State recognises gig and platform workers as vulnerable workers, it does not provide information on targeted inspections, enforcement activity, or measures to address risks arising from algorithmic management, automated monitoring, work intensification, psychosocial pressure, or unclear employment status. IHREC considers that the State should provide more detailed information on how health and safety supervision is being adapted to contemporary labour market realities, including platform work

Response

Ireland wishes to affirm its commitment to the effective supervision of health and safety risks in digital platform work, which will constitute an essential aspect of the relevant transposing provisions.

Article 12 of the Platform Work Directive requires that digital labour platforms assess and manage the occupational safety and health risks arising from the use of automated monitoring systems, automated decision-making systems and comparable automated systems used in platform work, and that such systems are not used in a manner that places undue pressure on workers or otherwise puts their physical or mental health at risk. The Article also requires preventive measures, including effective reporting channels, particularly in relation to violence and harassment.

These obligations will be transposed and enforced through the existing occupational safety and health framework, principally the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and the statutory role of the Health and Safety Authority.

Article 4: Right to Fair Remuneration

Recommendations
the State clarify the timeline for publication and enactment of legislation that will fully transpose the EU Pay Transparency Directive; the State ensure that all legislation transposing the EU Pay Transparency Directive is published with sufficient time to ensure proper pre-legislative scrutiny by all stakeholders, and that it includes effective sanctions, remedies, and enforcement mechanisms

Response

Pay Transparency

The 7th June date for transposition of the Pay Transparency Directive will not be achieved however remaining work to achieve full transposition is a priority.

The European Commission has been advised accordingly. It is envisaged that this legislation will advance through Ireland's Houses of the Oireachtas (national parliament) later this year. It is envisaged that the Bill will be referred for full pre-legislative scrutiny by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Equality to ensure open debate and consideration has been given to all elements of the Directive.

With this in mind, it is difficult to provide a definite timeline on the implementation of the necessary legislation as this will depend on engagement with members of the Oireachtas with the pre-legislative scrutiny, drafting of the Bill itself, and the legislative progress through the Houses.

Recommendation
the State provide adequate resources to IHREC to fulfil its statutory functions under the Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021

Response

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is funded through its own vote - Vote 25 of the Oireachtas (Parliament) - and the Director of IHREC is the Accounting Officer for its Vote.

To enable IHREC to carry out its functions effectively, its funding has increased annually since its establishment. It received €9.7 million in 2025 and has been allocated €10.5 million in 2026, and staffing levels have increased from 62 in December 2020 to 87 in December 2025.

Article 5: Right to Organise

Recommendation
IHREC recommends the State clarify what percentage of workers should be covered by a collective agreement by the end of the Action Plan to Promote Collective Bargaining in 2030.

Response

The Adequate Minimum Wages Directive does not require Member States to achieve a binding national target in terms of collective bargaining coverage. Instead, it requests Member States with a coverage rate below 80% to provide for a framework of enabling conditions for collective bargaining, either by law after consulting the social partners or by agreement with them.

The European Commission's expert-group interpretation of the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive points out that the 80% threshold is an indicator triggering the obligations set in Article 4(2), and not a mandatory target to be reached. In other words, the Directive imposes an "obligation of effort, not of result."

The State acknowledges that awareness-raising and capacity-building measures alone may not address all structural barriers to collective bargaining. For that reason, the Action Plan is not limited to promotional measures. It also includes actions under a dedicated "Protecting" pillar, including legislative reviews to safeguard workers' rights and strengthen protections for trade union representatives. It further includes measures to close major data gaps, strengthen the evidence base for future monitoring and policy development, develop a new Code of Practice, support productivity-enhancing agreements, and invest in the modernisation and digitalisation of the Workplace Relations Commission and Labour Court.

Implementation of these measures will be overseen through a Technical Subgroup of the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF), consisting of social partners and government representatives. A mid-term review is provided for in 2028 to assess progress and ensure that the Plan remains responsive to labour market developments.

Recommendation
IHREC recommends the State strengthen legal protections against victimisation in the workplace.

Response

The State recognises the importance of ensuring that workers are not penalised for trade union activity. Under existing law, dismissal on grounds of trade union membership, proposed membership or trade union activity is deemed unfair under the Unfair Dismissals Acts, with remedies including reinstatement, re-engagement or compensation.

In addition, the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) Code of Practice on Victimisation specifically addresses victimisation arising from an employee's membership or activity on behalf of a trade union. Complaints may be brought to the WRC, and compensation of up to two years' remuneration may be available in appropriate cases.

The Action Plan to Promote Collective Bargaining includes a specific "protecting" pillar. Measures under the Plan include legislative reviews to safeguard workers' rights and strengthen protections for trade union representatives. Any further changes to the law on victimisation will be considered in the context of the Action Plan's implementation and ongoing engagement with social partners. It is important to note that the Action Plan is intended to be an implementation framework rather than a single legislative instrument. Its actions will commence between 2026 and 2029, with some actions continuing throughout the lifetime of the Plan, and progress will be reviewed through the agreed monitoring structures.

Recommendation
IHREC recommends the WRC publish data, disaggregated by demographic characteristics and employment sectors, on the number of complaints relating to victimisation lodged at the WRC.

Response

The WRC currently publishes information in its Annual Report on the number of complaints referred to its Adjudication Service under a range of employment rights and equality legislation. This includes data relating to complaints of victimisation under the Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts, as well as complaints of penalisation under other employment rights enactments.

The WRC does not currently compile or publish data on victimisation complaints in the disaggregated format referred to in the recommendation, including by demographic characteristics or employment sector. Consequently, such information is not currently available.

The WRC notes the nature of the recommendation made by IHREC and, going forward, will consider whether it is possible to comply with the recommendation in the context of its reporting obligations and the statutory services provided within the WRC's remit.

Recommendation
IHREC recommends the State legislate to increase the legal obligation on employers to engage with union representatives in the workplace, in order to strengthen employee access to collective bargaining, in line with obligations under the EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages.

Response

Ireland's current industrial relations framework is based on a long-established voluntarist model, which provides a structured and flexible framework through which employers, workers and their representative organisations can engage constructively on matters affecting employment and workplace relations, including in response to significant economic and social challenges. The State considers that this model has contributed substantially to Ireland's economic resilience, competitiveness and industrial stability over several decades.

At the same time, the State recognises the importance of maintaining an appropriate balance between preserving the autonomy of the social partners and promoting greater opportunities for workers to participate in collective bargaining.

Ireland's Action Plan on Collective Bargaining does not introduce a general mandatory obligation on all employers to recognise or collectively bargain with trade unions. Instead, it seeks to strengthen access to collective bargaining through targeted and practical measures, including capacity-building programmes, awareness campaigns, a new Code of Practice, support for productivity-enhancing agreements, protections for trade union representatives, and institutional investment in the WRC and Labour Court.

Article 6: Right to Bargain Collectively

Recommendation

IHREC recommends the State to establish a platform to support deeper social dialogue between workers, employers, and Government on the potential impacts of AI and other forms of digitisation on jobs and the labour market, and how the benefits of the digital transition can be harnessed and shared equitably, in line with the principles of the decent work agenda.

Response

It has been agreed to establish a Forum under the Labour Employer Economic Forum to consider issues relating to AI and the labour market.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends the State to support continued social dialogue and joint consultation with workers and other social stakeholders on the Just Transition, in acknowledgement that addressing employment vulnerabilities associated with the Just Transition is critical for its long-term success.

Response

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 provides for a just transition in climate action, which endeavours, in so far as practicable, to maximise employment opportunities, and support persons and communities that may be negatively affected by the transition to climate neutrality.

To give effect to this statutory commitment, a Just Transition Framework, first published in Climate Action Plan 2021, supports key policy areas in integrating just transition into climate action policy planning and implementation. There are four overarching principles of a just transition are:

- An integrated, structured, and evidence-based approach to identify and plan our response to just transition requirements;

- People are equipped with the right skills to be able to participate in and benefit from the future net zero economy;
- The costs are shared so that the impact is equitable and existing inequalities are not exacerbated; and
- Social dialogue to ensure impacted citizens and communities are empowered and are core to the transition process.

All government Ministers in Ireland are expected to formulate and implement their climate action polices through the lens of these Just Transition Principles, so that policies are informed by the need to ensure a just transition.

In 2025, the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment published its Statement of Strategy for 2025-2028. This Strategy includes the key strategic objective to provide climate leadership to accelerate the delivery of a just transition to climate neutrality. As a key action to deliver on this objective, the Department will develop a Just Transition Strategy which will aim to further support the implementation of the Just Transition Framework into climate policy.

A further key action in the Strategy will be to engage and communicate with stakeholders to accelerate Ireland's progress towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, addressing critical areas such as poverty eradication, climate action, and improved living standards for all.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends the State to clarify whether there is any consideration to use Joint Labour Committees to regulate standards in the gig economy/ Platform Work sector, in line with obligations under the EU Directives on Platform Work and Minimum Wages.

Response

At present, the State has not made any commitments to establish a dedicated Joint Labour Committee (JLC) for the gig economy or platform work sector. However, the State recognises that the JLC model may provide useful learning for sectors characterised by low pay, low collective bargaining coverage or fragmented employment relationships. The 2023 Labour Court review of JLCs recommended the maintenance of existing JLCs, and the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment indicated support for strengthening and improving the JLC system, particularly for vulnerable sectors of the economy.

The State will therefore keep under consideration whether existing sectoral mechanisms, including JLCs, could have a role in improving standards for workers in platform or gig-economy work. Most importantly, the State has committed to examining the potential establishment of JLCs in government-funded sectors in Ireland's Action Plan to Promote Collective Bargaining.

Recommendation
IHREC recommends the State to take immediate action to address the ongoing absence of a statutory right to collective bargaining.

Response

As stated above, Ireland's current industrial relations framework is based on a long-established voluntarist model, which provides a structured and flexible framework through which employers, workers and their representative organisations can engage constructively on matters affecting employment and workplace relations, including in response to significant economic and social challenges. The State considers that this model has contributed substantially to Ireland's economic resilience, competitiveness and industrial stability over several decades.

At the same time, the State recognises the importance of maintaining an appropriate balance between preserving the autonomy of the social partners and promoting greater opportunities for workers to participate in collective bargaining.

Ireland's Action Plan on Collective Bargaining does not introduce a general mandatory obligation on all employers to recognise or collectively bargain with trade unions. Instead, it seeks to strengthen access to collective bargaining through targeted and practical measures, including capacity-building programmes, awareness campaigns, a new Code of Practice, support for productivity-enhancing agreements, protections for trade union representatives, and institutional investment in the WRC and Labour Court.

Recommendation
IHREC recommends that the forthcoming National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights recognises the right to decent work, including the right to collective bargaining, and include specific actions to respect and protect the right to decent work of structurally vulnerable groups.

Response

Ireland's second National Plan is under development. The intention of the second National Plan is to build on the outcomes of Ireland's first plan and take account of key international developments in the business and human rights space, including new EU Directives. All input from stakeholders following a comprehensive stakeholder consultation is being taken into consideration in the finalisation of the Plan.

IHREC comment
In its response to whether joint consultations on the digital transition have taken place, the State only mentions Platform Work in the context of existing obligations to transpose the EU Platform Work Directive and EU Minimum Wages Directive. To the best of our knowledge, platform workers have not been involved in any joint consultations to date, however we note that the digital transition referred to by the ECSR is about more than the increased prevalence of platform work.

Response

The Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment notes that, alongside its public consultation on transposition of the Platform Work Directive, it conducted a survey to gather the views of digital labour platforms operating in the State.

IHREC comment

Finally, in response to the query on measures to guarantee the rights of self-employed workers to collective bargaining, the State notes that aspects of competition law prevent self-employed individuals from concluding such agreements, save for a limited number of workers in creative fields, but that the State is 'considering this matter in light of links to national competition and employment law, with a view to identifying a way forward'.

This is a limited response, particularly as the State was previously asked to provide information regarding the 'practical application of Section 15F of the Competition Act 2002 insofar as different categories of self-employed workers are concerned, following the adoption of the Competition (Amendment) Act 2017. It is disquieting, in light of our previous concerns about workers that are increasingly misclassified as self-employed or independent contractors, and thereby denied access to certain labour protections. The State should provide a clear timeline for its 'consideration' of this issue and identify policy options to support self-employed workers' access to collective bargaining.

Response

With regard to collective/voluntary agreements in the creative and cultural sector linked to implementation of measures contained in chapter 3 of the Copyright in the Digital Single Market Directive (790/2019/EU), the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment is engaging with the relevant parties to seek to address possible obstacles in competition and industrial relations law.

In addition, the Directive is currently under review by the European Commission, a process that will conclude early in 2027. This assessment of effectiveness of the Directive as implemented across the EU27 will also facilitate identification of possible ways forward.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends that the prohibition on An Garda Síochána members' right to strike be removed, in order to bring the current legislative framework into conformity with Article 6.4 of the Charter.

Response

In relation to IHREC's view on An Garda Síochána members access to the right to strike, there has been no policy change for Ireland.

It should be noted that An Garda Síochána is the only police service in the State and holds a unique position given it is both a police service and a national security service. This is unlike many other police services internationally. As a result, any strike action would impact not only on policing, but also on the security of the State or the maintenance of public authority. It appears that the unique position of An Garda Síochána was not fully considered by IHREC in its comments.

In the past decade, the State has recognised the importance of ensuring that dispute resolution mechanisms which provide robust and effective processes are available to members of An Garda Síochána in order to ensure that they are not at a disadvantage in this regard compared to other workers. Garda Representative Associations represent members of An Garda Síochána in all matters affecting their welfare including pay, pensions and conditions of service. Such Associations represent Garda Members in collective bargaining processes at a national level and have full access to the industrial relations machinery of the State.

Ireland is of the view that these measures – in addition to internal dispute resolution mechanisms within An Garda Síochána – have dramatically improved the position of members of the Service in the industrial relations arena and that the correct balance has been struck to ensure that they have access to the industrial relations machinery of the State to pursue their interests and claims, while at the same time assuring the public of an uninterrupted policing service and the security of the State.

Article 20: Right to Equal Opportunities Between Women and Men

IHREC comment

As IHREC has repeatedly highlighted in the course of our work on gender equality, most notably our 2025 submission to the CEDAW Committee, the lack of accessible and affordable childcare in Ireland is a central driver of women's unequal labour market participation. Ireland is among the most expensive countries for childcare in Europe.

Response

In response to IHREC's comment on Ireland being among the most expensive countries for childcare in Europe, the State would like to respond that in 2018 prior to the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme, couples on low income (67% of the average wage) paid on average 22% of their net income for full time ELC, with lone parents spending 23% of their net income, compared to EU medians of 7% and 6% respectively.[1] By 2025, Early Learning and Care (ELC) costs in Ireland fell to 14% of net income for couples and 13% for lone parents on low income, compared to the EU median of 5% for both family types.

In 2018, couples on the average wage paid on average 19% of their net income for full time ELC, with lone parents earning the average wage spending 30% of their net income, compared to EU medians of 7% and 6% respectively. By 2025, ELC costs in Ireland fell to 12% of net income for couples and 13% for lone parents earning the average wage, compared to the EU median of 5% for both family types.[1]

Early Years Action Plan

Shaping the Future: The Early Years Action Plan, Phase 1 report (published on the 17 of December 2025) sets out measures to achieve key Programme for Government commitments on the affordability, quality, and accessibility of early learning and care and school-age childcare.

[1] Figures are based on the Department of Children, Disability and Equality's own calculations using model version 2.8.0. Family type has two children, one age 2 availing of NCS for 40 hours per week, one aged 3 attending ECCE and availing of NCS for 25 hours per week. In the couple, the second adult earns 67% of the average wage.

The Action Plan adopts a phased approach that enables action to be taken in 2026 while allowing adequate time for a broad public consultation and analysis on longer-term actions, which will be set out in a second report to be published by the end of 2026. A central objective of Shaping the Future is to reduce parental fees to an upper limit of €200 per month over the lifetime of the Government.

The Phase 1 report (published last December) documents actions that will be undertaken in 2026 using the Department's existing policy tools. The short-term actions in Phase 1 build on recent reforms to the National Childcare Scheme and Core Funding, and use existing policy mechanisms to strengthen affordability, access and quality. The fee-freeze and maximum fee-caps required for Core Funding have been key to the progress in recent years in making ELC and School-Age Childcare (SAC) services more affordable.

Phase 2 actions, which will be undertaken from 2027 through to the end of 2029, will be published in Q4 2026. Before Phase 2 actions can be specified, in line with the Programme for Government commitment a broad public consultation is underway. So far, multiple consultation channels have been used including a national online survey with over 11,000 responses and a telephone survey of approximately 600 parents with children aged under 15. 56 local consultation events were held between 20–30 April organised with the City and County Childcare Committees. There has been continued ongoing engagement through the Early Learning and Childcare Stakeholder Forum throughout the consultation process. A national forum, later this year, will build on insights from surveys, events, and stakeholder engagement and help shape future policy direction.

Additional data-gathering and analysis is also being undertaken to inform Phase 2.

Recommendations

IHREC recommends the State undertakes an awareness campaign to promote the uptake of parental leave and paternity leave by men.

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

Response

The Programme for Government 2025 has committed to a Pay-Related approach for Parent's Benefit and exploring other payments where a similar model could be applied. The Pay-Related approach aims to address the financial challenges faced by parents, improve gender equality in caregiving and employment and bring Ireland in line with other EU countries.

The Government intend to issue a public consultation paper before the end of 2026 seeking the views of the public, employers, and stakeholders on a pay-related approach to family leave benefits to support the process and assist in the development of any future proposals in this area.

The Department of Social Protection's communication around the issue of the consultation paper as well as the consultation paper itself will raise awareness of all family leaves available.

The Programme for Government commitments to introduce Pay-related Parents Benefit, to examine the introduction of Pay-related Carer's Benefit and to progressively increase the rates of the various carer's payments.

The Department of Social Protection has a Dormant Accounts Fund Carer measure specifically to support carers to remain in employment or education or to provide help to get back into work, education or training. The current programme runs until the end of 2026. It is the intention of the Department to have a successor programme in place in early 2027.

General Scheme of the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

The General Scheme of the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2024 provides for a number of changes to the law which will facilitate women's participation in the labour market, such as:

- extending the possibility for employers to take positive action on grounds other than that of gender to include prospective employees where labour market participation rates are lower than average (while this does not directly impact the gender ground it could apply to women who are disabled, older, members of ethnic minorities, etc.)
- Removing the existing provision that allows differential pay rates to be paid to disabled persons.
- Requiring employers to show that the specific criteria they seek of a job applicant is necessary and proportionate for a particular role.
- Extending the time limits and increasing the maximum compensation amounts for cases of alleged discrimination brought to the Workplace Relations Commission.
- Strengthening the existing provisions on discrimination by allowing for complaints in which there may not be sufficient merit on an individual ground, but where the intersection or combination of grounds leads to an instance of poor treatment which is sufficiently serious to meet the test of discriminatory action.

National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II

Ireland's National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II (NTRIS II) 2024–2028 demonstrates a strong and proactive commitment to addressing the inequalities experienced by Traveller and Roma women through a range of targeted and practical actions.

A significant achievement under the Strategy has been the development and wide dissemination of the Public Sector Standard for the Provision of Traveller and Roma

Cultural Awareness and Anti-Racism Training, which is supporting public bodies to deliver services in a culturally appropriate manner, strengthen understanding of Traveller and Roma experiences, and challenge racism and discrimination across the public sector.

The Strategy is also progressing initiatives to increase Traveller and Roma participation in the labour market, including enhanced tailored employment supports, expanded education, training and skills development opportunities, and the continued support for the Traveller and Roma Civil Service Placement Programme, which provides valuable pathways into public sector employment and career development. These measures reflect a clear commitment to improving employment outcomes and creating more inclusive workplaces for members of both communities.

The *DROM Ireland: Roma Peer Support for Health, Education & Equity Programme*, funded by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality and delivered by Cairde, provides adult Roma, particularly Roma women who had little to no educational opportunities as children, with educational and training supports. The Programme supports Roma to build their everyday reading, writing, and numeracy skills, as well as digital literacy, and aims to empower Roma in their interactions with employers, health services, and statutory bodies. The blended model of online, in-person learning and community outreach of the DROM Ireland programme has also strengthened participation and learning outcomes, further developing Roma women's leadership capacity.

In addition, NTRIS II places a strong emphasis on participation and representation. The Department of Children, Disability and Equality provides funding to the National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF) to work on supporting and progressing Traveller women's inclusion and equality in Irish society. In an effort to increase Traveller women's representation in public life, the Department of Children, Disability and Equality has funded research undertaken by the NTWF examining the participation of Traveller women in public and political life. This important evidence base study will help inform future policy and action aimed at supporting greater leadership, representation and engagement of Traveller women in decision-making processes at local and national levels. Together, these measures demonstrate progress towards ensuring that Traveller and Roma women can participate fully in Ireland's social, economic and political life.

Recommendation
IHREC recommends the State to urgently address pension inequality in Ireland, including through the implementation of a Universal State Pension system.

Response

Ireland's pension system currently has a number of measures designed to address pensions inequality.

State Pension

The State pension system comprises of two main components. The State Pension (Non-Contributory), which is a means-tested pension funded from taxation and the State Pension (Contributory) which is based on social insurance (PRSI) contributions and paid from the Social Insurance Fund. Both are payable to persons aged 66 and older. Alternatively, the Bereaved Partner's (Contributory) Pension is payable to a person who has suffered the loss of a spouse, civil partner or qualified cohabitant and is paid at the same maximum rate as the State Pension (Contributory).

The current State Pension (Contributory) system gives significant recognition and support to those whose work history includes extended periods outside of paid employment, often to raise families or in a full-time caring role, most of whom are women. Up to 20 years of HomeCaring Periods can be awarded in respect of time spent raising children or caring for family, provided an applicant has the necessary 520 (10 years) paid contributions to qualify for the payment.

In addition, Long-Term Carers Contributions can be awarded to a person who has cared for an incapacitated person for a period of 20 years or more. These contributions are treated the same as paid contributions for State Pension (Contributory) entitlement. This means carers (predominately women) who were unable to work on a long-term basis due to caring for incapacitated dependents can qualify for the State Pension (Contributory) without having paid at least 520 contributions.

The effect of these measures has been to close the gender pensions gap on State pensions. As of the end of 2025, 42% of State Pension (Contributory) Recipients were women, compared to 34% in 2010 and 39% in 2020. The average payment for those in receipt of a State Pension (Contributory), State Pension (Non-Contributory) or Bereaved Partner’s (Contributory) Pension is approximately €0.50 (0.2%) greater for men than for women. In total, there are more women in receipt of these payments than men. Therefore, the gender pensions gap cannot be attributed to the State Pension system.

For those who do not qualify for a State Pension (Contributory), or who only qualify for a reduced rate contributory pension based on their social insurance record, the means-tested State Pension (Non-Contributory) is available. The maximum rate of the State Pension (Non-Contributory) is equivalent to over 96% of the maximum rate State Pension (Contributory).

Finally, where a person's spouse or partner is in receipt of a State Pension (Contributory), they can also apply for an increase for a Qualified Adult, amounting up to 90% of a full rate State Pension (Contributory). Entitlement to this increase is based on the Qualified Adult's means. The combination of these measures means that no person with a viable income need falls outside these schemes.

The introduction of a universal State Pension paid at full rate to everyone of 66 years of age and over, regardless of their PRSI contributions or their means, would require fundamental reform of the State pension system, and perhaps to the entire model of social insurance. It would give rise to a range of considerable policy and operational issues and would require either considerable additional revenues, or, if introduced on a cost-neutral basis, very significant diversion of funds from elsewhere.

Auto Enrolment: MyFutureFund

The gender pensions gap in Ireland is a feature of the supplementary pensions market. As in other countries this is predominantly due to labour market dynamics giving rise to coverage and adequacy issues, especially for women. In January 2026. Ireland introduced a system of automatic enrolment, called MyFutureFund.

MyFutureFund represents a significant step in addressing existing pension coverage gaps including the gender pension gap in Ireland. In developing the final design, the Department of Social Protection gender-proofed proposals to assess their impact on both men and women. MyFutureFund applies to all employees who met the eligibility criteria, thereby giving women access to pensions in their own right. The system goes a considerable way to ensuring more women are brought into the savings system.

The design of MyFutureFund ensures that there will be equality of access to supplementary pensions, in particular for those with low to average earnings where pension coverage has traditionally been low. This is particularly relevant to women who have different experiences of employment in terms of employment rates, the prevalence of part-time work and lower earnings. It has and will result in hundreds of thousands of women being enrolled in a supplementary pension for the first time. When detailed analysis of MyFutureFund enrolees was done in April, forty percent of them were women.

In broader terms, Ireland's National Strategy for Women and Girls 2025-2030 commits to supporting the participation and visibility of women, particularly in male-dominated fields, such as politics. Specific actions will be outlined in the forthcoming first Action Plan, which is to be published shortly.

Recommendation
IHREC recommends the State to provide sufficient remuneration for Local Councillors to remove barriers to the recruitment and retention of women in politics.

Response
The role of the councillor is one that this Government values very highly. This has been demonstrated over a series of ongoing and significant improvements in terms

of the remunerative supports available to them over the past 5 years or so, which can be summarised as follows.

- With effect from 1 July 2021, the salary-type payments that councillors received – previously worth a total of €18,706 per annum (i.e. the Representational Payment worth €17,706 annually and the Municipal District and Area Committee Members Allowance worth €1,000 annually) – were replaced with a single salary type remuneration payment worth €25,788 per annum.
- This annual remuneration payment is linked to adjustments under Government pay agreements to the pay of Local Authority Grade 4 operatives. As of 1 June 2026, this payment is worth €32,059. This represents an increase of over 71% over the course of five years.
- A compulsory vouched expenses allowance, called the Local Representation Allowance (LRA), was introduced to replace the fixed annual rate (as well as the previous optional vouched expenses allowance). This allowance is worth a maximum of €5,160 annually.
- Other significant improvements in the last two years alone include the introduction of a revised gratuity payment for retiring councillors – worth up to a maximum of €96,177 subject to service – and the introduction of a Security Allowance in 2023, increased in 2025 to a lifetime maximum of €10,000 at 100% for eligible security expenses.
- Legislation passed in 2022 established, for the first time, an entitlement of maternity leave to local authority elected members. The Act also provides for the possibility of the appointment by co-option of an individual as a temporary substitute for a councillor who takes maternity leave under the Maternity Protection Act 1994, or is absent due to illness or in good faith for another reason under Section 18 of the Local Government Act 2001.
- In 2023 the Government introduced an administrative support allowance for councillors availing of maternity leave, or who have recently given birth and who choose not to avail of maternity leave, to engage additional administrative support to assist them in their role. The allowance is to cover expenses incurred by members in engaging an individual to maintain basic office duties and provide other secretarial or administrative

duties, for a period of up to 42 consecutive weeks (except in the case of a premature birth where additional weeks are applicable).

- In June 2023, in a further initiative to enhance the work life balance of councillors, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage launched a pilot scheme supporting the installation of hardware, specifically cameras and audio equipment, in council chambers where infrastructure is inadequate for the running of hybrid meetings. The purpose of the scheme is to facilitate remote attendance at local authority council meetings, which would allow for more flexible participation, including increased participation of diverse cohorts and those with caring responsibilities. This scheme has since been rolled out to 17 local authorities and one Regional Assembly with €868,700 investment from the Department.

Local Democracy Taskforce

The Local Democracy Taskforce was established by Government in June 2025 on foot of a commitment in the Programme for Government. Included in its terms of reference was a specific requirement to consider what supports should be provided to councillors to support them in carrying out their functions. The Taskforce also considered mechanisms to make the role of Councillor more attractive to a greater number of people from more diverse backgrounds. The Taskforce interpreted ‘more diverse backgrounds’ broadly to include issues in relation to gender balance, plus supports for candidates from a migrant background and for those with a disability.

The Local Democracy Taskforce presented its final report to the Minister on 4th March 2026. A key consideration by the Taskforce when considering its Terms of Reference was that its recommendations would be made in a manner that would allow for the successful implementation of the recommendations. An Implementation Plan and the Report will be submitted to the Government for consideration shortly. Following this, the Report and Implementation Plan will be published and the process of implementing the reform policy ultimately agreed by Government will commence.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends the State to prioritise the full implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life.

Response

The Report of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life contains 16 core recommendations addressed to various stakeholders including the Houses of the Oireachtas, Political Party Leaders, An Garda Síochána, Government Departments, agencies, independent public bodies and social media companies. The 16 main recommendations further contain sub-recommendations. In total, the Report sets out 52 recommendations to consider and action, as appropriate.

Significant progress has been made on the implementation of these recommendations by all stakeholders. The Senior Officials Implementation and Oversight Group will meet again later this year to assess further progress.

Recommendation

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

Response

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 gives legislative basis to the establishment of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in each local authority administrative area; this includes the development of general policy guidelines for the operation of LCDCs. LCDCs comprise both public and private sector socio-economic partners drawn from the relevant local authority administrative area.

Membership

The membership of LCDCs is based on section 128C of the Local Government Act 2014 and is supported by S.I. 234/2014 and S.I. 314/2014, both of which provide for, amongst other things, the membership of, and appointment of members to LCDCs. This composition reflects an appropriate representational balance between public and private sector interests, including representatives of publicly funded bodies and representatives of local community interests.

The number of LCDCs can vary in size ranging from 15 – 21 committee members and this is determined by the number of council members in a local authority area. LCDCs must include the following sectoral **public** and **private** representatives, as follows:

- Public sector interest includes local authority members and employees, as well as state agencies such as Údarás na Gaeltachta, HSE, ETBs etc.

- Private sector representatives include Public Participation Networks (PPNs), local development and community bodies, farming and business interests, trade union, youth or other local and community interests.

Role of Chief Officer

The administrative support for LCDCs is provided by a Chief Officer, who is a local authority official, and whose duties include the proactive management of the membership of LCDCs. The principle of gender balance on LCDCs is enshrined in the legislation and the guidelines that govern the operation of these committees.

Section 6 of S.I.234/2014 states that *"the chief officer shall, in so far as is practicable and having regard to relevant experience, ensure an equitable balance between men and women in the composition of the Committee."*

LCDC committee members are sought by a Chief Officer who will formally seek nominations from the relevant sectoral interests, and the local authority will nominate local authority member representatives. The guidelines state that *"every effort should be made to ensure an equitable gender balance among the local authority members on the LCDC, as well as across the broader LCDC membership."*

There are a broad range of sectoral bodies represented on LCDCs throughout the country, such as the ETBs, IFA and Údarás, and they would tend to recommend a senior manager/director for appointment to an LCDC. Such nominees reflect the experience and expertise in order to provide effective and efficient services to residents and communities.

While PPNs have their own independent electoral college, with nominees put forward by local community and voluntary organisations, who are then voted on by the registered PPN organisations within each local authority area.

Current LCDC membership

Based on current data available from LCDC annual reports, they convey, that of the 33 LCDCs:

- 23 LCDCs, or 70%, have female representation that is ≥ 40%
- 10 LCDCs, or 30%, have female representation that is ≤ 40%
- Of the 573 LCDC members nationally, 257, or 45% are female

(see data table below)

Review of LCDC Guidelines

A full review of the operational guidelines for the LCDCs has recently concluded. The process included the formation of a working group drawn up of LCDC stakeholders, the make-up of which was gender balanced.

The updated guidelines will be published in the coming weeks, and while some operational changes were identified, no changes to the membership, legislation or text surrounding balanced gender representation of the LCDCs was recommended by the working group.

Oversight of LCDCs

The Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht holds meetings with the LCDC Chief Officer Network on an ongoing basis and the importance of balanced gender representation on each of the LCDCs, will remain a discussion item.

LCDC Gender Representation Table

LCDC	Females	Males	Members	% Female Representation
Galway City	11	5	16	69%
Kildare*	11	6	17	65%
Cavan*	10	7	17	59%
Waterford	10	7	17	59%
Offaly	11	8	19	58%
South Dublin*	10	8	18	56%
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	11	9	20	55%
Clare	8	7	15	53%
Kerry*	8	7	15	53%
Donegal*	10	9	19	53%
Louth	10	9	19	53%
Fingal	9	9	18	50%
Carlow	9	10	19	47%
Dublin City*	9	10	19	47%
Tipperary	9	10	19	47%
Westmeath*	8	9	17	47%
Wicklow	10	12	22	45%
Meath	8	10	18	44%
Wexford*	8	10	18	44%
Kilkenny	8	11	19	42%
Laois	7	10	17	41%
Galway County	8	12	20	40%
Cork South*	6	10	16	38%
Cork West*	6	10	16	38%
Leitrim	6	11	17	35%
Monaghan*	6	11	17	35%
Cork City	6	12	18	33%
Longford	5	11	16	31%

Mayo	7	16	23	30%
Sligo	5	12	17	29%
Roscommon	4	15	19	21%
Cork North*	3	13	16	19%
National	257	325	573	45%

* Data retrieved from published 2024 LCDC annual reports, otherwise obtained from published 2025 LCDC annual reports.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends the State to undertake research on gender inequality in senior Public Service positions and on State boards, and to implement the recommendations to increase gender balance.

Response

Significant changes were made between 2011 and 2014 to the system for State Board appointments with a view to promoting wider access to opportunities on State Boards and greater transparency in appointments.

In September 2020, the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (The Code) was updated to take account of the recommendations of the Inter-Departmental Group on Gender Balance on State Boards. The subsequent Annex to The Code: Gender Balance, Diversity, and Inclusion was published in September 2020. The Annex urges State bodies to lead the way in seeking to achieve gender balanced and diverse boards. The key amendments included in the Annex are:

- Subject to compliance with the relevant body's establishing legislation, board terms should be between 3 - 5 years, which may be renewed once to a maximum of 8 years.

- The annual report of the body should include details of gender balance; where the board stands vis-à-vis the 40% gender balance requirement; the key elements of the board's approach to promoting gender balance and diversity and the measures being taken to address the situation where a board is either all male or all female.

- The current gender composition of the board should be highlighted when making submissions to the Minister on board appointments and re-appointments.

- Each board should carry out an annual self-assessment evaluation which would include a detailed analysis and critical assessment of the gender, diversity and skills mix within the board.

- The annual report of the board should give an account of the approach being adopted in regard to the promotion of diversity and inclusion, including with regard to gender, in the specific context of the organisation; and on the progress and achievements in this regard.

The Department of Public Expenditure collated data from the Stateboards.ie website of the membership of State Boards serving in December 2024 where the board composition is greater than 3 and where the Minister makes the board appointments. When these parameters are taken into account the data set consists of 187 boards totalling 2,044 board members. The analysis indicates that the gender participation rates are 49.5% female and 50.4% male, with 57.7% of Boards now meeting the 40% gender targets, of which, 45 are boards where female membership is greater than or equal to 60%.

The 2025 Programme for Government – Securing Ireland's Future - restates the Government commitment to increasing gender balance on State Boards.

Recommendation

IHREC recommends the State to clarify what measures are being taken to implement the CEDAW Committee's 2025 priority recommendation to ensure gender parity in decision-making, through temporary special measures in both the public and private spheres.

Response

The observations and recommendations of the CEDAW committee span a range of topics. These are being advanced through the National Strategy for Women and Girls. The Strategy seeks to support the economic empowerment of women and their full visibility and participation in society.

Objectives three and five support this aspiration and are respectively titled, '*Being a Leader: I can pursue my ambition and achieve my potential in any field*' and '*Having a Fair Share: I have a fair share of economic and financial power*'.

Commitments within these objectives aim to support women into leaderships roles, address the imbalance of visibility in sports and media, and ensure equal work for equal pay. The Commitments set out in this Strategy will be addressed by two Action Plans, the first of which is currently in the final stages of development.

Balance for Better Business

Balance for Better Business (B4BB) is a government-supported, business-led initiative established in 2018 to improve gender balance in senior leadership and decision-making roles across Irish businesses. Through monitoring, reporting, stakeholder engagement and advocacy, B4BB supports the achievement of greater gender balance at board and executive level.

In May 2024, B4BB launched a set of targets as part of a renewed 5-year strategy through to 2028, supported by the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment. The strategy focuses on a 'twin track approach' of quantitative targets to measure progress and qualitative guidance issued to companies, in the form of a B4BB roadmap. Under this strategy, B4BB has set targets for 40%+ female representation on boards and leadership teams for all company cohorts, to be achieved by the end of 2028.

As part of the 5-year strategy, Balance for Better Business recommended that a series of Ministerial led industry roundtables be organised, focused on selected sectors in which women are currently under-represented at leadership level and newly emerging fast-growing sectors to pre-empt any disparities developing.

The Ministerial Roundtables have assisted to identify the issues facing the sectors in achieving gender balance at the highest levels of their business and highlighted assistance the B4BB initiative could offer towards achieving gender balance goals. In 2024, two roundtables were held, focusing on the Construction and Hospitality sectors. In 2025, a Retail Roundtable took place in Q2, followed by a Fintech Roundtable on 3 December 2025. A Manufacturing Industry Roundtable was held on 27 March 2026. Further roundtables are planned for H1 2027.

Ireland has focused on gender balance targets, transparency and leadership accountability. This reflects a view that lasting progress is best achieved through developing the talent pipeline and supporting succession planning which drives broader organisational and cultural changes. In line with the approach underpinning the EU Women on Boards Directive, the focus is on improving gender balance through clear targets, accountability and transparent processes.