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in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant

Replies of Ireland to the list of issues in relation to its fourth periodic report^{*}, ^{**}

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

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



I. Reply to paragraphs 1 to 5 of the list of issues E/C.12/IRL/Q/4 (General Information)

Reply to paragraph 1 of the list of issues

1. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) does not form part of the domestic law of the State. Ireland has a dualist system under which international agreements to which Ireland becomes a party do not become part of domestic law unless so determined by the Oireachtas (Irish parliament) through legislation. While the ICESCR has not been directly incorporated into domestic law, the substance of a number of the rights contained in the Covenant is protected by the Constitution and by legislation.

2. Information on how effect is given to ICESCR is set out more fully in Ireland's Common Core Document and Fourth Periodic Report.

3. There is a relatively high degree of awareness of the economic, social and cultural rights enshrined in the ICESCR within the judiciary, the legal professions, academia, and civil society in Ireland. The status of economic, social and cultural rights under the Constitution was amongst the matters considered by the Convention on the Constitution, established by resolution of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

4. Economic, social and cultural rights are frequently invoked in proceedings before the domestic courts, notwithstanding that the ICESCR does not form part of the domestic law of the state. The justiciability of those economic, social and cultural rights that are afforded constitutional protection is subject to the doctrine of the separation of powers. Recent cases in which the provisions of the ICESCR have been considered by the superior courts include *NHV v Minister for Justice* [2017] IESC 35, in which the Supreme Court referred to the Committee's General Comment No. 18: *The Right to Work* (E/C.12/GC/18) in considering whether a legislative prohibition on asylum seekers from taking up employment was compatible with the Constitution.

Reply to paragraph 2 of the list of issues

5. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) has the statutory remit to promote human rights and equality and to raise awareness of discrimination experienced by persons under the protected equality grounds. IHREC accounts to the Oireachtas, with a mandate established under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014.

6. The annual Social Inclusion Forum brings together policy makers, service providers and service users, including NGOs, community and voluntary sector groups and representatives of people experiencing poverty and/or social exclusion, to discuss and debate national policy on poverty reduction and social inclusion. The Department of Social Protection (DSP) has engaged the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland and Community Work Ireland as event partners in organising the Forum to help ensure that people living in poverty participate in the event.

7. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD) requires State parties to actively involve persons with disabilities in policy development. The National Disability Inclusion Strategy includes action to enhance the participation of persons with disabilities in law and policy making processes, as well as actions to identify and address the remaining legislative measures required to give full effect to the CRPD.

8. The Disability Participation and Consultation Network (DPCN) has a wide membership with over 100 members, which includes disability organisations, disabled persons' organisations, individuals with disabilities and family members and support groups.

9. DSP engages extensively with the sector on matters relating to the Department's services and schemes for persons with disabilities through various consultative forums. Examples include the Annual Carers Forum, Disability Consultative Forum, the Community and Voluntary Pillar and pre- and post-Budget Forums.

10. The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021 (NTRIS) was developed in close consultation with national Traveller and Roma organisations and interest groups, as well as non-governmental organisations and other interested parties.

Representatives of both Traveller and Roma communities are permanent members of NTRIS Steering Committee.

11. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) is working closely with Traveller and Roma organisations to ensure that the views of these communities are fully captured and reflected in the successor strategy to the NTRIS, which is due to be published in Q4 2023.

12. In more general terms, a key principle underpinning the National Action Plan Against Racism is that affected groups should participate in the development and oversight of all government policy initiatives and targeted measures to address racism. The plan was developed by an independent anti-racism committee appointed by the Government in 2020, including representatives of Traveller organisations.

Reply to paragraph 3 of the list of issues

13. Ireland recognises the threat that climate change poses to the full enjoyment of human rights. As an active Party to the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC), Ireland is committed to global climate action, including the commitments made under the Paris Agreement in our national legislative and policymaking processes.

14. Ireland's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) is within the European Union's overall NDC.¹ On 17 December 2020, the EU and its Member States jointly submitted an enhanced NDC to the UNFCCC, confirming a commitment to net domestic reduction of at least 55% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990.

15. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021² set legally binding targets to achieve a climate neutral economy by no later than 2050, and a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 2018 levels.

Reply to paragraph 4 of the list of issues

16. Following an extensive consultation process, Ireland launched its National Plan on Business and Human Rights (2017–2020). The Plan commissioned a number of concrete actions, including the publication of a comprehensive baseline study of the existing legislative and regulatory framework applying to business and human rights in Ireland, a review of access to remedy in Ireland, and the development of Guidance on Business and Human Rights for Business Enterprises.

17. A review of Ireland's National Plan in 2021 found that over 91% of commitments were achieved, with plans to implement the remainder. The Programme for Government contains a commitment to "Ensure that the Action Plan is further developed to review whether there is a need for greater emphasis on mandatory due diligence". The Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment are currently working on a joint approach to fulfilling this commitment, including with regard to any developments linked to the proposed EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive.

Reply to paragraph 5 of the list of issues

18. The overall objective of Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) is to contribute to a sustainable, equitable, green and digital recovery effort, in a manner that complements the Government's broader recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. An NRRP Implementing Body was established in Q2 2022 within the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) to oversee implementation. This Body will act as the lead authority for Ireland and as the single point of contact with the European Commission.

19. A significant number of the proposed actions, both investments and reforms, which Ireland will commit to are designed to have substantive positive social impacts, particularly in relation to employment, education, training and lifelong learning, healthcare, and access to essential services.

¹ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/EU_NDC_Submission_December%202020.pdf.

² <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2021/act/32/enacted/en/html>.

II. Reply to paragraphs 6 to 9 of the list of issues (Issues relating to the general provisions of the Covenant)

Maximum available resources (art. 2(1))

Reply to paragraph 6 (a) of the list of issues

20. The Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) is the official source of poverty statistics in Ireland. The at risk of poverty rate in Ireland in 2022 was 13.1%, an increase on the 2021 figure of 11.6%, but similar to the 2020 pre pandemic figure of 13.2%.³

21. Over the last ten years, the at-risk of poverty in Ireland peaked at 16.9% in 2012, before beginning to fall post-2014 as the country emerged from recession, reaching a low of 11.6% in 2021 during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

22. In the SILC 2022, 17.7% of the population were defined as living in enforced deprivation, i.e. experiencing two or more of the eleven types of deprivation. The consistent poverty rate is defined as those both at risk of poverty and experiencing enforced deprivation. In 2022, 5.3% of the population were living in consistent poverty compared to 4.0% in 2021 and a pre-pandemic rate of 4.7% in 2020.

Reply to paragraph 6 (b) of the list of issues

23. In the 2022 SILC release, the top income decile in Ireland had a 23.29% share of equivalised income, with the bottom 40% accounting for a 22.85% share of equivalised income, giving a ratio of 1.02.

24. The ratio between the total income accruing to the richest decile of the population and the total income of the poorest 40% in Ireland was highest over the last decade in 2012 and 2013 at 1.19. This began to come down from 2014 onwards, reaching 0.96 in 2021. As with the 'at risk of poverty' figures above, due to a break in time series, figures pre- and post-2020 are not directly comparable.

Reply to paragraph 6 (c) of the list of issues

25. On an Exchequer basis, the revenue generated through taxes over the past ten years has amounted to between approximately 83% and 92% of total Exchequer revenue, dropping just once during that period outside that range to 78% of overall revenue in 2015. This deviation relates mainly to a number of additional capital receipts received from the sale of Bank shares that year, which interrupted the otherwise generally rising trajectory.

26. Overall, tax receipts paid have risen significantly, from the €37.8 million received in 2013 to over double this amount in that same ten-year period, reaching €83.1 million in 2022.

Reply to paragraph 6 (d) of the list of issues

27. The Office of the Revenue Commissioners do not compile or publish the percentage of total revenue that is generated from income tax in respect of the richest 10% of the population. Broader information on income rates and standard rates is attached in the supplementary annex to this document.

Reply to paragraph 6 (e) of the list of issues

28. Gross voted expenditure reached over €88 billion in 2022, €32 billion higher than expenditure in 2012.

29. In 2012, gross voted public expenditure stood at 32% of GDP. Although public spending increased across the decade, voted expenditure reduced to 18% of GDP by 2022, due to rapidly growing GDP. As a percentage of GNI*, a more meaningful indication for Ireland, voted spending was 33% in 2022. Under our National Development Plan, capital

³ Note: SILC data relates to income in the previous calendar year e.g. the 2022 results relate to 2021 income data.

expenditure has ramped up significantly from €3.8 billion in 2012 to €11.5 billion in 2022, including capital carry over.

Reply to paragraph 6 (f) of the list of issues

30. In 2020, over €16.5 billion in funding was made available to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, €4.5 billion was allocated to sectors still experiencing the impacts of the pandemic. €1.5 billion in funding will be made available in 2023 for the ongoing response to COVID-19.

31. The amount of direct government support provided during the pandemic amounted to over €32 billion – made up of both higher expenditure and revenue-reducing measures. However, funding of approximately €48 billion was made available in 2020, 2021 and 2022 overall and this included direct public expenditure, tax expenditures as well as ‘below the line’ supports, such as loans and guarantees.

Reply to paragraph 7 of the list of issues

32. A number of Departments, agencies and bodies have roles and responsibilities in relation to anti-corruption policies in Ireland. In December 2020, the Minister for Justice published a cross-government report, the “Review of Structures and Strategies to Prevent, Investigate and Penalise Economic Crime and Corruption”. An all-of-government implementation plan to progress the report’s recommendations was published in April 2021. The implementation of the recommendations will strongly support Ireland’s compliance with our international obligations.

33. The Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) is the main bureau of An Garda Síochána tasked with tackling economic crime. The Anti-Bribery & Corruption Unit (ABCU) is a ring-fenced resource in GNECB dedicated to the proactive prevention, disruption and investigation of bribery and corruption, both foreign and domestic. ABCU is exclusively responsible for the investigation of all credible cases of foreign bribery committed by Irish companies, nationals or persons ordinarily resident in Ireland and for the investigation of domestic bribery and corruption cases of national importance.

34. Ireland has had comprehensive legal protections for whistle-blowers in place since 2014, in the form of the Protected Disclosures Act. The Protected Disclosures Act was substantially revised and strengthened in 2022 by the enactment of the Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act 2022. This legislation gives effect to Directive (EU) 2019/1937 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law. It also provides clear mechanisms for workers to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing and to provide robust statutory protections for workers who suffer penalisation for raising a concern.

Land administration

35. An Bord Pleanála, Ireland’s national independent planning body, provides an arbitration forum in which any decision made on a planning application can be reviewed at the request of the applicant or another interested party. It is also responsible for the determination of applications for strategic infrastructure development and for dealing with proposals for expropriation of land.

Public procurement

36. The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) is responsible for sourcing common goods and services for the public sector, saving both time and money. The OGP operates as a Division of DPER.

37. The OGP has responsibility for the policy framework for public procurement in Ireland. Each contracting authority is responsible for its own procurement activity and managing any resulting contract. Public Bodies are advised to alert the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission to any suspicions regarding bid rigging or collusive tendering. All public bodies are required to publish calls for tenders and contract award information above national advertising thresholds in the interests of transparency.

Tax administration

38. The Office of the Revenue Commissioners serves the community by fairly and efficiently collecting taxes and duties and implementing customs controls. Its mandate derives from obligations imposed by statute, by Government and as a result of Ireland's membership of the EU. The Office of the Revenue Commissioners is committed to maintaining the highest standards in tax and duty administration and in the management of exchequer funds.

Non-discrimination (art. 2 (2))**Reply to paragraph 8 of the list of issues***Legislation and strategies*

39. 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.

40. A review of the Equality Acts is currently being conducted, including public consultations. The review will examine the operation of the Acts from the perspective of a person making a claim under its redress mechanisms, including the level of awareness of the legislation and whether there are practical or other obstacles which deter them from taking an action. A report outlining the findings will be published in 2023.

41. The Government published the Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill 2022 on 27 October 2022. The proposed legislation will criminalise any 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 proposed legislation will also create aggravated forms of certain existing criminal offences, where those offences are motivated by prejudice against protected characteristics, including gender (including gender expression or identity), disability, and traveller ethnicity (which is recognised in the proposed law on the same basis as other ethnicities).

42. NTRIS contains specific actions to combat racism and hate crime against minority groups in Ireland. A key initiative was the establishment of an independent Anti-Racism Committee to strengthen the Government's approach to combatting individual and institutional racism. Following extensive public consultation, including engagement with international experts, the Committee submitted its National Action Plan Against Racism to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on 27 June 2022.

Equal rights of men and women (art. 3)**Reply to paragraph 9 of the list of issues***Article 41.2 of the Constitution*

43. In the 2020 Programme for Government, the Government committed to respond to the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality and to consider whether there should be a referendum on Article 41.2 of the Constitution. That work is underway, including policy proposals for wording of such a referendum question.

Measures taken to tackle stereotypical views about the role and status of women in Irish society

44. The Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality produced recommendations related to norms and stereotypes in education, with focus on challenging the remaining barriers, social norms and attitudes that facilitate gender-based discrimination. A special Joint Oireachtas

Committee for Gender Equality published its report on the recommendations in December 2022. The Government has committed to responding to each of these recommendations.

Outcomes of the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017–2020

45. The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017–2020 was extended to end 2021 in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its objectives were advanced through 139 actions, undertaken by Government Departments and agencies in cooperation with social partners and civil society as appropriate. Key achievements of the Strategy include:

- Ratification of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention, and transposition of the EU Victims Directive;
- Additional leave for working parents of young children and a new childcare scheme;
- Publication of the second Health Service Executive (HSE) intercultural health strategy, and development of a women’s health action plan;
- Support for projects targeting socially excluded women to access education, training and employment opportunities.

Gender pay gap

46. The unadjusted gender pay gap has fluctuated over the past decade, from 12.2% in 2012 to 14.4% in 2017, before falling to 11.3% in 2018, the latest date for which figures are available. Provisional figures published by Eurostat indicate that the gender pay gap has since reduced further, to 10.8% in 2019 and 9.9% in 2020.

47. The National Strategy for Women and Girls included a commitment to introduce a legislative requirement for large companies to publish information on gender pay gaps. This target was met in 2022 by enactment of the Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2022. Organisations are required to indicate the reasons for any gender pay differentials and what measures are being taken or proposed to eliminate or reduce the pay gap.

Measures taken to improve the representation of women within public and political life and in decision-making roles within the private sector

48. The Balance for Better Business Review Group, a Government-supported, business-led group, aims to ensure that more women are represented at board level and in senior leadership teams in Ireland. The most recent report highlighted continued progress across the targets for female representation on boards and in leadership teams, with average female representation reaching 36% for the ISEQ20 companies and 32% across all listed companies.

National Traveller Women’s Forum

49. Annual funding is provided to the National Traveller Women’s Forum (NTWF), which works with Traveller women to enhance their position and work towards full inclusion and equality in Irish society.

50. NTWF engages with a range of policy fora at national and international level, to ensure that issues affecting Traveller women are meaningfully addressed (e.g. via national strategy steering committees and implementation groups).

Cairde’s Roma Education Project

51. DCEDIY funds the Roma Education Programme, which specifically targets adult members of the Roma community (mostly women) who did not have the opportunity to attend school regularly when they were children.

52. This online initiative supports Roma persons to build their everyday reading, writing, and numeracy skills, and aims to empower Roma women in their interactions with employers, health services and statutory bodies.

III. Reply to paragraphs 10 to 29 (Issues relating to specific provisions of the Covenant)

Right to work (art. 6)

Reply to paragraph 10 of the list of issues

53. The Irish labour market has been performing well, with most indicators outperforming pre-pandemic levels and many indicators at historic levels. According to the Q4 Labour Force Survey, there are 2.57 million people in employment, the highest in the history of the series. According to the most recent unemployment estimate, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 3.9% in April 2023 and 7.9% for those aged under 25. These unemployment rates are the lowest in over 20 years.

54. Pathways to Work 2021–2025, Ireland’s national employment services strategy, launched in July 2021 to help those who became unemployed during the pandemic, and those who faced barriers in the labour market prior to the pandemic, to find and sustain quality employment. Pathways to Work builds on the policy objectives of NTRIS to increase the employment rates of people from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds.

55. DSP funds the Association for Higher Education Access & Disability (AHEAD) to deliver the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) Programme and the Get AHEAD Programme to up-skill graduates with disabilities through training.

Employment actions under the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy

56. The NTRIS Employment Subgroup was established in September 2018 to focus on the Strategy’s employment-related actions and address the employment challenges faced by the Traveller and Roma communities. Membership consists of representatives of the Traveller and Roma communities, relevant Government Departments and agencies, unions, employer bodies, and the private sector. The Employment Subgroup also advises DSP on effective engagement and the Pathways to Work Strategy.

Funding for Traveller and Roma employment initiatives

57. DCEDIY provides annual funding for the Special Initiative for Travellers (SIT), which focuses on coaching and assisting Travellers wishing to enter employment. The SIT supports practical approaches to addressing Traveller under-employment, as well as providing support to Travellers already engaged in the Traveller economy.

58. The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), the Government’s primary social inclusion programme, is firmly rooted in the pre-employment space. The programme has worked with over 308 individuals identifying as Traveller or Roma. Of these, 128 have progressed into employment (part and full time), with 67 becoming self-employed.

59. The Department of Rural Community and Development recently announced a call for applications under the Community Services Programme, which supports over 420 community-based organisations.

Right to just and favourable conditions of work (art. 7)

Reply to paragraph 11 of the list of issues

60. The National Minimum Wage seeks to find a balance between a fair and sustainable rate for low paid workers and one that will not have significant negative consequences for employers and competitiveness. As it is legally enforceable, it provides protection for workers.

61. The Low Pay Commission is an independent body with the principal function to examine the national minimum hourly rate of pay on an annual basis and to make recommendations to the Minister.

62. The Government announced the introduction of a National Living Wage for employees, to be in place by 2026. Based on the recommendations of the Commission, it was agreed that the National Living Wage will have no regional or sectoral variations and will be set at 60% of hourly median wages.

63. There has been recent discussion in Ireland relating to national minimum wage subminimum rates and the Minister has asked the Low Pay Commission to re-examine the issues around retaining or removing these rates. The Commission's report and recommendations on this subject are expected during 2023.

Reply to paragraph 12 of the list of issues

64. The Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 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.

65. Even in the limited cases where a zero-hour contract may be issued, the existing body of employment law statutes applies. Once it is clear that a person is working under a contract of employment, on a full-time or part-time basis, that person has the same protection under employment law as other employees. In particular, entitlement to:

- The national minimum wage hourly rate of pay under the *National Minimum Wage Act 2000*;
- Written terms of employment under the *Terms of Employment Information Act*;
- Breaks and rest periods provided under the *Organisation of Working Time Act*;
- Payslips as provided under the *Payment of Wages Act*;
- The protections afforded under of the *Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005*;
- Protection from discrimination under the *Employment Equality Acts 1998–2021*.

66. 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.

67. Under the 2022 European Union (Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions) Regulations, which transpose EU Directive 2019/1152, any employee (including those on zero hours contracts) who has completed their probationary period, and has been in continuous service with an employer for at least six months, may request a form of employment with more predictable and secure working conditions, where available, and receive a reasoned reply from their employer. An employee can make such a request once in any twelve-month period.

68. Section 14 of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 places the obligation on employers to provide Sunday premiums to employees. The Sunday Premium is a national initiative and is not contained or derived from the European Working Time Directive. The premium can be in the form of an allowance, increased rate of pay, paid time off, or a combination of these.

Reply to paragraph 13 of the list of issues

69. The Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee (The McAleese Report) to establish the facts of State involvement with Magdalen Laundries was published in 2013. Following that report, the Government asked Mr. Justice John Quirke to devise a scheme to address the needs of the women who were admitted to and worked in the Magdalen institutions. Justice Quirke submitted his report to Government in June 2013 – The Magdalen Commission Report (otherwise known as the Quirke Report).

70. The Government accepted in principle all of the recommendations in the Quirke Report. These recommendations included the payment of an ex-gratia lump sum to each

eligible woman. The report sets out the amounts which may be paid, which vary between €11,500 and €100,000. By July 2023, €33m has been paid in awards to 824 applicants who qualified under the terms of the Scheme.

71. The Scheme addresses the needs of the Magdalen women. All eligible applicants, in addition to their lump sum payment, are entitled to an enhanced medical card (2015A Card) which they hold for life and a pension type payment – €100 per week if under State pension age, increasing to the value of the State Pension (Contributory) at pension age.

72. The Magdalen Ex-Gratia Scheme remains open. More applications than expected are being received at present and further funding of €300,000 was needed this year to bring the total allocation to €600,000 for 2022. The scheme is a demand-led scheme and it is not possible to accurately predict the number of applications that may be received.

73. On 29 March 2022, Government approved high-level proposals for a National Centre for Research and Remembrance, located on the site of the former Magdalen Laundry in Sean MacDermott St in Dublin city centre. The Centre will not only deliver on relevant recommendations of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation but will also fulfil earlier commitments to develop a national memorial and archives for survivors of Magdalen laundries, Industrial Schools and reformatories.

Trade union rights (art. 8)

Reply to paragraph 14 of the list of issues

74. There are no explicit measures planned to recognise in law the right to strike. Ireland has comprehensive and effective legal protections in place for workers who go on strike. The Industrial Relations Act 1990 provides workers who are taking part in peaceful and legal industrial action with a number of legal immunities.

75. Under the Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977–2021, the dismissal of an employee for taking part in a strike or industrial action is unfair if one or more of the other employees taking part in the action was not dismissed, or if one or more of the other employees who was dismissed was later reinstated or re-engaged and the employee was not, or the employee receives less favourable treatment after reinstatement after a strike.

76. Ireland has a voluntary system of collective bargaining. There is no legal obligation on an employer to recognise or deal with a trade union for the purposes of negotiations on pay and work conditions. Under Irish law, a trade union must have a licence to negotiate on employee wages and other conditions of employment. Any further change to Ireland's industrial relations legislation will be considered in light of recommendations made in the final report of the High-Level Group on Collective Bargaining (October 2022).

Right to social security (art. 9)

Reply to paragraph 15 of the list of issues

Access to social welfare services

77. DSP provides a range of income supports to families to alleviate child poverty, including child-related rates for all primary payments, the working family payment scheme to support low-income families, the back-to-school clothing and footwear allowance to help towards the cost of uniforms and footwear, and the introduction and expansion of the school meals programme.

78. Budget 2023 contained a series of short-term measures to help with the cost of living, including a double child benefit payment in November 2022, with another payment due in June, and additional payments under the working family payment scheme, back-school clothing and footwear and fuel allowances.

SAFE registration and the Public Services Card

79. Among the statutory functions of the Minister for Social Protection is the authentication of the identity of a person to a substantial level of assurance, through a process called “SAFE registration”, and issuing of a Public Services Card (PSC) which can be used as proof of identity when accessing the services provided by public bodies specified in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended.

80. That same legislation provides that a person must have authenticated their identity by way of SAFE registration before they can be issued with a personal Public Service Number and before they can be awarded a social welfare payment by DSP.

81. The SAFE registration service is provided in over 120 Departmental offices across the State; these same offices administer certain social welfare payments and the SAFE registration process is integrated into the application service.

Habitual residence criteria (HRC)

82. Habitual residence in the State is a requirement for receipt of certain social assistance payments and child benefits. It applies equally to all applicants and beneficiaries, regardless of nationality, gender or ethnic background. All individual circumstances are taken into consideration and there is no actual minimum period of residence in the State required.

83. A person who does not have a right to reside in the State cannot be regarded as habitually resident for the purposes of accessing the social protection schemes to which the HRC applies. However, the HRC does not apply to Exceptional Needs Payments or Urgent Needs Payments (both administered under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme) as, by their nature, these payments may be required to meet an immediate and once-off need. Under this scheme, any person present in the State, including asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, Travellers or Roma, can apply to access a payment arising from an exceptional or urgent need. There is no automatic entitlement to a payment as each application is determined by the particular circumstances of the case.

84. The Migrant Consultative Forum was set up in 2012 to afford an opportunity for NGOs to engage with the relevant Department on migrant-related aspects of social protection services, including issues regarding the application of HRC.

Protection of the family and children (art. 10)**Reply to paragraph 16 of the list of issues**

85. The Parent’s Leave and Benefit Act 2019 introduced individual leave and benefit entitlements for each parent of a child in their earliest years. This leave entitlement is now seven weeks for each parent, to be taken within the first two years of the child’s life. In line with the EU Work Life Balance Directive, parental leave will increase to 9 weeks by August 2024.

86. With regard to measures take to improve the provision of childcare, please see replies to paragraph 9.

Reply to paragraph 17 of the list of issues

87. Ireland ratified the Istanbul Convention on International Women’s Day 2019. A range of legislative and administrative measures was required to enable Ireland’s ratification and to support the Convention’s implementation. The Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017:

- Gave all victims of crime, including victims of domestic violence and sexual violence, an entitlement to information about the criminal justice system and their case, and supports special measures during investigation and court proceedings where necessary;
- Enhanced the protections to some of the most vulnerable persons;

- Introduced a statutory definition of ‘consent’ to a sexual act, improving legal clarity;
 - Improved legal protections available to victims of domestic violence and delivers a number of the Istanbul Convention actions, such as introducing forced marriage as a criminal offence and extending access to emergency barring orders.
88. In addition, key provisions of the Domestic Violence Act 2018 include:
- Availability of safety orders to persons who are in intimate relationships but who are not cohabiting;
 - A new criminal offence of coercive control;
 - In cases where a person commits a violent or sexual offence against their spouse, civil partner or intimate partner, the relationship between the perpetrator and victim may be considered an aggravating factor at sentencing.
89. The Criminal Law (Extraterritorial Jurisdiction) Act 2019 was the final legislative action required to enable Ireland to ratify the Istanbul Convention.
90. The Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (DSGBV) has taken direct inspiration from the Istanbul Convention, as the Strategy is structured around the Convention’s four pillars of Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and Coordinated Policies.
91. The Government has approved the drafting of legislation to create a statutory agency dedicated to addressing DSGBV. Key responsibilities will include overseeing refuge accommodation for victims/survivors, preparing and publishing standards for DSGBV service provision, and monitoring adherence to those standards. The new specialist agency will establish a group whose role it is to proof and advise all interventions in terms of intersectionality and inclusivity for socially excluded groups including people with disabilities, migrant women, Travellers and Roma, ethnic minorities, LGBTIQ+ persons.
92. A Victims’ Forum was established in 2022 to facilitate exchange between civil society organisations and the Department of Justice. One aspect of its work is to develop materials to raise awareness of the rights and supports available to victims of crime, including victims of gender-based violence among marginalised and harder-to-reach communities.

Supports for disadvantaged or marginalised women impacted by DSGBV, including in the context of COVID-19

93. In April 2021, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme was reformed to serve vulnerable victims of crime more efficiently and effectively: for example, through removal of Paragraph 10 which prevented compensatory awards where the crime was committed by a member of the same household.
94. The Department of Justice has introduced ‘Victims of Domestic Violence Immigration Guidelines’, aimed at persons subject to abuse by their sponsor in the State. These guidelines recognise that migrants have particular vulnerabilities, as the perpetrator may threaten a victim with the loss of their legal immigration status if they report the abuse.

Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions

95. In November 2021, Government published its strategic Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions, which sets out a roadmap for fulfilling these commitments. This programme of restorative action aims to recognise the failings of the past, provide survivor-centred supports, offer opportunities for reconciliation and healing, rebuild trust, and, at the broadest level, promote the development of a progressive, respectful and equal society.
96. Government has approved proposals for a Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme, with legislation published in October 2022. This Payment Scheme will provide financial payments and health supports to eligible applicants. The legislation is currently progressing through the Oireachtas with a view to establishing the Scheme as soon as possible. This Scheme will be available to survivors living both inside and outside of Ireland and an extensive national and international information campaign will be undertaken.

97. In June 2022, landmark new legislation was enacted to conclusively address the wrongful denial of people's identity rights. The Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022 provides a full and clear right of access to birth certificates, and birth and early life information for all persons who were adopted, boarded out, the subject of an illegal birth registration, spent time as a child in a Mother and Baby or County Home Institution or who otherwise have questions in relation to their origins.

Right to an adequate standard of living (art. 11)

Reply to paragraph 18 of the list of issues

Measures to address poverty and social exclusion (note: reply to paragraph 2 may also be relevant)

98. With regard to older persons, the State Pension is the bedrock of the pension system in Ireland. It is extremely effective at ensuring that pensioners do not experience poverty. Government is committed to ensuring that this remains the case for current pensioners and those nearing State Pension age, as well as carers and today's young employees, including those who are only starting their careers.

99. Under Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland, there is a policy objective to increase and improve housing options for older people to facilitate ageing in place with dignity and independence. Housing for All takes forward the ongoing actions in the "Housing Options for Our Ageing Population" policy statement (2019), published jointly by the Department of Housing and the Department of Health (DHLGH).

100. The actions include the development of a catalogue of housing options that provide choices to meet the diverse needs of an ageing population, spanning owner-occupier, private rental and social housing, whilst providing accessible care and the associated support needs. DHLGH, together with local authorities and the Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), is guiding and delivering age-friendly housing within this framework.

101. Persons with disabilities and older persons were amongst the groups identified for enhanced support during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Community Call initiative was launched as a safety net under the leadership of local government. The established relationships with other state agencies at local level ensured that these priority groups were well supported.

102. The COVID-19 crisis had a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable members of society, including Traveller and Roma communities. In response to emergent needs, DCEDIY provided additional funding to Traveller and Roma representative bodies for provision of necessary services throughout the pandemic. This included short-term funding for interpretation services for Roma healthcare, as well as for the production of public health information materials, in appropriate languages and formats, for the Traveller and Roma communities.

103. Under the European Social Fund+ 2021–2027: Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training ('EIST') Programme, DCEDIY announced grants totalling €2.7 million to promote and provide employment support for migrants in 2022. Seven projects will be delivered across Ireland over the next three years to increase the employability of migrants who may be experiencing barriers to entering the Irish labour market.

Report on the cost of disability

104. The report on "The Cost of Disability in Ireland" (December 2021) was prepared following an extensive consultation with disabled persons and disability stakeholders. This included one of the largest disability surveys ever undertaken in the State.

105. The report identified that additional costs of disability run across a number of areas of expenditure including housing, equipment, aids and appliances, care and assistance services, mobility, transport, communications, medicines, and additional living expenses. The report also found that there is not a single typical cost of disability. There is a spectrum from low to

high additional costs of disability, depending on individual circumstances. For this reason, a whole-of-Government approach is required to address the cost of disability.

Reply to paragraph 19 of the list of issues

106. Housing for All was launched in September 2021. It is a multi-annual, multi-billion euro plan, which will improve Ireland's housing system and deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs. The plan will increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year to 2030. Over 300,000 new homes will be built by the end of 2030, including a projected 90,000 social homes, 36,000 affordable purchase homes and 18,000 cost rental homes.

Housing Delivery

107. The conflict in Ukraine, challenging supply chain issues, and significant inflation on residential construction, has impacted housing delivery in Ireland. 27,000 residential dwellings were commenced in 2022. This is a 12% decrease on the number of residential dwellings commenced in 2021.

108. There was a strong increase in commencements in Q4 2022, which has continued into 2023. 12,987 homes have been commenced in the first five months of 2023, a record when compared to similar periods since the data series began in 2014.

109. Planning permissions data shows more than 34,000 residential dwellings were granted planning permission in 2022, down 20.5% on 2021. Planning permission was granted for 11,659 homes in Q1 2023 (an increase of 37.5% for the same period in 2022). Approximately 30,000 residential dwellings were completed in 2022, 5,400 more than the Housing for All projections and 9,000 more that delivered in 2020/2021. In Q1 2023, 6,716 new homes were completed (an increase of 19.1% on the same quarter in 2022).

Social Housing

110. The focus of the social housing programme is to increase the number of new-build homes, with a target to reach delivery of more than 9,500 new-build homes on average each year to 2026. Recently published data shows that 10,263 social homes were delivered in 2022 through build, acquisition and leasing. This represents an 11.9% increase on 2021 figures, when 9,169 social homes were provided. The 2022 output represents the highest annual output of social homes in decades. Of the 10,263 social homes delivered, 7,433 were new-build, a 43% increase on 2021 figures. This is the highest number of new-build social homes delivered since 1975.

111. The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is a flexible and immediate housing support that is available to all eligible households with a long-term housing need. The Homeless HAP Place Finder Service is a targeted support for homeless households, or households who are at risk of homelessness, and who are finding it difficult to secure HAP tenancies.

Affordable Housing

112. As of 2022, over 500 Cost Rental homes have been delivered with rents at least 25% below the private market rates for comparable properties (to rise to 18,000 Cost Rental by 2030). As of end 2022, local authorities have advertised 471 affordable purchase homes. Delivery of 36,000 Affordable Purchase homes is targeted by 2030. The First Home Shared Equity Scheme was launched on 7 July 2022. At end 2022, 1,004 applications were submitted, 750 applications had been approved, and 137 drawdowns of funds had been made. 8,000 equity supports through this scheme are targeted by 2025.

Rental Market

113. Significant legislative changes have occurred in the Rental Market Sector over the past six years with the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 being modified on ten occasions between 2016 and 2022, including to give temporary protection to tenants during the COVID-19 pandemic (now reversed).

114. Enduring changes include:

- Rent predictability measures to limit rent increases in rent pressure zones until 2024;
- Conditional sales for landlord wishing to sell ten or more properties in a single development (tenants can remain in situ);
- New procedures to be followed in the context of rent arrears warnings and associated tenancy terminations;
- New tenancies after 11 June 2022 become Tenancies of Unlimited Duration once the tenancy has lasted 6 months or more;
- Notice of Termination periods extended for all tenancies, where there has been no breach of tenant obligation.

Supports for homeless persons

115. Housing for All contains four pathways, one of which is to eradicate homelessness, increase social housing delivery and support social inclusion. Housing for All contains 18 actions relating to homelessness. Since the launch of Housing for All, the relevant Department has:

- Established the National Homeless Action Committee;
- Published a new Housing First National Implementation Plan, developed a Youth Homelessness Strategy, and issued guidance to Local Authorities on their Homeless Action Plans;
- Provided €250m in funding to support families and individuals experiencing homelessness;
- Supported a pilot scheme to convert Local Authority emergency accommodation facilities to own-door, permanent social housing tenancies;
- Provided enhanced tenancy sustainment supports to families experiencing long-term homelessness to help them exit from homelessness and maintain their homes.

Reply to paragraph 20 of the list of issues

Persons with disabilities

116. The second joint National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022–2027 (NHSDP) sets out the vision for the cooperation of Government Departments, State Agencies and others in delivering housing and related supports for persons with disabilities.

117. The decongregation of residential institutions for persons with intellectual disabilities is supported by NHSDP. In 2009, 4,000 residents were identified in 72 centres to transition to community living. Department of Health statistics indicate that in 2021, 2,400 of these persons had moved to their own homes.

Traveller communities

118. The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 is the principal statutory basis for the provision of Traveller accommodation in Ireland. The Act requires each Local Authority, following a consultation process with all relevant stakeholders, to prepare, adopt and implement five-year Traveller Accommodation Programmes to meet the existing and projected accommodation needs of Travellers in their areas.

119. Accommodation for Travellers is provided across a range of options and it is open to Travellers to opt for any form of accommodation. These include standard local authority housing, which is financed from the Department's capital allocations for social housing, private rented accommodation or private housing assisted by local authorities or voluntary organisations and Traveller-specific accommodation, which receives 100% capital funding from the relevant Department. Traveller-specific accommodation includes group housing schemes and halting sites.

120. In previous years, it became apparent that the delivery of Traveller accommodation in many Local authorities had become challenging to the extent that available funding was not being fully expended. DHLGH ceased the practice of allocating specific budgets to individual local authorities and implemented a new allocation process following a review of arrangements for the disbursement of funding provision and related supports for Traveller-specific accommodation. Since 2020, it is open to all local authorities to apply for and drawdown funds at any time of the year. Full spend of the Traveller accommodation budget has been achieved for the past three years (2020, 2021, 2022).

121. The relevant Department provides funding to local authorities for measures for Traveller-specific accommodation (including on unauthorised sites) including sanitation, access to water and waste collection.

Right to physical and mental health (art. 12)

Reply to paragraph 21 of the list of issues

Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme

122. The goal of the national Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme is to improve the long-term health and wellbeing of the most disadvantaged communities in Ireland. Based on the 2016 census and using the HP deprivation index, nineteen areas of greatest need were identified across urban and rural locations. The programme takes a place-based approach to tackling health inequalities, with a focus on the determinants of health, and includes targeted supports in areas such as smoking cessation, parenting, nutrition and social prescribing.

Homeless persons

123. The Housing First programme is an expression of the Government's determination to break the vicious cycle between homelessness and ill-health. The Housing First model aims to eliminate homelessness through a person-centred approach, particularly for individuals with a history of long-term rough sleeping, and who have complex needs related to their mental health and substance use.

124. The Housing First National Implementation Plan 2022–2026 provides for the creation of 1,319 additional tenancies over the period of 2022–2026. This represents an average of 264 new tenancies per year, with specific regional targets. To-date, 800 tenancies have been created. In 2023, 60 tenancies were created in Q1 which is on target.

Travellers

125. The HSE and Department of Health published the National Traveller Health Plan in November 2022. To support the delivery of the Action Plan, the Department of Health has provided new development funding of €1.3 million in 2023. This is in addition to the €10 million ring-fenced for Traveller-specific health services each year.

126. Mental health issues pose an increasing challenge to Traveller health and wellbeing. National policies for mental health, *Sharing the Vision and Connecting for Life* recognise that Travellers have specific vulnerabilities and that these should be addressed through the delivery of diverse and culturally competent mental health services. In addition, the National Office for Suicide Prevention provides annual funding for the Traveller mental health service and supports a number of research projects on Traveller mental health.

Access to health-care services for refugees

127. The Department of Health and HSE are currently co-ordinating the provision of health-care services for more than 88,600 beneficiaries of Temporary Protection as part of the Irish Government's humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine. This is in addition to providing healthcare services for 19,600 applicants for International Protection.

128. Under the Temporary Protection measure, Ukrainian refugees are considered ordinarily resident in Ireland for a limited time period and are therefore entitled to access healthcare services, in line with other refugee groups and Irish citizens.

129. A simplified application process is in place whereby Ukrainian refugees automatically qualify for a medical card. Following the initial year of automatic entitlement, renewal will be subject to an assessment of means.

130. International protection refugees also automatically qualify for a medical card, where their application is supported by relevant documentation (e.g. confirmation that they are in receipt of Asylum Seekers Weekly Payment), based on the Personal Public Service Number provided by DSP.

Period poverty and menstrual health

131. The Period Poverty in Ireland Discussion Paper was published in February 2021. The recommendations of the Report include consideration of the provision of free period products in public buildings, through publicly funded services and in education. The most urgent focus is supporting those most in need (e.g. the homeless, those living with addiction, minorities including Travellers, Roma and refugees and those experiencing consistent poverty). Funding of €714,000 was allocated to combat period poverty in Budget 2022, increasing to €814,000 in Budget 2023. The Department and HSE are working with community health organisations, local authorities and NGOs to provide period dignity supports.

Reply to paragraph 22 of the list of issues

132. Free COVID-19 testing was available to everybody meeting the criteria. Access to COVID-19 medication (Paxlovid and Sotrovimab) is also free of charge and based on clinical decisions by a treating doctor.

133. The HSE, the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, Local Authorities and homeless service providers put preventative measures in place to curb COVID-19 infections among people experiencing homelessness. As a result, COVID-19 infections and the death toll remained low. Key components were a well-coordinated government response, increased access to GP and other services, and the expansion of harm reduction and case management. It also included a vaccination programme for those experiencing homelessness and enhanced vaccination for those entering homelessness for the first time.

134. A Traveller-specific response was developed in partnership with Traveller organisations, including a tailored vaccination programme and outbreak control team. A COVID-19 Preparedness Checklist was developed to identify any additional supports required at Traveller Halting Sites or Traveller-specific housing schemes.

135. Ireland's vaccination programme rollout to vulnerable groups, which included Travellers, people experiencing homelessness and refugees commenced on 5 May 2021. The single-dose vaccine was identified as particularly beneficial in protecting these groups.

Reply to paragraph 23 of the list of issues

136. In line with statutory and government commitments, the Review of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 commenced in December 2021. The final Report of the Review was submitted to the Minister in February 2023. It makes a range of recommendations, most of which are operational in nature with some proposing legislative change. The Government has agreed that the HSE will establish an implementation group to progress the operational recommendations, while those proposing legislative change have been referred to the Joint Committee on Health.

137. The Irish Government is committed to ensuring that anyone needing a termination of pregnancy can access services in safety and with privacy and dignity. Progressing Safe Access Zones legislation is a priority for the Government and, to this end, the General Scheme of a Bill was published in August 2022. Drafting of this legislation is now at an advanced stage and the Minister expects to bring a final draft of the Bill to Cabinet in the coming weeks.

138. The free contraception scheme for women aged 17–25 was launched on 14 September 2022 and expanded to include 26-year-olds on 1 January 2023. The scheme will be further expanded to include women aged 30 and under by 1 September 2023. The free prescription contraception scheme is being introduced on a phased basis, as per recommendations, to avoid excess demand on the health care system, to pilot the likely costs of full eligibility more accurately, and to have the time to resolve any issues that arise in the course of implementation.

Reply to paragraph 24 of the list of issues

139. *Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone 2020–30* takes a lifecycle approach to promote positive mental health and build resilience at all stages in life, specifically outlining recommendations to promote positive mental health and wellbeing among children and young people. *Sharing the Vision* seeks to enhance Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), from mental health promotion, prevention, and early intervention to acute and specialist mental health service delivery.

140. The Department of Health is finalising a Mental Health Bill which will contain discrete provisions related to the care and treatment of children, including additional safeguards, an overhauled approach to consent to admission and treatment, and the introduction of guiding principles. The provisions of the Bill will allow young persons over 16 years to consent to mental health treatment in the same way as physical health treatment. The Government expects the Bill to be ready this year.

141. The HSE is committed to age-appropriate placement and to minimising the number of children admitted to adult units, while acknowledging that, in exceptional circumstances, it will continue to be necessary where there is a clear clinical imperative. There were twenty-nine admissions of children and young persons to adult psychiatric units in 2021, and twenty admissions in 2022.

142. The total allocation for mental health services in 2023 is over €1.2 billion. A key objective is to improve access and address CAMHS waiting lists.

Reply to paragraph 25 of the list of issues

143. Developing and implementing a detailed action plan to address the specific health needs of Travellers is a key health action in NTRIS. The HSE played the lead role in developing the action plan, in conjunction with Traveller organisations and the Department of Health.

144. As indicated in the reply to paragraph 21, a national Traveller Health Action Plan has been published. In 2023, the Department of Health allocated €1.3 million for its implementation. Regional action plans are currently being developed. Once completed, a timeframe for the implementation of all actions will be clear.

Right to Education (articles 13–14)

Reply to paragraph 26 of the list of issues

145. In 2022, a significant expansion of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme provided for the inclusion of 322 additional schools and a refined DEIS identification model capturing a greater breadth of disadvantage, including the significant educational disadvantage experienced by Traveller and Roma learners, those residing in centres managed by the International Protection Accommodation Service, and those experiencing homelessness.

146. Over 240,000 students (25%) in over 1,200 schools (30%) are now supported. In 2023, the Department of Education will spend over €180m on DEIS – an increase of over 20% since 2020. In addition, €8 million has been secured under Budget 2023 to address the impacts of COVID-19 on school attendance and retention, especially for those at risk of educational disadvantage.

Retention rates

147. Education retention reports measure the percentage of students who enter the first year of post-primary school in a given year and complete the Leaving Certificate five or six years later. The most recent report (January 2023) shows that 92.1% of the students who entered their first year of post-primary school in 2015 completed their Leaving Certificate in 2020 or 2021, while 97.5% sat the Junior Certificate examination in 2018 or 2019.

Non-discrimination

148. The Department of Education provides a wide range of supports to schools to support inclusion and ensure that all students have their educational needs met, including Traveller and Roma students, and to address barriers to students achieving their potential. Additional measures and supports to combat disadvantage available to all schools include special education teachers, special needs assistants (SNAs), and supports from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

149. In December 2021, a review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 was announced to ensure legislation is up-to-date, fully operational, and reflective of the lived experiences of students and families. Online surveys closed in March 2023 and the 28,000 responses received are being analysed. The review will conclude in 2023.

150. Under the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018, schools must admit all students applying where places are available, and must include a statement in their admission policies stating that the school will not discriminate on any of the nine grounds specified in the Equal Status Act 2000. The DEIS Plan references Travellers as a group at risk of educational disadvantage, and includes specific actions in relation to Traveller and Roma education to promote improvements in school attendance and completion.

151. Previously segregated Traveller provisions have been incorporated into schools and overall funding streams to provide supports for Traveller pupils in mainstream schools. Additional pupil capitation for Travellers at a rate of €75 per pupil at primary level, and €213.50 per pupil at post-primary level, is provided at a current annual cost of €1.3 million.

152. The School Transport Scheme provides free school transport to children with disabilities. In the 2022/2023 school year, over 149,000 children, including over 18,000 children with special educational needs, are transported on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country.

153. The Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations at Certificate Examinations facilitates access to state examinations by candidates who would have certain difficulties because of a physical, visual, hearing or learning difficulty.

154. In November 2022, the Department of Education updated on the implementation of the first phase of the Irish Sign Language (ISL) scheme. The ISL scheme provides ISL in-school support for students who are Deaf and whose primary means of communication is ISL.

Digital inclusion

155. In April 2022, the Department of Education announced the ‘Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027’ with €200 million in associated grant funding committed for all recognised primary and post-primary schools. €50 million funding has already been provided to schools through the ICT Grant.

156. Where children with complex disabilities require essential specialist equipment to access the school curriculum, which they do not already have, or cannot be provided for them through the schools existing provisions, schools may apply to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) under the terms of the Assistive Technology scheme.

Further and higher education

157. The new National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022–2028 was launched in August 2022. The Plan identifies three priority groups who are under-represented in higher education: 1) those

from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, 2) members of Traveller and Roma communities and 3) persons with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities.

158. In 2020/21, there were 33 new entrants and 119 enrolments in higher education from the Traveller community. A new target of 150 new entrants from the Traveller community has been set in the relevant National Action Plan. Members of the Roma community have been added as a new target group, with plans to collect data on Roma persons in higher education.

Reply to paragraph 27 of the list of issues

Oberstown Children Detention Campus

159. Oberstown Children Detention Campus provides care and education for young people referred by the courts on detention or remand orders, supporting them to address their offending and return successfully to society. Its model of care has five pillars: Care, Education, Health, Offending Behaviour, and Preparation for Leaving.

Breakdown of Young People on the Oberstown campus at the end of April 2023

<i>Type of order</i>	<i>Number of young people*</i>	<i>Age 13–15</i>	<i>Age 16–18</i>
Remand	22	8	14
Committal	34	5	29
Total	56	13	43

160. There was a total of fifty-three young people present on campus during April 2023. Three young people served both a remand and committal sentence. This accounts for the figures provided in the above table totalling fifty-six. Twenty-two young people served remand orders and 34 young people served committal orders.

161. Of all young people on campus during April, (53) were male and (0) female. Of those on Remand Orders: (0) aged 13; (2) aged 14; (6) aged 15; (6) aged 16; (8) aged 17; (0) aged 18.

162. Regarding those on Committal Orders: (0) aged 13; (2) aged 14; (3) aged 15; (6) aged 16; (15) aged 17; (8) aged 18.

Child protection and welfare

163. DSP seeks to alleviate and prevent child poverty by providing a range of income supports. Recent Budgets have improved measures to assist low-income families and children, as follows:

- Increases in weekly child-related payments, including the introduction of a higher rate of payment for older children in 2019;
- Increases in the Working Family Payment thresholds to support working families on low pay (including single parent families);
- Increases in the Back-to-School Clothing and Footwear Allowances;
- Increases in the weekly rates of payment for all schemes, including payments for jobseekers, lone parents and persons with disabilities;
- Introduction and expansion of the school meals programme, in line with the Programme for Government commitment to ensure no child goes hungry.

164. The Budget 2023 Expenditure Report notes that lone parent households stand to benefit from a €1,872 annual increase in support. The Department of Finance, in its analysis of Budget 2023, found that single retirement-age households and single parents gain proportionally the most from the Cost-of-Living Measures packages in 2022 and 2023, with social welfare measures contributing the most to these gains.

Cultural Rights (art.15)

Reply to paragraph 28 of the list of issues

165. Ireland has continued to invest in cultural infrastructure to facilitate on-going access to cultural and artistic institutions. From 2011–2018, over €242 million was invested in cultural infrastructure and over €86 million in infrastructure to protect and promote the Irish language. The Cant language was added to Ireland’s National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2019.

166. DCEDIY supports national awareness of Traveller and Roma culture and heritage, and provides annual funding for Traveller Pride Week, International Roma Day and Traveller Pride Awards to showcase Traveller culture.

167. The National Integration Fund promotes the effective integration of migrants and Irish citizens with a migrant background into wider communities. In 2017, grants totalling €1.9 million were made available to 15 projects over a three-year period, and in 2020 approximately €750,000 in funding was made available to 14 projects, with almost €2.3 million in total funding committed to the programme over a three-year period.

168. The Communities Integration Fund provides small grant funding to local community-based projects to support the integration of migrants and host communities. Since its inception in 2017, the Communities Integration Fund has supported over 820 projects with grant funding totalling €3.82m.

Reply to paragraph 29 of the list of issues

169. The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is the Government’s strategy to ensure that every home, school and business in Ireland, regardless of how remote or rural, has access to high-speed broadband. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment and State intervention. In 2012, less than 700,000 premises (out of 2.3 million) had access to high-speed broadband. At the end of 2022, there were 1.96 million premises with broadband subscriptions. Over 90% of premises will have access to high-speed broadband within the next four years.

170. The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce was established in 2016 to identify and overcome barriers to the deployment of fixed and mobile telecommunications services in the State, particularly in rural, isolated and under-served communities. The 2017–2019 work programme addressed more than 70 actions, bringing lasting change around Ireland and reducing the urban/rural digital divide so that all citizens can benefit from enhanced connectivity. The Taskforce was re-established in 2021 with a new three-year work programme to tackle outstanding issues regarding nationwide connectivity.

171. The Adult Literacy for Life strategy was published in July 2021. The strategy’s vision is to ensure that “every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully engage in society and realise their potential”. A number of vulnerable groups were identified during the strategy’s development process for targeted support. These include older adults (55+); Travellers; low paid workers; migrants; persons with disabilities; incarcerated persons and ex-offenders; and international protection applicants.