

# **Ireland's Voluntary Written Submission of Commitments**

## **Summit for Democracy 2021**

Ireland is a parliamentary representative democracy, with a Constitution which safeguards fundamental rights. The Constitution of Ireland is a living document, which can be amended by the people of Ireland to reflect our changing society. Successive Governments have sought to uphold the democracy we cherish.

Ireland is also an outward-looking country, and we have sought - since the foundation of the State - to promote our democratic values abroad, through our firm and enduring commitment to the rules-based multilateral systems.

Reflecting that history, and on the occasion of this first Summit for Democracy, Ireland makes the following commitments:

### **Commitment 1**

#### **Combatting racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance**

**Ireland commits to combatting all manifestations of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance through a combination of legislation and educational measures, in order to promote an inclusive society free from racism.**

Ireland's pledges at the recent Malmo International Forum brought together the holistic approach we are taking to addressing all manifestations of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance, including antisemitism. Our goal is to address intolerance through a combination of legislation and education. This is consistent with Ireland's commitment to equality in our Programme for Government.

Ireland will publish a National Action Plan against Racism before April 2022, in line with our UN and EU commitments. The Plan will consider the review of evidence and will establish a programme, which will build on actions currently included in the Migrant Integration Strategy and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. Ireland is also reviewing our Equality Acts to examine their effectiveness, including through a currently ongoing public consultation.

Furthermore, Ireland has introduced a new Hate Crime Bill which introduces new offences of incitement to hatred, including publicly condoning, denying or grossly trivialising crimes of genocide. The Bill creates aggravated forms of existing criminal offences where offences are motivated by prejudice against a protected characteristic.

Ireland is also working to promote equality through supporting intercultural education. We are further integrating intercultural education in our primary and post-primary curricula, and are supporting learning and teaching about Traveller Culture and History in post-primary schools.

Ireland attaches great importance to the inclusion of civil society. For example, we work closely with representatives from academia and Jewish organisations in our Standing Committee on Holocaust Education, Research and Remembrance.

## **Commitment 2 - Strengthening Democracy**

### **Electoral Commission**

**Ireland commits to the establishment of an independent statutory Electoral Commission, which will assist in protecting and enhancing our electoral system into the future.**

Ireland's Programme for Government commits to the establishment of a statutory, independent Electoral Commission. The legislative provisions for the Electoral Commission are being progressed as part of an Electoral Reform Bill, which also provides for the modernisation of the electoral registration process, the regulation of online political advertising during election periods, and provisions to assist with the holding of electoral events where Covid-19 restrictions are in place.

The establishment of an Electoral Commission will bring about a more cohesive and efficient administration of electoral functions in Ireland. It will assist in protecting and enhancing our electoral system into the future. The Commission will be independent of Government and will report directly to the Houses of the Oireachtas (Parliament). It will be an organisation of substance, taking on a broad range of new and existing statutory functions. These include:

- A new policy research and advisory function to inform and advise both the Government and the Houses of the Oireachtas (Parliament) on electoral issues.
- A voter education and awareness function, working to increase participation in our electoral and political processes.
- A monitoring role in respect of the electoral register.
- Responsibility for the regulation of online political advertising,
- Taking charge of several existing statutory electoral functions from other bodies, including the work of: The Referendum Commission; The Registrar of Political Parties; The Constituency Commission; and Local Electoral Area Boundary Committees.

## **The Future of Media Commission**

**Ireland commits to supporting a strong, independent and pluralistic media sector through a variety of initiatives. The recommendations of the Future of Media Commission will guide the way in identifying a sustainable pathway for the media sector over the next decade and beyond.**

Healthy democracy needs a strong, independent and pluralistic media sector. In recent years, far too often, we have seen how misinformation and the curtailment of media freedoms can have a negative impact on social cohesion, democracy and human rights.

In Ireland, we are fortunate to have a vibrant, independent media that is well regarded and trusted by the public. While Ireland's media system has served society and democracy excellently over many decades, we cannot take its future for granted. With this in mind, last year the Government established the Future of Media Commission, an independent, expert body that was tasked with identifying a sustainable pathway for the media sector over the next decade and beyond. One of the areas that the Commission examined was the interplay between a strong independent media sector and democracy. The Commission has now finalised its report and recommendations, and it is expected that the Government will very shortly be considering and responding to its recommendations.

## **Review of Defamation Act 2009**

**Ireland commits to support free and independent news media by publishing a review of our defamation law and bringing forward a Defamation (Amendment) Bill to implement resulting reforms. The objective is to ensure a balanced approach to the right to freedom of expression, the right to protection of good name and reputation, and the right of access to justice, taking account of the vital role played by a free and independent press in our democracy.**

Ireland ranks 12<sup>th</sup> globally for press freedom, according to the independent Reporters without Borders World Press Freedom Index 2021. The Programme for Government contains a specific commitment to “review and reform defamation laws to ensure a balanced approach to the right to freedom of expression, the right to protection of good name and reputation, and the right of access to justice”.

The review of the Defamation Act 2009 is a legislative priority for the Government. The objective set for the review from the outset was to ensure that our defamation law strikes the correct balance between rights which are protected both by our Constitution and by the European Convention on Human Rights (the individual’s right to their good name and privacy, and the right to freedom of expression, taking account of the vital role played by a free and independent press in our democracy).

Very extensive work has been completed on the review, and the Minister for Justice expects to bring a Report to Government before the end of the year for approval to publish.

A Defamation (Amendment) Bill, to advance the reforms approved by Government following the Review, is already included in the Government’s current Legislation Programme. It is a priority for the Government to get the reform of defamation law right, and to bring forward the required legislation at the earliest opportunity.

## **Commitment 3**

### **Equality Budgeting**

**Ireland commits to mainstreaming the approach to equality budgeting, developing understanding and capacity across all Government Departments, thereby moving towards a full integration of equality concerns into the budgetary process.**

The goal of Equality Budgeting is to provide greater information on how proposed or ongoing budgetary decisions impact on particular groups in society, thereby integrating equality concerns into the budgetary process. By highlighting the impact of government spending on various groups in our society, Equality Budgeting is a key component of the 2020 Programme for Government commitment to develop a well-being approach to public policy. A structured framework attempts to capture the various dimensions of equality in a more holistic manner and to reflect various Government-wide strategies in place, including: ensuring gender equality; ensuring people with disabilities have equal opportunities; promoting integration and ensuring a fair and inclusive society for minority groups; accessibility of health and wellbeing services; equality of access to education; equality of access to housing; providing early intervention through children and youth services; creating a safer and equal society for all; supporting those in lower socio-economic groups and providing better access to opportunities.

The initiative is strongly supported by all parties in the Houses of the Oireachtas (Parliament), with scrutiny regularly coming from the Committee on Budgetary Oversight. It also enjoys support across a multitude of civil society organisations. Development of Equality Budgeting is guided by an Expert Advisory Group that has met regularly for over two years, and includes both internal and external stakeholders. There is an interdepartmental network on Equality Budgeting in which all government departments are represented. In 2019, the OECD conducted a scan of Equality Budgeting in Ireland and delivered twelve recommendations to drive this work forward. Implementation of these recommendations has been ongoing over the past two years. This work also complements and drives forward the Programme for Government commitment to continue to work towards achievement of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

## **Commitment 4**

**Supporting Democracy through International Development Ireland commits to multilateral efforts to support democracy and protect civil society space, including within the EU structures and the OECD DAC.**

In line with Ireland's longstanding commitment to protecting civil society space, Ireland strongly supported the drafting and acceptance of the recent OECD DAC *Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance*. Ireland is committed to implementing its recommendations throughout its development programme. These include, among others, recommendations to:

- Co-ordinate among providers and with international, regional and national bodies to monitor openings and restrictions of civic space, enhance access to and sharing of information, and foster stronger, more coherent proactive and preventive actions.
- Support and engage with international, regional, and national bodies and initiatives that work to respect, protect, and promote civic space.
- Explore and share strategies among providers and with civil society actors to counter mis- and disinformation, harassment, discrimination and anti-democratic narratives targeting civil society.
- Support greater and more inclusive civil society participation in public policy at all levels of partner country or territory governments and with other institutions, including through the use of digital technologies.

Ireland is also an active member of the Governance Network and the Anti-corruption Task Team within the OECD DAC.

As a member of the Team Europe Democracy Initiative Ireland is committed to promoting democracy and human rights worldwide in a common European endeavour. Together with the European Commission and its European Union partners, Ireland will strengthen networks and joint programming of European democracy support and increase the availability of expertise and data on democratic backsliding and effective democracy support activities in the coming years.

In addition to these multilateral efforts to support democracy, Ireland provides direct support to several partners working on democracy through its bilateral and policy programmes. These include partnerships with Transparency International, the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), and several initiatives relating to rule of law.