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Human Rights Council

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Joint Stakeholders' Submission on:

Human Rights in Ireland

Submitted by:

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(NGOs in Consultative Status with ECOSOC)

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. This stakeholders' report is a joint submission of the above-mentioned organizations. The report highlights key concerns related to Human Rights in Ireland in the following areas: **education, birth registration, ill treatment and violence against children, child and adolescent health, the rights of women, and economic and sexual exploitation of children.** Each section conveys recommendations to the Ireland Government.
2. The data and information obtained for this submission came from various sources and includes information from teachers, educators, and other civil society actors living and working in Ireland. All information concerned the period from July 2016 to February 2021.
3. **IIMA** is an international NGO in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. IIMA is present in 96 countries where it provides education to children and adolescents, youth and women, particularly the most disadvantaged and vulnerable.
4. **VIDES International** is an international NGO in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, which is present in 42 countries worldwide. It was founded in 1987 to promote volunteer service at the local and international levels to ensure the implementation of human rights to vulnerable groups, especially children and women.

II. GENERAL REMARKS AND COOPERATION WITH THE UPR MECHANISM

5. This NGO coalition welcomes the constructive participation of Ireland in the 3rd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The present joint submission represents the follow-up to the UPR recommendations accepted by Ireland in 2016.
6. The implementation of recommendations is critical in order to ensure a true advancement of human rights in the State under review. Therefore, special attention should be paid by Ireland to the follow up of recommendations in an effective manner and in consultation with Civil Society.

III. VULNERABLE CHILDREN

7. The most vulnerable groups in Ireland society consist of children and women in difficult situations: children from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds, members of ethnic minorities including Traveller and Roma children, children of color, children with disabilities, and children of single parents.
8. This NGO coalition acknowledges the acceptance of recommendation No. 135.5¹. However, although the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and the Optional Protocol to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography have yet to be ratified, placing vulnerable women and children at risk of maltreatment and sexual and economic exploitation.

¹ Recommendation No. 135.5. “Ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (Georgia)” See Report of the Working Group p.14, UN Doc.A/HRC/33/17 , 18 July 2016.

9. We recommend to the Government of Ireland to:

- a) Promptly Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.**
- b) Promptly Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.**

IV. RIGHT TO EDUCATION

10. This NGO coalition welcomes the significant progress made by the Government of Ireland in the area of education, especially through the Irish Aid Development Education Strategy 2017 – 2023, which provided human rights education and global citizenship courses to 279,550 students in Ireland in 2019, and continues to promote development education for students across Ireland². We also commend the government’s efforts to implement an educational system where families can choose from religious and non denominational schooling, through the “*Educate Together*” initiative, which operates 95 primary and 19 post primary, state-funded, schools³. However, three main categories of children in Ireland are still educationally disadvantaged: children belonging to low income families, Traveller and Roma children, and asylum-seeking and refugee children.

11. **Children belonging to low income families.** Although education is free in Ireland, we are concerned with reports of schools asking for “voluntary contributions” to make up for shortcomings in statutory funding. Parents report that these voluntary contributions feel compulsory, with both parents and children feeling singled out if they are unable to pay. Families are also asked to pay for other school related fees, including school books and school branded uniforms. The inability to pay for such fees places many children at a disadvantage in realizing their right to education, especially children belonging to low income families.

12. **Traveller and Roma children.** We welcome the acceptance of Recommendation No. 135.141⁴, aiming to ensure equal opportunities for all children to quality education. However, we are deeply concerned with the low percentages of Traveller and Roma children enrolled in secondary school, with reports of only 13% of Traveller children and 37.8%⁵ of Roma children completing secondary education, as opposed to 92% of the general population.⁶ Previous interventions, such as the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers, were highly effective in engaging Traveller families to education. Such services were removed due to the recession, and although Ireland has largely recovered from the recession, this vital service, along with other supportive services for Traveller and Roma students, have not been reinstated⁷. Additionally, we note with great concern of the continuous discrimination and bullying faced by Traveller and Roma children by peers and school personnel.⁸

² See Report Irish Aid Development Education- [Layout 1 \(irishaid.ie\)](https://www.irishaid.ie)

³ Information gathered from- [Educate Together - Educate Together](https://www.educatetogether.ie)

⁴ Recommendation No. 135.141. “35.141 Step up efforts to promote to ensure equal opportunities for all children to quality education (Philippines)” See Report of the Working Group p.21, UN Doc.A/HRC/33/1, 18 July 2016.

⁵ Statistics derived from- [Roma in Ireland.pdf \(drugsandalcohol.ie\)](https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie)

⁶ Statistics derived from- [Traveller-Children-and-Poverty Briefing-Paper-2016.pdf \(paveepoint.ie\)](https://www.paveepoint.ie)

⁷ See Report [Education - Key Issues - Irish Travellers Movement \(itmtrav.ie\)](https://www.itmtrav.ie)

⁸ See Report- [Roma in Ireland.pdf \(drugsandalcohol.ie\)](https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie)

13. Asylum-seeking and refugee children- We note with concern that several measures still need to be taken to adequately respond to the specific needs of asylum seeking and refugee children living in direct provision facilities. Children staying in temporary accommodations or in direct provision, do not have equal access to education as children that are not in the direct provision system.⁹ Similarly, direct provision facilities do not have adequate spaces for students¹⁰. Therefore, children are often found doing homework on hotel room floors and common places.

14. We recommend to the Government Ireland to:

- a) Adopt all necessary measures to ensure low income families have the financial support they need to cover school related fees and ensure low income families are exempt from “voluntary contributions”.*
- b) Take remedial action to combat low enrolment rates in schools within the Roma and Traveller community, by providing children with supportive services and reinstating programs such as the “Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers” and the “Home School Community Liaison program (HSCL)”*
- c) Ensure direct provision facilities are safe and adequate for children and families, including recreational and study spaces for young children in asylum seeking and refugee situations.*
- d) Strengthen measures to combat all forms of discrimination and bullying in schools, through education and awareness-raising initiatives.*

V. RIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

15. This NGO coalition is highly concerned with the high rates of homelessness among young people, with a recent increase of 90% in the number of young people ages 18-24 experiencing homelessness¹¹. As of 2019, pre pre-pandemic figures showed approximately 924 young people experiencing homelessness¹². However, it is difficult to identify an exact number of young people experiencing homelessness, since many go unreported. These unreported cases are known as “hidden homelessness” and account for those young people sleeping in sofas with different families and friends¹³. Homelessness causes significant difficulties and challenges in the life of young people, including declined health and unemployment¹⁴.

16. We recommend to the Government of Ireland:

- a) Effectively document the number of homeless young people, including young people in “hidden homelessness situations”, and implement strategies to improve access to housing among young people in Ireland.*

⁹ See Report of the Convention of the Rights of the Child p.14, UN Doc. CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4

¹⁰ See Report-[Children in Direct Provision ‘live in State-sponsored poverty’ - Independent.ie](#)

¹¹ Statistics derived from- [Young People – Ireland’s ‘Forgotten Homeless’ - Focus Ireland](#)

¹² Statistics derived from- [Young People – Ireland’s ‘Forgotten Homeless’ - Focus Ireland](#)

¹³ See Report [Young People – Ireland’s ‘Forgotten Homeless’ - Focus Ireland](#)

¹⁴ See Report- <https://www.focusireland.ie/young-people-irelands-forgotten-homeless/>

VI. CHILD AND ADOLESCENT HEALTH

17. IIMA and VIDES commend government efforts to reduce teenage pregnancy by 60.2% from 2008 to 2018¹⁵.

18. However, in regards to adolescent health, we are deeply concerned with the high number of suicides, self-harm, substance abuse and high prevalence rates of mental health illnesses among adolescents. In 2019, there were approximately 7,429 children and teenagers on a waiting list to see a mental health provider¹⁶. The Covid-19 pandemic, only exacerbated this number, placing adolescents without care at a higher risk for self-harm¹⁷. Additionally, we are deeply concerned with reports of children staying in adult psychiatric facilities, due to insufficient child psychiatric services available¹⁸.

19. We recommend the Government of Ireland to:

- a) In light of the pandemic, improve the quality and capacity of mental health services for children and adolescents and respond to the high demand of mental health services needed by opening more children and adolescent mental health clinics and psychiatric facilities.***

VII. RIGHTS OF WOMEN

20. We welcome the acceptance of Recommendations No.135.91¹⁹ and 136.35²⁰, addressing the gender pay gap and gender role stereotypes in Ireland. However, we are deeply concerned with inequalities for women in the workforce, with 56% of women being employed in Ireland, compared to 68% of men²¹. Additionally, women in Ireland earn 86 cents for every euro earned by men²². The gender wage gap widens in one parent households headed by women. The wage gap is due in part to the fact that women can only work part time because of family obligations²³, ranking Ireland as the third country in the EU with the most hours of unpaid work²⁴.

¹⁵ See Report on Teenage Pregnancies- [Irish birth rates falls by 18pc and teenage pregnancies drop a drastic 60pc, new statistics reveal - Independent.ie](#)

¹⁶ Statistics derived from- [Mental health services for young people need real change \(irishtimes.com\)](#)

¹⁷ See Report- [Not enough being done to prevent youth suicide \(irishtimes.com\)](#)

¹⁸ See Report of the Convention of the Rights of the Child p.12, UN Doc. CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4CRC.pdf

¹⁹ Recommendation No. 135.91. “Continue to take actions to address the issue of gender pay gap, improve the access to decent work for marginalized women, and ensure adequate social protection system for women in vulnerable situations (Malaysia)” See Report of the Working Group p.18, UN Doc.A/HRC/33/17, 18 July 2016

²⁰ Recommendation No. 136.35. “Take effective measures to increase women’s representation in decision-making positions in all areas, close the gender pay gap and eliminate strong gender role stereotypes and ensure that all women workers benefit from the maternity benefits scheme (Namibia)” See Report of the Working Group p.23, UN Doc.A/HRC/33/17, 18 July 2016

²¹ Statistics derived from- [NWCI submission to the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality amended .pdf](#)

²² Statistics derived from- [NWCI submission to the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality amended .pdf](#)

²³ See Report- [NWCI submission to the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality amended .pdf](#)

²⁴ See Report- [NWCI submission to the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality amended .pdf](#)

21. We welcome the acceptance of Recommendation N.136.37 to adopt the draft law on domestic and sexual violence against women, and strengthen support services in shelters and legal assistance to the victims. However, there are still frequent occurrences of violence against women in Ireland. It is estimated that up to 29% of Irish women have experienced domestic violence in Ireland.

22. In 2020, Ireland saw an 87% increase in domestic violence cases due to the Covid-19 pandemic²⁵. Government efforts to support domestic violence organizations throughout the pandemic, by granting them 160,000 euros to assist women victims has not been enough. Organizations feel like more government funding is needed to ensure women are kept from harm²⁶. Additionally, we are highly concerned with the lack of refugee camps. In 2020, Approximately 808 request for refuge from domestic violence situations were not met due to the lack of space²⁷. This evident lack of resources for women in domestic violence situations places their safety at risk.

23. We recommend to the Government of Ireland to:

- a) *In compliance with previous UPR Recommendations No.135.91 and 136.35, effectively and promptly implement existing policies in order to ensure equal opportunities and equal pay for women.*
- b) *Facilitate access to full time employment for women, especially to one parent households headed by women, by providing low cost childcare options.*
- c) *Intensify existing efforts to combat gender-based violence against women, including domestic violence, by opening additional shelters and strengthening supportive services for victims.*

XIII. RIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

24. We note with great concern of the high number of young people experiencing homelessness in Ireland, reported at 760 as of January 2021²⁸. However, this figure is said to be understated because it does not account for those individuals who are “couch surfing”, living with friends, or in transitional housing. Not securing the right to housing for young people can cause significant difficulties and vulnerabilities such as: job insecurity, substance abuse, anti-social or criminal activity, and social-exclusion²⁹.

25. Additionally, we are highly concerned about the high unemployment rates among young people, reported at 45.3% in 2020 for those aged 15 to 24 years.³⁰ These high rates are due in part because of the pandemic, which has impacted the sectors most employed by young people in Ireland. Amidst the pandemic, employers in Ireland are most likely to lay off young

²⁵ Statistics derived from- [2020-06-09 1-rs-note-domestic-violence-and-covid-19-in-ireland_en.pdf \(oireachtas.ie\)](#)

²⁶ See Report- [2020-06-09 1-rs-note-domestic-violence-and-covid-19-in-ireland_en.pdf \(oireachtas.ie\)](#)

²⁷ Statistics derived from- [Further increases in women and children contacting a domestic violence service during the second lockdown of 2020 - Safe Ireland](#)

²⁸ Statistics derived from- [Latest Figures on Homelessness in Ireland - Focus Ireland](#)

²⁹ See Report- [Microsoft Word - Budget 2020-long version \(focusireland.ie\)](#)

³⁰ Statistics derived from- [Half of under-24s in Ireland are unemployed, CSO figures suggest \(thejournal.ie\)](#)

people first and keep employees with more experience and seniority³¹. Young people from disadvantaged areas, those with disabilities and those from ethnic minorities are an especially vulnerable group finding it difficult to secure employment.

26. We recommend to the Government of Ireland to:

- a) *Analyze the impact of the current housing crisis among young people and take measures to ensure higher access to housing and emergency shelter and provide adequate supportive services to ensure young people can secure long term housing.*
- b) *Provide training and educational support, including vocational services, to ensure young people have effective skills for the labor market, especially those in vulnerable groups or situations.*

IX. INDIGENOUS / MINORITIES RIGHTS

27. We welcome the acceptance of Recommendation N.135.146³² to activate the policies of integration of Travellers and Roma in all social, economic, cultural, political, educational and other spheres (Lebanon). However, the application of these policies is inconsistent and at times tokenistic, genuine integration of the Traveller and Roma communities has yet to be realised. When compared with the general population Travellers and Roma experience lower levels of educational attainment, lower levels of employment, lower health outcomes, lower life expectancy, higher suicide rates and higher infant mortality, placing Travellers and Roma communities as the most disadvantaged groups in Ireland.

28. In 2016, the unemployment rate, prior to the pandemic, was reported at 80% among the Traveller community³³. The implications of Covid-19 have only exacerbated these numbers by impacting the occupations in sectors most employed by the Traveller and Roma communities³⁴. Additionally, due to lack of documentation and/or language barriers, the Traveller and Roma communities have found it difficult to access unemployment benefits, training schemes, social protection payments, child benefits, and housing³⁵.

29. We recommend to the Government of Ireland to:

- a) *Reassess and effectively enforce efforts to promote the integration of Travellers and Roma in all social, economic, cultural, political, and educational spheres.*
- b) *Take specific measures to tackle the unemployment rates among the Traveller and Roma communities and make unemployment benefits easier to access by removing language barriers and providing adequate assistance to applicants.*

³¹ See Report- [€190m funding call to tackle youth unemployment \(rte.ie\)](https://www.rte.ie/news/2016/07/18/190m-funding-call-to-tackle-youth-unemployment/)

³² Recommendation No. 135.146. “Activate the policies of integration of Travellers and Roma in all social, economic, cultural, political, educational and other spheres (Lebanon)” See Report of the Working Group p.21, UN Doc.A/HRC/33/17 , 18 July 2016.

³³ Statistics derived from- [IE report-Covid-19 Impact on Roma-FRANET SR 33 \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1)

³⁴ See Report- [IE report-Covid-19 Impact on Roma-FRANET SR 33 \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1)

³⁵ See Report- [IE report-Covid-19 Impact on Roma-FRANET SR 33 \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1)

X. DISCRIMINATION

30. We welcome the acceptance of Recommendation N.135.81³⁶ and efforts taken to promote tolerance and respect for cultural diversity, including projects such as “Africa Day” and the “Sanctuary Runners” to provide the opportunity for people of all backgrounds to come together and learn about each other in a social environment. However, we perceive that the Traveller and Roma communities and people of African Descent continued to be racially profiled and discriminated against in all aspects of life including employment and education.³⁷

31. A survey conducted in 2017 found that the Traveller and Roma communities are 10 times more likely than the White Irish population to experience discrimination³⁸. The Traveller and Roma communities continuously faced discrimination by authorities. In 2019, a report showed that 70% Travellers felt discriminated against by police authorities and 77% of Roma had reported being stopped by the police merely for an “identity check”.³⁹

32. Unfortunately, the increase of Anti-Traveller racism in Ireland has increased, amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the Traveller community has been safely following all Covid-19 guidelines, we are deeply concerned with reports of people stating Travellers are to “blame” for the Covid-19 spread in Ireland and therefore should be “gassed” or placed in “reservation camps”.⁴⁰

33. People of African Descent also continue to face discrimination on a day to day basis in Ireland. Black people in Ireland are 3 times more likely than White Irish to experience discrimination when accessing public services and 5 times more likely to experience discrimination when accessing private services⁴¹. Recent studies have also found that Black non-Irish people were five times more likely to be discriminated against than White Irish groups when looking for work.⁴² This is in part because of discriminatory beliefs in Ireland, such as the belief that some races and ethnic groups are “harder working” than others⁴³.

34. We recommend to the Government of Ireland to:

- a) Investigate and punish discrimination against the Traveller and Roma communities by police authorities and provide anti-discrimination trainings to police divisions across Ireland.**

³⁶ Recommendation No. 135.81. “Implement public awareness campaigns to promote tolerance and respect for cultural diversity (United Arab Emirates)” See Report of the Working Group p.17, UN Doc.A/HRC/33/17, 18 July 2016

³⁷ See Report of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination p.7, UN Doc. CERD/C/IRL/CO/5-9

³⁸ Statistics derived from- [Travellers | Minority Rights Group](#)

³⁹ Statistics derived from- [OHCHR | Make racists feel uncomfortable in Ireland, including politicians and Rogue Police Officers, Experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination say in dialogue with Ireland](#)

⁴⁰ See Report- [IE report-Covid-19 Impact on Roma-FRANET SR 33 \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴¹ Statistics derived from- [Racism in Ireland and the Resurgence of the Irish Black Lives Matter Movement — FAC \(facmagazine.com\)](#)

⁴² See Report- [IHREC CERD UN Submission Oct 19.pdf](#)

⁴³ See Report- [IHREC CERD UN Submission Oct 19.pdf](#)

- b) Raise public awareness on the detrimental effects of hate speech and discrimination among the Traveller and Roma communities.*
- c) Combat discriminatory beliefs and racist practices against people of African Descent and provide formation training on diversity and inclusion to individuals providing services in the public and private sectors regarding the integration of all ethnic and minority groups in Ireland .*

XI. ECONOMIC AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

35. We welcome the acceptance of Recommendation N.135.150⁴⁴ to continue efforts to adopt the National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking. However, efforts to combat human trafficking in Ireland has remained stagnant. The 2008 Human Trafficking Act, amended in 2013, aimed to criminalize human trafficking, sentence perpetrators, and bring them to justice. However, since its amendment, 471 human trafficking victims have been identified, but zero perpetrators have been convicted⁴⁵. The lack of convictions in sentencing perpetrators discourages human trafficking victims from seeking assistance and testifying against their perpetrators⁴⁶.

36. Additionally, we are deeply concerned with reports of Irish authorities reducing victim protection efforts, especially in the area of identifying human trafficking victims, with the number of identified numbers of victims reducing lower and lower each year. It is crucial to provide protection and assistance once victims have been identified, however, in Ireland, victims oftentimes are not provided with adequate and secure accommodation and specialized services⁴⁷.

37. We recommend the Government of Ireland to:

- a) Effectively implement existing legislation and strengthen measures to prosecute and convict human trafficking perpetrators.*
- b) Ensure appropriate measures to provide adequate and secure accommodation and specialized supportive services to victims of human trafficking.*

XII. IMPACT OF COVID-19 TO VULNERABLE GROUPS

38. We observe that the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly impacted two main groups of people: the elderly people and people from low socio-economic and disadvantaged backgrounds.

39. The government of Ireland took several restrictive measures to ensure the public safety of its citizens in its fight against the pandemic. Part of these measures included “Cocooning”, also known as strict social distancing from older people in Ireland. This situation was accepted as it was felt that the sacrifice was necessary to prevent transmission to vulnerable older people. However, a recent study showed that 40% of people in Ireland over the age of

⁴⁴ Recommendation No. 135.150. “Continue its efforts to adopt the National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking (Sudan)” See Report of the Working Group p.17, UN Doc.A/HRC/33/17 , 18 July 2016.

⁴⁵ Statistics derived from- [Ireland - United States Department of State](#)

⁴⁶ See Report- [Ireland - United States Department of State](#)

⁴⁷ See Report- [Ireland - United States Department of State](#)

70, reported a decline in their mental health and 57% of participants reported feeling lonely. These alarming figures highlight the secondary effects of isolation and how they may lead to long-term effects on the physical and mental health of older people.⁴⁸

40. We are also concerned with the inequalities faced by people from disadvantaged backgrounds, amidst the pandemic. Prior to Covid-19, 1 in 7 people in Ireland had an income below the poverty line, including 200,000 children⁴⁹. Individuals in this category seemed to be disproportionately impacted by the virus, as most individuals were laid off, placing them in an even more vulnerable state. Though Ireland will start to slowly go back to normality, those from disadvantaged groups will continue to experience the devastating impact of the pandemic.⁵⁰

41. We recommend to the Government of Ireland to:

- a) Fully analyze the long term effects of cocooning on older people, including its impact on mental health, and provide the adequate services to improve their physical and mental wellbeing.**
- b) Implement a national strategy to combat loneliness among older people in Ireland.**
- c) Address the disparities faced by disadvantaged groups amidst the pandemic and adopt policies aimed at reducing poverty among particular vulnerable groups.**

⁴⁸ Statistics derived from- [The stark health and well-being impacts of 'cocooning' on older people | EurekAlert! Science News](#)

⁴⁹ Statistics derived from [Uneven impact of Covid-19 crisis will lead to increase in poverty | Social Justice Ireland](#)

⁵⁰ Please see <https://www.oxfamireland.org/blog/government-must-tackle-inequalities-made-worse-covid-19>