



## Public Consultation on the Development of the Priorities and Policy Programme for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026

### 1. Submission Form

#### Public Consultation on the Development of the Priorities and Policy Programme for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026

Mandatory questions	
Name	Maeve Taylor
Organisation (if any)	Irish Family Planning Association
Date of submission	12/12/2025
Do you agree to all of the terms set out in this consultation process, including those set out under section 5 and 6?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Respondent type (i.e. individual, NGO, business, academic, local authority, etc.)	NGO
What is your sector/area of work?	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
What is your connection to the issues you are providing feedback on? For example, are you an expert practitioner, person affected by a policy issue, member of the public with a general interest in the topics, etc.?	Expert practitioner/advocacy organisations
Describe your geographical focus in the context of your submission? For example, rural, urban, national or EU wide.	EU wide

## **Question 1 – What should Ireland choose as the high-level thematic priorities for its Presidency of the Council in 2026?**

*Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.*

**Priority 1: Champion sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) within EU policies on overseas development and humanitarian assistance—ensure a focus on SRHR within the EU’s obligations to ensure gender equality and promote, protect and fulfil women’s human rights and eradicate discrimination towards women, adolescents, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ communities and migrants.**

Ireland has implemented progressive laws and policies and been an increasingly strong champion of SRHR within EU and UN multilateral spaces in recent years. As Ireland takes its place on the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Commission on Population and Development, as well as its EU role, and at a time when EU values are being attacked and policy and legal advances in support of the rights of marginalized groups are under threat in many parts of Europe and the world, Ireland’s support for SRHR, as essential to sustainable development and the attainment of the SDGs and as critical to the realization of human rights and democracy will be more important than ever.

This requires both proactively reiterating the human rights values of the EU states with respect to SRHR and international human rights law (IHRL), and, at the same time, challenging both roll-back on these rights and their undermining through initiatives such as the Geneva Consensus Declaration (GCD). The GCD aims to create false equivalences between the normative framework of IHRL and a non-negotiated statement that (1) attacks sexual and reproductive rights under the guise of a purported defence of “traditional families” and (2) aims to limit the application of IHRL by privileging national sovereignty over the principle of the indivisibility, interdependence, inalienability and universality of IHRL.

Ireland should use its role as the EU’s diplomatic voice in multilateral arenas to promote human rights and gender equality, foster stronger coordination among like-minded partners (including global south governments), and build coalitions to promote SRHR and to counter anti-rights and anti-gender narratives.

**Priority 2 Champion the role of civil society and advocacy organisations (CSOs) as critical to the development of EU policy**

Ireland should use the presidency to endorse the vital role of civil society organisations and human rights defenders in sustaining democracy, including their contribution to safeguarding EU values. Ireland should use its agenda-setting role to ensure that the 2025 EU Civil Society Strategy delivers on its promise to foster a vibrant civic space that helps make democracy work for all and reaffirm its call for the EU to engage CSOs in developing, implementing, and evaluating public policy and to provide them with adequate funding and protection.

Ireland should support the continuation and strengthening of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme as a stand-alone instrument within the MFF, under direct management, equipped with an appropriate budget, and maintaining distinct sub-strands for gender equality and women’s rights including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), equality and non-discrimination including LGBTIQ equality. Advocacy must remain an eligible activity in the future CERV programme, as a core function of CSOs and essential to democratic resilience.

**Question 2 – Which particular policy areas and legislative proposals should be a focus of work for the Irish Presidency of the Council in 2026? What should the Irish Presidency aim to achieve in these areas?** *Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.*

Ireland can set the agenda for **development cooperation** so that the EU takes bold and coordinated action, including:

- Uphold and strengthen the EU's political and financial commitments to gender equality and global health, including SRHR, through increased and sustained funding in the current and future MFFs (including through the current NDICI and the future Global Europe Instrument).
- Increase flexible, direct and accessible funding to women's rights organizations and grassroots human rights groups operating at the local level, who are on the frontlines defending rights and delivering essential services.
- Reaffirm financial and political support for UN agencies, including UN Women, UNFPA (both through core funding and support to the UNFPA Supplies Partnership), UNITAID and UNICEF which play a crucial role in advancing gender equality and access to SRHR.
- Set a tone of support for the mandates of UN Women and UNFPA as critical to the success of reform of UN80 and ensure UNFPA has a seat at the table.
- Recommit to the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on SRHR in sub-Saharan Africa, by scaling up funding to ensure long-term, predictable support for comprehensive, rights-based SRHR programming, including new jointly-funded SRHR programmes with the European Commission and/or other Member States; reinforce leadership in coordination with European actors and allies and partners in Regional Economic Communities; and ensure meaningful involvement of civil society - especially local organizations - as essential partners and advocates for gender equality, SRHR and human rights;
- Make strong commitments to the upcoming replenishments of the Global Fund to Fight HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to ensure continuity of life-saving services and equitable health access.
- Engage with like-minded Member States to ensure that Gender Action Plan IV is as ambitious as GAPIII and retains its three key principles (intersectionality, human-rights based approach and gender-transformative approach), its targets for both gender mainstreaming and gender-targeted actions, and its inclusion of SRHR.
- Monitor the implementation of the Global Health Strategy by the European Union and Member States, including when it comes to UHC and SRHR.

**For policies relevant to EU countries:**

- Adopt an ambitious Trio Declaration on Gender Equality – with commitments on SRHR.
- Ensure the implementation of the directive on violence against women and domestic violence: the implementation workshop on prevention planned in September 2026 should include comprehensive sexuality and consent education and should draw on civil society expertise.
- Implement the new Gender Equality Strategy and other Equality Strategies. Propose and adopt Council Conclusions on the Union of Equality Agenda, gender equality issues, including SRHR, CSE, combating all forms of SGBV. Encourage the European Commission to publish Recommendations to Member States on the provision of SRHR, comprehensive sexuality education, and combating all forms of SRHR violations and obstetric and gynaecological violence, and endorse them.
- MFF: Ensure funding for civil society through CERV+ strand of AgoraEU, including operating grants and funding for advocacy, with sufficient and earmarked funds for CSOs, and for gender equality / GBV.
- Contribute to a gender-responsive implementation of the Civil Society Strategy and the Democracy Shield.

**Question 3 – How can the work of the Council during the term of the Irish Presidency make the most substantial positive impact for people, businesses and communities across the EU?**

*Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.*

**Strong political leadership for gender equality and gender-transformative policymaking**

- Active prioritisation of gender equality, bodily autonomy, and SRHR issues, e.g. through organisation of high-level events on these topics.
- Counter anti-rights opposition in the Council of the EU and systematically support gender equality and SRHR language in Council's documents.
- Monitor and condemn any negative developments pertaining to women's rights in EU Member States.

**Work with and support civil society organisations**

- Meaningfully consult, engage with, give a platform to diverse civil society voices, and speak out in defence of CSOs under attack. Reject any harmful narratives against CSOs, their advocacy, or their funding.

**Funding**

- The most substantial positive impact the Council can make is through adopting a good position on the MFF and especially on relevant programmes for SRHR and gender equality (AgoraEU and Global Europe Instrument).
- Support the budgets proposed by the EC for Global Europe and CERV+ and make sure that SRHR and gender equality are sufficiently funded in those two programmes.
- Ensure gender budgeting through the MFF and conditionality based on respect for fundamental rights and the rule of law.

**Question 4 – How can we best communicate the values and benefits of EU membership to its citizens and create a sense of ownership, amongst citizens, over Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU?**

*Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.*

**Public communications**

Develop a values-based communication strategy that consistently reinforces Ireland's commitment to IHRL, democracy, civil society space and multilateralism. Ensure these values are clearly articulated in the terms of reference for all presidency comms and integrated into statements, socials, images, events and media.

**Promote and defend international human rights law as non-negotiable**

- (1) Consistently defending the values of the EU and the norms of IHRL in all spaces where Ireland has a chairing or agenda-setting role.
- (2) Using the presidency and the diplomatic channels this will open, clearly and robustly draw attention to:
  - (1) attacks on IHRL, DEI, on the ECHR and on EU values;
  - (2) the intent of such attacks to roll back progress in rights, diminish respect for marginalised groups and to reinforce prejudice and discrimination, whether directly or indirectly, within systems, structures, policies and laws;
  - (3) and the harms of such attacks to the most marginalised, disadvantaged and vulnerable women and girls, LGBTQI+ individuals, people with disabilities and vulnerable migrants.

### Question 5 – Any other comments

*Respondents are welcome to submit additional information alongside Submission Form. However, in such cases, respondents must provide a summary of the additional information under the 'Any other comments' question. This summary should also be limited to a maximum of 500 words.*

#### **Public support for Ireland to champion gender equality and SRHR is strong.**

A Red C omnibus online poll of 1003 adults conducted between 4th and 10th September 2025 shows strong public support for the priorities proposed in this submission. The poll included six statements relating to Ireland's global role with respect to gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

##### **Statement 1**

60% of respondents agree that **Ireland should prioritise funding for global development programmes that support the rights and empowerment of women and girls in other countries.**

This sentiment is shared by men (58%) and women (61%), with equal levels of support in urban (59%) and rural (61%) areas. Support for this statement is in the low 60% for Dublin, rest of Leinster and Munster, with lower support in Connaught/Ulster (48%).

##### **Statement 2**

67% of respondents agree that **gender equality should remain a core part of Ireland's foreign policy.**

There is stronger support amongst women (73%) than men (61%). Support is higher in urban (69%) than rural (62%) areas. At regional level, support is in the 60s, ranging from 69% in Dublin to 63% in Connaught/Ulster.

##### **Statement 3**

66% of respondents agree that **Ireland should use its influence in international organisations like the United Nations (UN) to promote gender equality worldwide.**

This sentiment is supported by 63% of men and 69% of women. Support is the same regardless of whether people live in urban (66%) or rural (67%) areas. Regional support ranges from a high of 71% in Munster to 58% in Connaught/Ulster.

##### **Statement 4**

70% of respondents agree that **Ireland has a responsibility to support the rights of women and girls globally, including their right to make decisions about their own bodies and health.**

There is a noticeable gender difference in support, with 76% of women in agreement, compared with 64% of men. Support is similar amongst urban (71%) and rural (69%) dwellers. Regional support is 74% in Munster, 72% in Dublin, 70% in Rest of Leinster and 62% in Connaught/Ulster.

##### **Statement 5**

57% of respondents agree that **Ireland should continue to fund programmes around the world that support reproductive rights.**

Support for this sentiment is similar amongst men (56%) and women (58%). 58% of urban dwellers and 55% of rural dwellers agree with this statement. Regional support ranges from 60% in Munster to 55% in Connaught/Ulster.

**Statement 6**

63% of respondents agree that **Ireland should advocate at the United Nations (UN) for access to sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion, as a human right.**

There is stronger support amongst women (66%) than men (59%) for this statement. Urban/Rural support stands at 64%/60%. Regional support is 69% in Rest of Leinster, 66% in Munster, 62% in Dublin and 50% in Connaught/Ulster.