

2017—

Strategic Framework

2022



## IFPA Strategic Framework 2017 to 2022 — Chairperson's Statement

The Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA) Strategic Framework 2017–2022 is a bold and aspirational vision of what the IFPA plans to achieve and how we will achieve it over the next five years.

It is the culmination of an extensive consultative process involving IFPA members, staff and collaborating partners. It is also guided by evaluations and analyses of our work, strengths, weaknesses, capacities, resources and networks. The Strategic Framework was approved by the IFPA's Board of Directors in October 2016.

The Strategic Framework responds to sexual and reproductive healthcare needs in Ireland, including significant social and economic inequalities in accessing contraceptive services; the violation of women's reproductive rights through discriminatory abortion laws; inadequate State responses to sexual health service provision and significant barriers to high-quality and comprehensive sexuality education.

The Strategic Framework sets the priorities that will allow the IFPA to deliver impact as a leading sexual and reproductive health and rights organisation in Ireland. It will guide us and our partners in formulating programmes to respond to the identified needs. It also provides IFPA staff with a structure to influence policies and laws that are harmful to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and incompatible with international best healthcare practice.

For over 40 years the IFPA has been at the helm of the sexual and reproductive health and rights movement in Ireland. Over the next five years, the IFPA will continue to be a leading voice and to support the actions and achievements of sexual and reproductive health champions in Ireland.

## Our Vision

# A society where all people can make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive lives.

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## Our Core Values

Our core values guide the way in which we undertake our work.

**The IFPA believes:**

- In full access to high quality information, education and health services regarding sex, sexuality, conception, contraception, safe abortion and sexually transmitted infections.
- In the right to decide freely on the number and spacing of children, so that every pregnancy is a wanted pregnancy.
- That abortion services should be accessible as early as possible and as late as necessary.
- In equal rights for all people and their empowerment in obtaining full participation in, and benefit from, social, political and economic development.
- In the right to enjoy a fulfilling, positive and healthy sexual life.
- In working in alliance with all those who share our aims and in co-operation with interested governmental and non-governmental bodies.
- In high performance, ethical standards and transparency throughout our organisation.

## Priority objective 1

**Ensure that the IFPA is governed in such a way that it effectively achieve its objectives.**

The IFPA is committed to strong and transparent governance policies and procedures, which are essential to the sustainability, accountability and effectiveness of the organisation.

The IFPA will continue to provide transparency and accountability to its stakeholders through its AGM, annual report, website, social media and other public communications. The IFPA will continuously review its governance policies and its Memorandum and Articles of Association to ensure that appropriate, well-functioning checks and balances are in place and that the organisation is at all times compliant with the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015, the Charities Act 2009 and the Companies Act 2014, as well as with the following voluntary NGO governance codes: Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP); Dóchas Fundraising and Governance Codes; Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages; and the governance obligations as a Member Association of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).

## Priority objective 2

**Change IFPA clinical services from mostly family services to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services.**

Family planning medical services have to a large extent been incorporated into the Irish healthcare system. While this is a welcome development, it is one that poses challenges for the IFPA. Demand for IFPA clinical services has diminished to the point that stand-alone family planning clinics are no longer financially viable. However, the mainstreaming of family planning does not eliminate the need for confidential, non-judgmental specialist family planning services, particularly among young people, who still face significant legal and cost barriers to contraceptive services.

Our credibility as an advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) has always been linked to our role as a key service provider.

In order to remain at the forefront of SRH service provision in the longer term, our clinical services must evolve and change. We will broaden our range of services and introduce innovative ways to provide current services. We will identify sources of funding to establish new services, train existing staff and recruit specialist staff where appropriate.

In the short term, the IFPA will develop a marketing strategy aimed at increasing awareness of the IFPA's medical services and increasing annual client attendance. This strategy will include an integrated marketing approach, including developing the client base by promoting the values and experience of the IFPA as a sexual health provider and champion of reproductive rights. We will also conduct a review of the IFPA name and explore possibilities for change.

## Priority objective 3

### **Improve quality, planning, delivery, consistency and accountability in the provision of IFPA services.**

IFPA clients, SRHR advocates, providers of sexual and reproductive health services, policy makers and policy influencers all look to the IFPA to provide the benchmark for high quality service provision based on best international rights-based practice.

Restrictive interpretation of laws on SRHR act as a barrier to access to services. The IFPA will review its medical and counselling policies and protocols to ensure the best possible balance between legal restrictions and reproductive rights.

The IFPA will review its policies and protocols to ensure that IFPA services (both medical and pregnancy counselling services) (1) have completed a formal clinical risk management assessment; (2) are consistently delivered to the highest possible quality standards; and (3) comply as far as possible with international best practice.

Technological innovation and changes in societal attitudes and behaviours mean that sexual and reproductive health service needs are constantly evolving and changing. In order to be responsive to emerging issues and changing contexts, the IFPA will (1) review and implement the recommendations from the evaluation of the IFPA National Pregnancy Helpline; (2) research the possibility of delivering pregnancy counselling online; (3) develop a detailed harm reduction strategy in response to the provision of medical abortion pills online; and (4) develop client factsheets on medical abortion based on best practice guidelines. We will articulate our ethical approach to providing additional supports to women who require assistance to vindicate their right to travel for an abortion.

## Priority objective 4

### **Advance a health promotion approach to sex, sexuality, contraception and unplanned pregnancy through information, education and campaigns.**

Irish policy making has not reflected the positive and respectful approach to sex, sexuality and sexual health advocated by the World Health Organisation. The 2015 National Sexual Health Strategy (NSHS), however, sets out actions to comprehensively improve sexual health information and education as well as actions to remove stigma. This provides a framework for policy dialogue with the HSE, within which the IFPA can promote its vision for sexual and reproductive health.

The IFPA will support the implementation of the NSHS by (1) developing a post-graduate course on sexuality and sexual health education with DCU; (2) continuing to develop and expand our Speakeasy and Speakeasy Plus training programmes; (3) supporting organisations involved in the delivery of sexuality education by providing educational resources, including information leaflets, posters, infographics, videos, sexuality education teaching kits and training courses; (4) delivering expert training to medical professionals through its bi-annual Contraception Foundation Course for

Nurses and Midwives; (5) exploring the possibility of developing online sexuality education courses; and (6) participating in the communications and advisory working groups set up by the HSE to support the implementation of the NSHS.

The IFPA will use its position on the NSHS advisory and communications working groups to promote a more holistic approach to SRHR and the use of best international practice.

Many sexual and reproductive health issues that the IFPA regards as priorities are not covered by the NSHS. The IFPA will (1) continue to lead a public campaign to promote uptake of free cervical screening through the annual Pearl of Wisdom campaign, with integrated communications strategies and the involvement of public champions, key opinion formers and media outlets; (2) advocate for comprehensive and rights-based sexuality education in schools; (3) collaborate with other NGOs on service and social media actions for Sexual Health Awareness and Guidance Week, Irish AIDS Day and World AIDS Day; (4) support, through social media and online actions, key calendar dates such as: International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM, International Women's Day, International Day for Maternal Health and Rights, International Day of the Midwife, International Day to End Obstetric Fistula, International Menstrual Hygiene Day, World Refugee Day, World Population Day, World Sexual Health Day, World Contraception Day, Global Day of Action for Access to Safe and Legal Abortion, International Day of the Girl, World Menopause Day, World Vasectomy Day and European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week.

## Priority objective 5

### **Promote positive public discourse on the right to access abortion services.**

Media and political attention to abortion in Ireland has expanded substantially in recent years. Public and political discourses have moved beyond a narrow conservative frame and are beginning to shed some of the stigma attached to abortion.

However, the deficit of Irish medical experience with abortion and the lack of a rights-based discourse continue to pose problems. These deficits are significant barriers to progressive social and legal change. The IFPA will work to promote discourses that are non-stigmatising and that position abortion rights as a matter of human rights and as a social good.

The IFPA will promote an informed discourse based on international best practice and women's right to health, and challenge the over-representation of "tragic" and exceptional abortion cases. We will make the case for the provision of safe and legal abortion services within the Irish healthcare system.

All our communications will be professional, moderate and based on the IFPA's role as a service provider and our clients' experiences of restrictive sexual and reproductive health laws and policies.

Research indicates that women who have had abortions and medical professionals are the most trusted sources of information on abortion. We will increasingly draw on research from our pregnancy counselling, medical and educational services to highlight women's and girls' experiences of the denial of abortion services in Ireland.

The IFPA will develop a Style Guide on Abortion for the media and provide ongoing support by presenting clear alternatives to stigmatising language and images which are grounded in client and service provider experience. A related Code of Ethics on Images and Messages on Abortion will also be developed in collaboration with other NGOs. This code will provide a framework from which to challenge diverse forms of abortion stigma within the media and will set clear guidelines for best practice.

## Priority objective 6

### **Hold the State accountable at the UN and European level to bring its laws and policies on SRHR, in particular abortion, into conformity with international human rights law and commitments under international agreements.**

Women in Ireland are denied full enjoyment of the reproductive health rights that is guaranteed by international human rights law. Ireland is regularly examined by UN human rights monitoring bodies, whose criticisms of Irish abortion laws have become more trenchant and directive in recent years.

The IFPA will bring evidence from our services to these processes. The IFPA will present information on the harms of Irish abortion laws, and the ways in which law and policy in relation to access to contraception and to sexuality education fail to comply with the requirements of the right to health. We will work within civil society to ensure that further and more specific criticisms continue to be made by human rights bodies and that these are widely publicised in the media. We will support the All Party Oireachtas Group on SRHR (APG) to highlight the reports of UN bodies more effectively within the Oireachtas and to work for their implementation. Where appropriate cases arise, we will support litigation in the courts to challenge restrictive SRHR laws.

The Irish Government has a role in the development of policy on SRHR at the intergovernmental level, within the European Union and at the United Nations, in particular at the UN Human Rights Council. The IFPA will monitor Ireland's positioning on SRHR at the intergovernmental level and work to ensure that such positioning is progressive and rights-based.

We will also monitor the implementation of commitments to SRHR within Ireland's overseas development policy.

In the absence of a specific Irish Aid policy on SRHR, there are no clear accountability mechanisms in regard to SRHR in intergovernmental or development policy. Parliamentary scrutiny of Ireland's role in this regard is particularly important. We will support the APG to highlight relevant issues and to engage with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of State for Development. We will work closely with international organisations in this regard, in particular the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the Countdown 2030 Europe Consortium, the IPPF, EuroNGOs and the European Parliamentary Forum (EPF).

## Priority objective 7

### **Secure support across the political, health and civil society spheres for access to abortion services in Ireland.**

Reform of Ireland's abortion laws requires repeal of Article 40.3.3, or the Eighth Amendment, of the Irish Constitution. Ireland's current abortion laws have led to a situation where political, public and health sector discourses on abortion in Ireland are lacking an informed, rights-based health perspective. Without such a perspective, any laws or policies developed to permit abortion services (once constitutionally possible) are likely to be flawed. Changes in law, policy and practice on SRHR require political support for the introduction of measures and for monitoring their implementation and effectiveness in practice.

The IFPA will work with allies in civil society to ensure that we add value to campaigns without losing the IFPA's distinctive position to advocate for effective measures to ensure access to abortion.

Through its work as secretariat of the APG, the IFPA will engender cross-party political support for abortion rights and rights-based service provision by providing information and analysis, and creating spaces for knowledge building and discussion.

Within the APG and other safe, confidential spaces, we will provide opportunities to develop understanding among key influencers. This will involve informing actors in health policy, activism, media, civil society and the Oireachtas of the health, medical ethics, legal and rights considerations that should underpin legal and policy change, in order that women can have access to rights-based abortion services.

The IFPA will enhance the capacity of allies that are well positioned to highlight the ways that the abortion ban affects maternity services and harmfully restricts access to care and treatment for pregnant women. We will draw on international human rights norms, best health care practice and work with international organisations.

Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution impacts not only on access to safe and legal abortion, but on the care and treatment of pregnant women and on Irish maternity services more generally. The IFPA will support and work to enhance the capacity of organisations and groups that are best positioned to raise awareness of these impacts.

In all our work towards this objective, the IFPA will draw on international human rights norms and standards and best international healthcare practice, and work, as appropriate, with international organisations that share our values and goals.

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