Ireland's Submission on the Implementation of the Agreed Conclusions on 'Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work'

29 September 2021

1. ***Strengthening normative and legal frameworks (paragraphs 40 (a) to (j))***
   - *What specific actions have been taken to enact, strengthen and enforce laws and regulatory frameworks that ensure gender equality and prohibit discrimination against women in the world of work?*
   - *What specific actions have been taken to enact, strengthen and enforce laws and regulations that uphold the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value in both the public and private sectors?*
   - *What measures have been taken to enact, strengthen and enforce laws and policies to eliminate all forms of violence and harassment against women in the world of work and provide means of effective redress in cases of noncompliance?*

Implementation of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty under Section 42 of Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014.

All public bodies in Ireland, including Government Departments and state agencies, have responsibility under the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty established by Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014[1] to prevent discrimination and promote equality and the human rights of opportunity of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. Since 2016 the national human rights institution, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) has engaged extensively with public bodies to raise awareness of the duty and support effective implementation. This included the publication in 2019 and 2020 of guidance for public bodies, while information sessions and webinars have also been conducted.[2]

Equal Pay

The Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021[3] will implement a Government commitment to enhance pay transparency. Employers will be required to calculate and publish information relating to the gender pay gap, initially in firms of 250 or more employees with this threshold reducing to 50 when the legislation is fully operational. Work is ongoing on the preparation of regulations to give effect to this legislation.

Violence and Harassment of Women in the World of Work

In 2019, Ireland ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention. Ireland plans this year (2021) to ratify the ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the workplace.

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[1] http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2014/act/25/section/42/enacted/en/html
[2] https://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty/
[3] http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2021/act/20/enacted/en/print.html

A review of Ireland's Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence[4] is being conducted for the Department of Justice, with public consultation to inform the development of the Third National Strategy.

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has begun consultations on a scheme of domestic violence leave, to get a better understanding of the needs of employees and employers in terms of such leave. Legislative proposals will be developed following this process.

In June 2021, the Higher Education Institutions published action plans aimed at ending sexual violence and harassment, in line with the sector's 'Framework for Consent'[5] which focuses on institutional culture, processes, policies and targeted initiatives.

Parent's Leave scheme

First 5[6] is a whole-of-Government strategy to improve the lives of babies, young children and their families. It is a ten-year plan to help ensure that all children have positive early experiences and get a great start in life.

A key objective of *First 5* is to provide access to a broader range of options for parents to balance working and caring, in order to ensure children can spend more time with their parents, especially in their first year. *First 5* sets out plans to develop a new Parent's Leave scheme, along with extensions to Parental Leave entitlements along with other measures to allow parents to develop greater family-friendly flexible working arrangements.

Delivering on this objective, the Family Leave and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2021[7] provides working parents with an entitlement to an additional five weeks of paid Parent's Leave for each parent. The *First 5* commitment is to extend this further, and this is further underscored by the EU Work Life Balance directive, which will be incrementally transposed over the coming years. Parental leave also entitles parents to take unpaid leave from work to spend time looking after their children. Since 2020, parents can take 26 weeks' parental leave for each eligible child before their 12th birthday.

State Investment in Early Learning and Childcare

Improving the availability and reducing the cost of Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) helps to remove barriers to female labour market participation and contributes to the reduction of child poverty. These factors inform the rationale for the Programme for Government's[8] commitment to reforming the ELC/SAC system to create one that brings together the best of community and private childcare provision, is focused on children's rights and quality outcomes, reduces inequalities, supports staff retention, and substantially reduces costs to parents.

State investment in this sector has increased by an unprecedented 141% since 2015. This funding has been used to remove barriers to access so that children can enrol and meaningfully participate in high-quality ELC/SAC. In addition, the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) pre-school programme provides for ELC provision for all children in the two years before they begin primary school for fifteen hours per week,

[4] http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Second%20National%20Strategy%20on%20Domestic,%20Sexual%20and%20Gender-based%20Violence%202016%20-%202021.pdf/Files/Second%20National%20Strategy%20on%20Domestic,%20Sexual%20and%20Gender-based%20Violence%202016%20-%202021.pdf
[5] https://assets.gov.ie/24925/57c394e5439149d087ab589d0ff39c92.pdf
[6] https://first5.gov.ie/
[7] http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2021/act/4/enacted/en/html
[8] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/

entirely free for parents. Families may also be entitled to subsidies under the National Childcare Scheme (NCS)[9] –further details below.

First 5 commits to at least doubling investment in ELC and SAC in the decade to 2028. A new funding model will be a key vehicle to ensure that such significant additional investment delivers for children, families and the State. The new funding model will be the framework for additional investment in services in return for clear evidence of quality and affordability to ensure effective use of public funding.

An Expert Group has been leading the work on developing this new funding model since 2019. The Group is independently chaired and includes national and international experts in ELC and SAC systems, funding, quality, economics, and relevant policy experts from the Government Departments who will be involved in implementing the new funding model. The Group will be providing their report and recommendations to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in November 2021.

Financial Support for Childcare

Historically, childcare costs in Ireland have been found to be a factor in contributing to low levels of participation in employment, education and training for mothers, particularly for lone parents.

The National Childcare Scheme (NCS) opened on 20 November 2019. The scheme represents the first ever statutory entitlement to financial support for childcare in Ireland and offers childcare subsidies for babies as young as 24 weeks old. The NCS makes childcare much more affordable, and in some instances free to parents.

The scheme aims to:
- improve outcomes for children,
- reduce poverty,
- facilitate labour activation, and
- tangibly reduce the cost of childcare for tens of thousands of families.

The underpinning policy for the NCS was informed by national and international evidence and advocacy on measures to prevent poverty (including inter-generational poverty).

Parents who are working, studying or transitioning in and out of work or study qualify for the maximum subsidised hours under the NCS (45 hours). The applicant or their partner can qualify for subsidies for these full hours if they engage in work for a minimum of two hours per week or are enrolled in a Level 1 training programme on the NQF. If the household earns less than €26,000 per annum NET, this effectively means that their ELC and SAC up to 45 hours per week is very low cost (free in some instances, requiring a small top up in others).

The NCS is designed to be flexible and accommodate busy parents' lives. The attendance rules for the scheme facilitate the need for flexibility and recognise that, in practical terms, parents are constrained by commuting schedules, traffic and other individual circumstances.

The scheme acknowledges that childcare needs differ widely across different families. That is why the subsidies are offered on an hourly basis. Parents and childcare providers continue to agree childcare requirements amongst themselves and the NCS allows for flexible arrangements to be made depending on the parents' needs.

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[9] https://www.ncs.gov.ie/en/

Work is progressing on a new funding model for the early learning and childcare sector. This work is being led by an Expert Group, due to report later this year (2021), who are tasked with designing mechanisms to deliver additional funding to ensure greater levels of affordability, accessibility, quality and inclusion.

2. *Strengthening education, training, and skills development (paragraphs 40 (k) to (n))*

- *What measures have been taken to mainstream a gender perspective into education and training programmes in order to facilitate the effective transition from education or unemployment to work?*

Equality Budgeting

A pilot programme of equality budgeting was introduced by Government in six policy areas for the 2018 budgetary cycle, including in the Department of Education and Skills. The further expansion of this initiative announced by Government in March 2021 will see equality budgeting extending to all Departments. [10]

Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions

Higher education legislation requires institutions to promote gender-balance among students and staff, and for the Higher Education Authority (HEA) to promote the attainment of equality of opportunity.

The HEA monitors Higher Education Institutions' (HEI) performance as part of an annual review process.

The HEA Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was established in 2019. The Centre's objective is to ensure sustainable acceleration towards gender equality through centralised support for HEIs and dissemination of good practice.

The Centre is responsible for analysing and publishing annual Higher Education Institutional Staff Profiles by Gender. Ambitious targets for the proportion of academic and professional, management and support staff of each gender to be in senior positions are agreed with the HEA and monitored annually through the Strategic Dialogue process. Each HEI will be held accountable for achieving its targets.

Institutional Profiles

The institutional profiles provide information on key indicators which contribute to the assessment of gender equality and offer a valuable baseline from which progress can be measured. Profiles include all grades of staff in 23 HEIs.

As well as listing the gender of each president/or equivalent, the gender-balance on governing authority/body, academic council, and executive management teams is provided per HEI, and the sector summaries indicate the number of institutions that have a minimum 40% of each gender on these key decision-making bodies. A wide array of staffing information is also collected.

Athena Swan

The Athena SWAN charter[11] is a framework that is used across the globe to support and transform gender equality in higher education and research. The charter launched in Ireland in 2015 with a specific remit to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM)

[10] https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/aec432-equality-budgeting/
[11] https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/07/HEA-Statement-on-Athena-SWAN-Charter-in-Ireland-.pdf

employment. The charter has since been expanded to include arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law (AHSSBL) and staff working in professional, managerial and support roles (PMSS).

The framework also now recognises work undertaken to address gender equality more broadly, including consideration of the experience of transgender staff and students, as well as the underrepresentation of men in particular disciplines. The Athena SWAN Bronze, Silver and Gold awards testify to institutions' and departments' success in advancing these goals.

Engagement with the charter is a key pillar of Ireland's national strategy for gender equality in higher education and institutional access to the charter is nationally funded by the HEA.

Gender Action Plan 2018-2020

In 2017, the Gender Equality Taskforce was established by the Minister for Higher Education to identify significant measures that could accelerate progress in achieving gender equality, drawing on the work of the HEA Expert Group. The Taskforce developed the Gender Action Plan 2018-2020[12] which built on the 2016 report of the Expert Group[13] and recommended a series of initiatives to progress organisational and cultural change.

Further Education and Training

Fostering Inclusion is one of the core pillars around which the Further Education and Training Strategy (FET) 2020-2024[14] is built. The Further Education and Training (FET) sector is committed to increasing levels of inclusion through the provision of high quality, more accessible and flexible education and training programmes and supports suited to the identified needs of individuals with the aim of enabling every citizen to participate fully in society. The FET system aims to ensure that systemic and structural barriers within FET to learner participation and success are proactively addressed so that each learner can access the available learning opportunities.

SOLAS is the statutory funding authority for the Education and Training Boards further education and training programmes and is an advisory body to the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in relation to the further education and training sector. Some of the main functions of the ETBs are to:-

- Establish / maintain / resource, as appropriate, recognised schools, centres for education and education or training facilities in its functional area when directed to do so by the Minister
- Plan, provide, co-ordinate and review the provision of education and training, including education and training for the purpose of employment, and services ancillary thereto in its functional area
- Enter into arrangements with, and provide support services to, education or training providers

ETBs are required to consider the needs of identified priority cohorts, including women returning to the workplace, in their planning and delivery of FET provision and to provide details on existing and new initiatives to address barriers to FET.

Another core pillar of the FET Strategy 2020-2024 is 'Creating Pathways', which aims to provide pathways for a diverse group of learners and to support societal participation and

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[12] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/3c3c6f-gender-action-plan-2018-2020/
[13] https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/HEA-National-Review-of-Gender-Equality-in-Irish-Higher-Education-Institutions.pdf
[14] https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/1e2e117467/solas-professional-dev-strategy.pdf

strong communities, and to prepare people for successful careers and a lifetime of learning and development.

Digital Inclusion in Further Education and Training

A range of programmes are provided within Education and Training Boards (ETBs) for individuals who wish to develop their digital literacy. Basic ICT tuition is integrated within adult literacy and numeracy provision. Opportunities for basic skills provision are offered through a variety of providers via a broad range of ETB FET provision. Delivery of these programmes is designed to meet the needs of participants' personal and career goals and are offered on a full and part-time basis. The majority of digital literacy provision is free of charge or is heavily subsidised.

FET also offers a wide variety of more vocationally oriented courses at NFQ Level 5 and 6 for individuals seeking to improve their digital skills to enable direct progression into employment, to enable pathways to higher education, or to build in depth knowledge in particular digital domains. Designed to meet the rapidly evolving needs of industry, these include courses in general digital skills, office productivity, business, web and graphic design, computer programming, data science and IT professional subject areas.

10 Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy, and Digital Literacy Strategy

Despite a generally well-educated workforce and technology-driven economy and society, there are many people in Ireland who lack the reading, writing, numeracy, communication and digital skills required to perform essential daily tasks to fully participate in society. To address this, and as provided for in the Programme for Government, Minister Simon Harris tasked SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority of Ireland, with the development of a new 10 year strategy for adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy[15]. This Strategy was launched on International Literacy Day, 8th September 2021.

The strategy takes a whole-of-government approach and will provide a framework to build on and streamline the substantial work that is already being done across a range of Government departments, state agencies and wider stakeholder groups, to increase awareness of services for the public and to capture the contribution that can be made right across Government to deliver better literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in the adult population. The framework being provided through this new strategy will also embed the use of literacy friendly provision and plain language to ensure the most accessible public, civil and business services throughout the country.

The aim of this new strategy will be to ensure that everyone has the literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to meet their needs and participate fully in society.

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[15] https://www.solas.ie/alnd-strategy/

3. *Implementing economic and social policies for women's economic empowerment (paragraphs 40 (o) to (mm))*
   - *What steps have been taken to promote decent paid care and domestic work in the public and private sectors?*
   - *What actions and investments have been made to support gender-responsive social protection and care infrastructure and services?*
   - *What specific measures have been implemented to promote women's entry, re-entry and advancement in the labour market?*

Ireland has implemented a number of economic and social policies for women's economic empowerment, including the National Skills Strategy 2025[16], ICT Skills Action Plan 2014-2018[17], the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education[18] and other measures in the field of education; the Action Plan for Jobs and Pathways to Work [19] programmes and National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship in Ireland[20], including measures to enhance women's labour market participation and entrepreneurship.

European Social Fund

The European Social Fund (ESF) is the EU's key instrument for investing in people, focusing on improving employment and education opportunities as well as enhancing social inclusion and tackling poverty. The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science administer the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014 – 2020 (PEIL)[21], which is co-funded by the ESF and participating Government Departments.

The overall gender breakdown for the PEIL operating programme is 54% female and 46% male and it includes a number of gender specific activities aimed at women, such as the Gender Equality activity, which is a positive action measure targeted at women who have the potential and desire to play a more active role in the labour force, focusing on two specific strands:

   - Supporting the return to the workforce of women who are very distant form the labour market
   - Supporting female entrepreneurship

Funding is administered by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth through calls for proposals for relevant projects. Over 2,400 women participated in the scheme between 2017 and 2019 with 67% successfully completing the programmes by the end of 2019.

The Tus Nua activity is a specialist service aimed at facilitating resettlement and reintegration of homeless women with complex needs in the community, who have either been released from prison or with an offending background.

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[16] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/69fd2-irelands-national-skills-strategy-2025-irelands-future/
[17] https://assets.gov.ie/24698/50fcbc8f80ab4a828ab7f44e2114aa7b.pdf
[18] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/283c3-national-plan-for-equity-of-access-to-higher-education-2015-2021/
[19] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1feaf-pathways-to-work-2021/
[20] https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/Publications/National-Policy-Statement-on-Entrepreneurship-in-Ireland-2014.html
[21] https://eufunds.ie/european-social-fund/operational-programmes/programme-for-employability-inclusion-and-learning-2014-2020/esf-programme-evaluations-2014-2020/

4. *Addressing the growing informality of work and mobility of women workers (paragraphs 40 (nn) to (qq))*
   - *What measures have been implemented to promote the transition from informal to formal paid employment for women?*

5. *Managing technological and digital change for women's economic empowerment (paragraphs 40 (rr) to (ss))*
   - *What specific actions have been taken to support women's access to skills development and decent work in emerging fields, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics?*

National Remote Work Strategy

On 15th January 2021, Ireland's first National Remote Work Strategy[22] to make remote working a permanent option for life after the pandemic was published. The Strategy is built on three fundamental pillars:

1. Create a Conducive Environment
2. Develop and Leverage Remote Work Infrastructure
3. Build a Remote Work Policy and Guidance Framework

There are multiple benefits that can be derived from remote work, which will help to achieve numerous public policy objectives. These benefits include increasing participation in the labour market, improving work/life balance, improving child and family wellbeing, reducing the amount of time spent commuting, and reducing carbon emissions and air pollution. The impacts of increased remote work can be substantial and remote working has the potential to fundamentally change the nature of where, how, when and why people work. This in turn will bring about economic, spatial, environmental, cultural and societal change.

In the context of Pillar 1 (Create a Conducive Environment for the adoption of remote work) a commitment was made to legislate to provide employees with the right to request remote work. Introducing the right to request remote working will provide a clear framework around which requesting, approving or refusing remote work can be based. It is anticipated that the Tánaiste will bring the draft Heads of Bill to Government seeking approval to draft by the end of Quarter 4 2021.

STEM Implementation Plan 2017-2019

The Department of Education and Skills' STEM implementation plan 2017-2019[23] built on a range of reforms and initiatives already underway in STEM, in areas such as curriculum and assessment reform, teacher professional development, embedding digital learning and advances in initial teacher education. The areas of policy development and action in relation to STEM education span 4 pillars as follows:

1. Nurture learner engagement and participation;
2. Enhance early years practitioner and teacher capacity;
3. Support STEM Education Practice; and
4. Use evidence to support STEM education.

Some of the achievements to date include:

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[22] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/51f84-making-remote-work-national-remote-work-strategy/
[23] https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/4d40d5-stem-education-policy/

- The development of a Gender Balance in STEM Advisory Group and the publication of A Review of Literature to Identify a Set of Effective Interventions for Addressing Gender Balance in STEM in Early Years, Primary and Post-Primary Education Settings Nov 2020;[24]
- Ongoing STEM awareness campaign in conjunction with Science Foundation Ireland;
- A Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Framework[25] which supports the cross-sectoral design and delivery of STEM CPD has been developed;
- STEM related curricular reform to include the introduction of Computer Science for Leaving Certificate;
- Guidelines in relation to forming industry-school partnerships were launched on 14th November 2019.[26]

Gender Balance in STEM

A Gender Balance group has been established to advise the STEM Implementation Advisory Group on addressing the issue of gender balance in STEM, with an initial focus on female participation in these domains.

This sub-group commissioned research, which was published in November 2020 - *A Review of Literature to Identify a Set of Effective Interventions for Addressing Gender Balance in STEM in Early Years, Primary and Post-Primary Education Settings* - which sets out what is known about critical barriers to girls' participation in STEM education and STEM learning, while also highlighting effective interventions to increase participation of girls in STEM.

It identifies that interventions are required across the STEM education ecosystem to effect change. It also acknowledges that there is no single intervention that will achieve gender equity, rather there is a requirement to support multiple interventions addressing different segments of the ecosystem to effect the change required.

The evidence set out in this literature review will inform actions under the second phase of the *STEM Education Implementation Plan,*[27] with a view to addressing gender balance and increased overall participation in STEM. The literature review is a step towards developing evidence-based policy for gender balance in STEM.

The Gender Balance in STEM Advisory Group is committed to recommending actions that enable systemic change to addressing these barriers and create inclusive educational experiences for all learners.

Skillnet Ireland

Skillnet Ireland is committed to increased diversity and inclusion across all sectors of the economy. Skillnet Ireland is funded from the National Training Fund through the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Skills and operates a cost-sharing model where State grants are combined with investment from participating private businesses. Skillnet Ireland provides subsidised training to business through learning networks operating nationwide and across all sectors. The mission of Skillnet Ireland is to facilitate increased participation in enterprise training and workforce learning.

[24] https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/96986/f05f7b2f-e175-442e-85e9-4a2264391843.pdf#page=null
[25] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/756dd-stem-partnerships/
[26] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/756dd-stem-partnerships/
[27] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/756dd-stem-partnerships/

Through its work with Skillnet Business Networks, including Technology Ireland Digital Skillnet, it supports the establishment and growth of initiatives that support the increased participation of women in STEM.

Technology Ireland Digital Skillnet enables companies with software technology functions to remain highly competitive by facilitating active talent development and continuous up-skilling for staff, developing and delivering programmes and talent development frameworks across 5 key themes. The Digital Diversity theme aims at increasing the number of women in digital tech roles and their representation across the digital workforce. It builds knowledge and enables best practice approaches for companies and women, enabling:

- women to enter or re-enter the technology workplace with the appropriate technical and professional skills, and succeed in recruitment processes;
- companies to put in place policies, programmes, and approaches to attract and support women entering or re-entering the workforce.
- new ways for companies and women job seekers to interact and connect.

Through its innovative programmes, the Technology Ireland Digital Skillnet has already enabled over 200 women to return to the tech sector, or transition from other occupations and sectors into tech. In 2020 alone, The Women's Reboot and Women Techstart programmes were delivered virtually to 62 unemployed participants. The Digital Women Initiative, which is supported by the organisation Women in Technology and Science (WITS), provides training, work-experience, and mentoring programmes including:

- *Women ReBOOT*, an award-winning national tech sector initiative for experienced and qualified ICT women who have taken a career break and now want to reignite their tech career. It supports women seeking to return to the tech sector to develop the skills, competences and confidence to re-engage with technology businesses. In 2021 to date, 17 women have already completed the programme this year and are now placed within 8 companies.
- *Women TechSTART*, which retrains women jobseekers from non-ICT backgrounds who have a range of professional skills, qualifications and experiences and with competencies transferable to a career in technology.
- *Women ACCELERATE*, an on-ramp training programme for women returners who have been successfully hired for specific digital roles, but require training on specific role orientated technologies.
- *Women in Digital Alumni*, a working on-line community where alumni and companies provide work-place exposure to new tech trends, new role conversions, and role 'day in the life', returner case studies.

Technology Ireland Digital Skillnet, supported by WITS, is developing the Women in Digital Platform which will support women at all digital literacy levels and act as a portal for companies to access this new talent pipeline and support diversity within their organisations. This online centralised platform will provide free guidance and toolkits to IT returners, new IT entrants and organisations to provide accessible pathways to restart and develop their career in tech. Women in Digital Platform will create a single point of access for; information, learning and connections between women seeking to transition into and back to digital careers, and for companies seeking to achieve a gender balance in digital roles.

Skillnet Ireland has also several other programmes established by its Skillnet Business Networks that support women's inclusion in STEM:

- Technology Ireland ICT Skillnet established "Women in AI" chapter. Women in AI Ireland's aim is to increase participation of women including those from minority backgrounds in the AI dialogue. A new learning programme that supports women to

build the competence to add value in the Artificial Intelligence domain by providing flexible access to learning opportunities, practice opportunities and a community for support has also been launched. Technology Ireland ICT Skillnet and Women in AI Ireland have also developed a Level 8 Continuous Professional Development Certificate in Foundations of Artificial Intelligence which is commencing in September 2021.[28]

- ITAG Skillnet is a business network for companies of all sizes in the technology sector in the West, North West and Mid West Regions of Ireland. Its Digital Women's Leadership Programme is for ambitious women in middle/senior management. The programme encourages and increases technology skills in the IT sector. The training modules are designed to ensure long term engagement and the development of increased leadership impact.

6. ***Strengthening women's collective voice, leadership, and decision-making (paragraphs 40 (tt) to (aaa))***
   - *What specific efforts have been implemented to support women's participation and leadership in trade unions, workers' organizations and employers' organizations?*

7. ***Strengthening the role of the private sector in women's economic empowerment (paragraphs 40 (bbb) to (eee))***
   - *What efforts have been undertaken to encourage private firms and institutions to mainstream gender equality considerations in policies and practices?*
   - *What action has been taken to increase investment and support for women entrepreneurs?*

In July 2018, the Taoiseach launched the 'Balance for Better Business'[29] initiative. This is an independent business-led Review Group established by the Government to improve gender balance in senior business leadership in Ireland. The Review Group adopted a voluntary approach, setting and monitoring progress towards incremental targets for the representation of women and men on corporate boards and in the senior management of business in Ireland. To date, the Review Group has published three reports, with Ireland's ranking among the EU-27 companies for gender balance on the boards of the largest listed companies continuing to improve, climbing from 17th to 13th in the two years to December 2020.

Since its launch in 2015, the Irish Chapter of the 30% Club (which began in the UK and now has a global reach) has aimed to achieve 30% representation of women on boards and executive management by 2020 in Irish business and the public sector. It is a group of Chairs and CEOs committed to better gender balance at all levels of their organisations through voluntary action. Its activities involve specific networks established for the Public Sector, and in the financial services, professional services, pharma, food and drink, and technology sectors. The 30% Club Ireland has developed a toolkit for diversity and inclusion to assist organisations, drawing on the experience of its networks.

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[28] https://www.ictskillnet.ie/training/foundations-certificate-in-artificial-intelligence/
[29] https://www.betterbalance.ie/