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The State of the World's Human Rights; Ireland 2023

The crisis in housing availability worsened, including for asylum seekers. Concerns emerged about the Data Protection Commission's failure to hold Big Tech companies such as Meta and Google accountable for violations of the right to privacy. Criminalization of aspects of sex work continued to put sex workers at higher risk of violence.

Right to housing

The crisis of housing availability and affordability worsened, and led to record numbers of people experiencing homelessness, including children. In November, 13,514 people were living in emergency homelessness accommodation. This included 4,105 children, the largest ever number and 17% higher than during the same month in 2022. In its Concluding Observations published in February, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child called on the government to address the root causes of homelessness among children, strengthen measures to phase out emergency accommodation schemes and significantly increase the availability of social housing for families.

By year's end, a review of housing policy by the government-established Housing Commission had still not been published, and a constitutional referendum on housing promised by the government had not been scheduled.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

The worsening housing crisis continued to seriously impact the availability and quality of accommodation for asylum seekers, with some new arrivals offered only tents and sleeping bags.

In October, the Ombudsman for Children published a *Special Report on the Safety and Welfare of Children in Direct Provision* showing that the government's "crisis-driven response" to significantly increased numbers of people seeking protection affected the welfare of children living in state-provided accommodation. Progress on reforms to the "direct provision" accommodation system for asylum seekers, as promised in the government's 2021 white paper, had "stalled or regressed", the report said.

Right to privacy

There were concerns about the Irish Data Protection Commission's poor record in holding Big Tech companies such as Meta and Google accountable for disregarding the privacy rights of millions of social media users in Europe and around the world. In June, legislation was passed allowing the commission to deem all its enforcement procedures confidential, potentially further shielding Big Tech from scrutiny.

Sexual and reproductive rights

A report of the government's review of the 2018 Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act published in April found concerning gaps in, and barriers to the provision of, appropriate abortion care. It acknowledged the negative impact of conscience-based refusal by medical professionals to provide abortion care and recommended removing criminal liability for healthcare professionals.

Workers' rights

The 2017 law criminalizing the purchase of sex and retaining the "brothel-keeping" offence – preventing sex workers from working together – had still not been reviewed, despite a statutory requirement for a review within three years. Therefore, no progress was made in addressing evidence that the legal framework exposed sex workers to a higher risk of violence and other abuse.

Freedom of expression and association

No progress was made in addressing restrictions imposed by the Electoral Act 1997 (as amended in 2001) on the freedom of civil society organizations to access funding for campaigning purposes.

Right to a healthy environment

In June, the Environmental Protection Agency published its greenhouse gas emissions projections for the period 2022-2040, concluding that the government's climate policies and measures, even if fully implemented,

would not achieve the emissions reduction targets set out in Ireland's climate legislation. It found that almost all sectors – including agriculture, electricity, transport and industry – were projected to exceed their national sectoral emissions ceilings for 2025 and 2030.

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