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## **COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**

### **2025 Rule of Law Report Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Ireland**

#### *Accompanying the document*

**Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the  
European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

#### **2025 Rule of Law Report The rule of law situation in the European Union**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Reforms aimed at enhancing the independence and quality of the justice system in Ireland continued and companies perceive its independence as very high. The Judicial Appointments Commission, established to reduce political influence in the appointment and promotion of judges, has started its work. Further steps have been taken to reduce the costs of litigation, with work to learn from the development of scales of fees in environmental and planning judicial review cases underway, and a Civil Reform Bill is under preparation. A general review of the civil legal aid scheme has been completed and a reform of the criminal legal aid system is being prepared. Steps are planned to ensure better access to justice, though concerns persist about the length of proceedings. There remain questions about the need for additional safeguards for employment conditions for the judiciary. A follow-up to the report on the Offences Against the State Acts as regards the operation of the Special Criminal Court remains to be decided by the Government. There are no defined indicators available to measure the length of proceedings in the different courts. The new law providing for the establishment of an independent assessment procedure to assess claims for cases of excessively long court proceedings is expected to enter into force in 2025. Further measures to improve digitalisation of justice are being implemented.

Ireland continues to have an efficient framework for both the prevention of corruption and enforcement of anti-corruption regulations. The publication of the draft multiannual anti-corruption strategy is delayed. While the cooperation among responsible authorities is smooth, insufficient resources and specialisation remain a challenge for investigating and prosecuting corruption cases. Awareness-raising activities and training measures on integrity improved, and new structures and processes are being set up to strengthen integrity and to enhance accountability of the police. The reform of the existing framework for Ethics in Public Office, including the digitalisation of asset declarations, is at an advanced preparatory stage. The Lobbying register was extended to include information about lobbying activities at the level of senior officials in high-level bodies. New legislation aims to mitigate risks in the planning and development sectors.

The media regulator functions independently and relies on a self-financing system ensuring adequate resources to carry out its growing regulatory competences. The Government put forward a legislative proposal to reform the funding system for public service media and enhance their accountability and independence. The Government is developing new legislation in several areas, including media market concentrations, media ownership transparency and state advertising as well as new initiatives to financially support the media industry and public-interest content, while the media regulator adopted new rules updating the regulatory framework for services offering audiovisual content. Existing cooperation initiatives continue to ensure the overall safety of journalists although threats against reporters covering protests have increased. Work on the reform of the defamation regime is ongoing, with a draft bill currently under discussion in Parliament.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission has new tasks but is concerned that extra resources have not followed. The civic space in Ireland remains open. The Electoral Commission is committed to a review of the Electoral Act 1997 which will encompass consideration of the issues around funding for civil society organisations. Different initiatives to promote a rule of law culture have been brought forward.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Overall, concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland has made:

- Some further progress on taking forward the necessary legislative work aimed at reducing litigation costs to ensure effective access to justice, taking into account European standards on disproportionate costs of litigation and their impact on access to courts.
- Some further progress on strengthening the existing ethics framework, including the monitoring and enforcement capacity of the Standards in Public Office Commission, and limited progress on strengthening and digitalising the asset declarations system.
- Some further progress on completing the reform of the Defamation Act to improve the professional environment for journalists taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists.
- Some progress on ensuring that rules or mechanisms are in place to provide funding for public service media that is appropriate for the realisation of its public service remit while guaranteeing its independence.
- Some further progress on addressing legal obstacles related to access to funding for civil society organisations, as part of the reform of the Electoral Act.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, it is recommended to Ireland to:

- Take forward the legislative work aimed at reducing litigation costs to ensure effective access to justice, taking into account European standards on disproportionate costs of litigation and their impact on access to courts.
- Continue efforts to strengthen the existing ethics framework, including the monitoring and enforcement capacity of the Standards in Public Office Commission, and to strengthen and digitalise the asset declarations system.
- Complete the reform to provide funding for public service media that is appropriate for the realisation of its public service remit while guaranteeing its independence.
- Finalise the reform of the Defamation Act to improve the professional environment for journalists taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists.
- Continue ongoing efforts to address legal obstacles related to access to funding for civil society organisations, as part of the reform of the Electoral Act.

## **I. JUSTICE SYSTEM**<sup>1</sup>

### **Independence**

**The level of perceived judicial independence in Ireland continues to be high among the general public and very high among companies.** Overall, 72% of the general population and 79% of companies perceive the level of independence of courts and judges to be ‘fairly or very good’ in 2025<sup>2</sup>. The perceived judicial independence among the general public remains at the same level as in 2024 (72%), and has slightly decreased in comparison with 2021 (73%). The perceived judicial independence among companies has slightly increased in comparison with 2024 (78%), and has increased in comparison with 2021 (76%).

**The Judicial Appointments Commission was established and started its work.** On 1 January 2025, the Judicial Appointments Commission Act 2023 came fully into force, and the Judicial Appointments Commission took office<sup>3</sup>. It has a key role in judicial appointments and interviews of all judges applying for promotion. Once a judicial vacancy is published, the Judicial Appointments Commission will consider the applications received, shortlist and interview candidates and establish recommendations for appointment. The Government may only nominate for appointment candidates who have been recommended by the Judicial Appointments Commission. Appointment is made by the President of Ireland.

### **Quality**

**There was some further progress on the recommendation to reduce litigation costs as new guidelines to set clear fee scales and a Civil Reform Bill are under preparation**<sup>4</sup>. Concerns on the issues of costs linked to litigation persist<sup>5</sup>, and stakeholders underline that the particularities of Ireland as a common law jurisdiction need to be considered in this context<sup>6</sup>. The 2025 Programme for Government commits to address the issue of litigation costs<sup>7</sup> and to take further steps to resolve cases outside court. Following the publication in 2024 of a report containing an independent examination of possible models to control litigation costs<sup>8</sup>, officials from the Department of Justice are engaging with and utilising the data and learning emerging from the work of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications to develop a scale of fees for judicial review applicants in environmental and planning law as a first/pilot step in developing options that can have more general application<sup>9</sup>. The Department of the Climate, Energy and Environment is leading on the

<sup>1</sup> An overview of the institutional framework for all four pillars can be found [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> Figures 50 and 52, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard and Figures 49 and 51, 2023 EU Justice Scoreboard. The level of perceived judicial independence is categorised as follows: very low (below 30% of respondents perceive judicial independence as fairly good and very good); low (between 30-39%), average (between 40-59%), high (between 60-75%), very high (above 75%).

<sup>3</sup> As highlighted by previous Rule of Law Reports, although the composition of the Judicial Appointments Commission remains unchanged and is not drawn in substantial part from the judiciary, the new Act reduced political influence in the judicial appointment procedure.

<sup>4</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended to Ireland to “take forward the necessary legislative work aimed at reducing litigation costs to ensure effective access to justice, taking into account European standards on disproportionate costs of litigation and their impact on access to courts”.

<sup>5</sup> The Irish Environmental Network (2025), written input, p. 12; country visit Ireland, ISME and Competition and Consumer Protection Commission.

<sup>6</sup> The Bar of Ireland (2025), written input, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Irish Government (2025f), p. 2.

establishment of the scale of fees and an Environmental Legal Costs Financial Assistance Mechanism, and these models have been legislated for in the newly enacted Planning and Development Act 2024<sup>10</sup>. On this basis, the aim is to develop more policy options to reduce litigation costs for businesses, individuals and the State, taking into account their impact on the quality of services and the need to ensure access to justice and the efficiency of the legal system<sup>11</sup>. Other reforms to civil proceedings that will aim to reduce litigation costs include amendments to the system of discovery in civil proceedings. A Civil Reform Bill is under preparation, which aims to give effect to some of the recommendations contained in the Report of the Review of the Administration of Civil Justice<sup>12</sup>. On 19 September 2024, the Report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on the Rising Cost of Health-Related Claims was published and a working group tasked with the implementation of its recommendations was established. Overall, some further progress has been made on the recommendation on reducing litigation costs to ensure effective access to justice.

**A general review of the Civil Legal Aid scheme has been completed and a reform of the criminal legal aid system is envisaged.** An independent review group has concluded its review of the Civil Legal Aid Scheme and the Department of Justice is currently examining the outputs of that Review<sup>13</sup>. Stakeholders continue to share concerns about the current civil legal aid system, highlighting that progress on its review, including the publication of the report on this matter, is urgently needed<sup>14</sup>. Legal practitioners consider that the civil legal aid system is under-resourced and unfit to properly ensure access to justice for the most vulnerable citizens<sup>15</sup>. However, over the last decade there has been a large increase in annual investment for the Legal Aid Board, which is the statutory, independent body responsible for the provision of civil legal aid and advice<sup>16</sup>. During 2024, criminal barristers called for a reform of the criminal legal aid system, including the determination of their fees<sup>17</sup>. The 2025 Programme for Government commits to reform the operation of the criminal legal aid system and fully restore criminal legal aid fees, and also to enact a Legal Aid Bill that would ensure the assessment of financial means, including powers to restrict or facilitate recoupment of legal aid. There has also been a large increase in investment in Criminal Legal Aid with the budget allocation increasing by 91% or €42.4m between 2015 and 2025<sup>18</sup>.

**Measures to improve access to justice are planned and an appropriate structure to discuss questions concerning constitutional safeguards for the judiciary in connection with employment conditions has not yet been established**<sup>19</sup>. Ireland remains the Member State with the lowest number of judges per capita<sup>20</sup>. The Government has agreed to further increase the number of judges by 57% in the period 2012-2025, which is over three times

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<sup>10</sup> Irish Government (2025f), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 8. In this context, the need to facilitate the resort to Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms, as less costly and more flexible options, has been raised by Law Society of Ireland, ISME and Chambers Ireland in the country visit to Ireland.

<sup>12</sup> Country visit Ireland, Department of Justice.

<sup>13</sup> Irish Government (2025f), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), p. 486.

<sup>15</sup> The Bar of Ireland (2025), written input, p. 7; The Irish Environmental Network (2025), written input, p. 12; Country visit Ireland, Law Society of Ireland.

<sup>16</sup> Annual funding for the Legal Aid Board has risen by 97%, or €31.7m, between 2015 and 2025. Irish Government (2025f), p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> The Bar of Ireland (2025), written input, pp. 7-8.

<sup>18</sup> Irish Government (2025f), p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard, Figure 37 (number of judges per 100 000 inhabitants).

greater than the level of population growth over the same timeframe<sup>21</sup>. The 2025 Programme for Government provides for the appointment of 20 additional judges and a review of the Courts Service and the Legal Services Regulatory Authority by 2026. On 13 May 2025, Ireland signed the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer. The Bar of Ireland has underlined the need for an appropriate family law courts infrastructure to be in place, to ensure successful implementation of the Family Courts Act 2024<sup>22</sup>. The Government has committed to publish an implementation plan for a new Family Court system by 2026. Stakeholders have raised concerns about the shortage of judicial resources<sup>23</sup> and the need to address inadequate court facilities, particularly the accessibility of buildings<sup>24</sup>. The Courts Service Estates Strategy 2022-2025 aims to ensure that buildings and facilities properly serve the needs of users while supporting the modernisation and digitisation of the service<sup>25</sup>. In September 2024, the Legal Services Regulatory Authority (LSRA) published its “Breaking Down Barriers Implementation Plan” aimed at improving equity of access and entry into the legal professions<sup>26</sup> and the 2025 Programme for Government includes addressing obstacles to become a solicitor or barrister. Evidence gathered by the LSRA in preparing this plan pointed notably to economic and other early career barriers for legal professionals affecting diversity and retention<sup>27</sup>. Stakeholders<sup>28</sup> have also raised concerns about the lack of an appropriate structure to examine questions concerning constitutional safeguards for the judiciary in connection with employment conditions, which is a pending recommendation by the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO)<sup>29</sup>, and the effect of the lack of such a structure on judicial independence. The 2022 report of the independent Judicial Resources Working Group recommended the development of explicit terms and conditions applying to judges as a matter of priority<sup>30</sup>. In the context of employment conditions and in particular remuneration, the Senior Posts Remuneration Committee (SPRC), established in March 2024 and also covering the Judiciary, will review particular senior roles following an instruction from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform<sup>31</sup>.

**Further progress was made in the improvement of the digitalisation of justice, including e-litigation.** Despite progress, there is scope for development as regards digitalisation of

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<sup>21</sup> Irish Government (2025f), pp. 8-9.

<sup>22</sup> The Bar of Ireland (2025), written input, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Country visit Ireland, The Bar of Ireland, Law Society of Ireland and IEN.

<sup>24</sup> Country visit Ireland, ICCL.

<sup>25</sup> Irish Government (2025f), p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Concerns about the emergence of legal deserts in some regions in Ireland and the need to better address legal training have been shared by Law Society in the country visit to Ireland.

<sup>27</sup> LSRA (2024), p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Country visit Ireland, Chief Justice and AJI.

<sup>29</sup> GRECO (2014), para. 137, finding that the constitutional protection providing that judges were exempt from a pay reduction which applied to other public officials was revoked and amended; recommending that an appropriate structure be established within the framework of which questions concerning constitutional safeguards of the judiciary in connection with employment conditions are to be examined. In 2024, GRECO welcomed that the report of the Judicial Planning Working Group was completed and a High-Level Steering Group looking into the implementation was established but underlined that many questions still remained open, concluding that the recommendation has been partially implemented (GRECO (2024a), para. 24-29).

<sup>30</sup> Irish Government (2025f), pp. 5-6.

<sup>31</sup> Irish Government (2025f), pp. 5-6.

justice<sup>32</sup>. The 2025 Government Programme announced possible legislative amendments to ensure that the Courts and Legal System are digital, modern, cost-effective, and focused on the victims' needs. On 6 May 2025, the Government approved the drafting of a Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill in accordance with the General Scheme of the Bill<sup>33</sup>. The proposed Bill provides an enabling basis for remote hearings and electronic documents in criminal proceedings and surrender/extradition proceedings, building on similar reforms in civil proceedings as introduced by the Civil Law and Criminal Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020. The implementation of a ten-year modernisation programme<sup>34</sup> has yielded positive results, including an increase of technology-enabled courtrooms, support for remote attendance at hearings and fully remote hearings, a new digital jury system, digital evidence display and digital audio recordings of proceedings. Following the 2023 rollout of the Unified Case Management System in the High Court, it was also introduced in Circuit Court Family Offices in 2024 and the deployment will continue into 2025<sup>35</sup>. From June 2025 online applications relating to Family Law matters in the Dublin Circuit Court will be accepted via the Courts Service Portal<sup>36</sup>. In 2024, the Courts Service launched an Open Data Portal<sup>37</sup>, as a central hub for the publication and sharing of Courts Service data. In December 2024 a new ICT Digital & Data Strategy has been published<sup>38</sup>.

**A follow-up to the report on the Offences Against the State Acts as regards the operation of the Special Criminal Court remains to be decided.** The Offences Against the State Acts contain certain provisions on the operation of the Special Criminal Court. The Group to review the Offences Against the State Acts published its final report in June 2023<sup>39</sup>, recommending the Acts' repeal in their entirety, while keeping some elements in replacement legislation, including the establishment of a new non-jury court instead of the Special Criminal Court. Stakeholders have called<sup>40</sup> for the immediate abolition of the Special Criminal Court, or alternatively, to strengthen the procedure of the Court to ensure respect of the right to fair trial<sup>41</sup>. According to its 2025 Programme, the Government will consider the report on the Offences Against the State Acts, retain the Special Criminal Court and annually review some related legal provisions.

## Efficiency

**Concerns persist regarding the length of proceedings and the need for a specific system to regularly evaluate court performance based on defined indicators.** In 2023, the clearance rate for non-criminal cases was 81%, the lowest in the EU<sup>42</sup>. There is no system to regularly evaluate court performance based on defined indicators. Data on the length of proceedings is still not systematically recorded in conformity with the methodology of the

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<sup>32</sup> 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard, Figures 40-48, the room for improvement includes the use of digital technology by courts and prosecution services, the courts electronic communication tools and the digital solutions to conduct and follow court proceedings in criminal cases

<sup>33</sup> General Scheme of the Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025.

<sup>34</sup> The Courts Service Long-Term Strategic Vision to 2030: Supporting Access to Justice in a modern, digital Ireland.

<sup>35</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> Irish Government (2025f), p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Country visit Ireland, The Courts Service.

<sup>38</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Department of Justice (2023a).

<sup>40</sup> IHREC (2022), p. 33; Country visit Ireland, ICCL.

<sup>41</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, pp. 8-9.

<sup>42</sup> 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard, Figure 9.

Council of Europe and the European Commission for the efficiency of justice<sup>43</sup>. According to data on annual reports from the Courts Service, for the High Court, the average length of civil proceedings in 2023 was 796 days, an increase of 63 days in comparison with 2022<sup>44</sup>. The average length of proceedings for criminal cases increased in 2023 in some instances. The length of proceedings at the Court of Appeal increased for civil cases (to 553 days in 2023 from 527 in 2022), while it decreased for criminal cases (to 426 days in 2023 from 461 in 2022). The average length of appeal proceedings in the Supreme Court decreased significantly (to 329 days in 2023 from 434 in 2022). According to authorities, the collected court data are being used for court management purposes, and a 2023 OECD study showed room for improvement in this regard<sup>45</sup>. The report of the Judicial Planning Working Group recommended that the Courts Service adopts a comprehensive system to collect data and monitor performance measures<sup>46</sup>. The Courts Service continues working on the actions aimed at improving the data that is made available on court activities and court proceedings<sup>47</sup>.

**An independent assessment process to implement the right established by the 2024 Act on delays in court proceedings is under preparation.** The Court Proceedings (Delays) Act was enacted on 1 May 2024. The Act creates a statutory right to the conclusion of court proceedings within a reasonable time, providing for a declaration, and where appropriate compensation, in cases where people experience unjustified delays in the justice system. The Act provides for the establishment of an independent assessment process, under the aegis of the Department of Justice, to assess claims for breaches of the right contained in section 11 to the conclusion of proceedings within reasonable time. Work is ongoing to implement the assessment scheme, which is expected in the second half of 2025<sup>48</sup>. Commencement of the Act will coincide with the scheme becoming operational<sup>49</sup>.

## **II. ANTI-CORRUPTION FRAMEWORK**

**The perception among experts, citizens and business executives is that the level of corruption in the public sector remains relatively low.** In the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International, Ireland scores 77/100 and ranks sixth in the European Union and tenth globally<sup>50</sup>. This perception has improved over the past five years<sup>51</sup>. The 2025 Special Eurobarometer on Corruption shows that 63% of respondents consider corruption widespread in their country (EU average 69%) and 23% of respondents feel personally affected by corruption in their daily lives (EU average 30%). As regards businesses, 30% of companies consider that corruption is widespread (EU average 63%) and 8% consider that corruption is a problem when doing business (EU average 35%). Furthermore, 29% of respondents find that there are enough successful prosecutions to deter people from corrupt

<sup>43</sup> CEPEJ data feed the EU Justice Scoreboard.

<sup>44</sup> The Courts Service (2024), pp. 116-117.

<sup>45</sup> This limited use does not provide the necessary data for the effective handling and future planning of resources and staff allocation. OECD (2023), p. 210.

<sup>46</sup> Department of Justice (2023b).

<sup>47</sup> Country visit Ireland, The Courts Service.

<sup>48</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 18.

<sup>49</sup> Irish Government (2025f), p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> The level of perceived corruption is categorised as follows: low (above 79); relatively low (scores between 79-60), relatively high (scores between 59-50), high (scores below 50).

<sup>51</sup> In 2020, the score was 72, while, in 2024, the score is 77. The score significantly increased/decreased when it changes more than five points; improved/deteriorated (changes between 4-5 points); has been relatively stable (changes from 1-3 points) in the last five years.



practices (EU average 36%), while 25% of companies believe that people and businesses caught for bribing a senior official are appropriately punished (EU average 33%)<sup>52</sup>.

**The publication of the draft multi-annual strategy to tackle corruption has been delayed.** Work on the strategy, developed by the Advisory Council against Economic Crime and Corruption, was set up in 2022 but remains ongoing<sup>53</sup>. A public consultation in relation to the Strategy was organised by the Department of Justice in late 2024<sup>54</sup>. According to the timeline, a first draft was expected by early 2025<sup>55</sup>. The draft strategy would then be submitted for approval to the Government. Transparency International has raised concerns about the delay and has also asked for an annual report on the implementation of the strategy<sup>56</sup>.

**While the cooperation among responsible authorities is smooth, insufficient resources and specialisation remain a challenge for investigating and prosecuting corruption cases.** The investigation of corruption offences is a shared task within the national police, including the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) and its specialised Anti-Bribery and Corruption Unit (ABCU). As already reported in previous years<sup>57</sup>, the available resources to effectively investigate corruption cases are insufficient. The current capacities of the GNECB and ABCU are still below the planned staffing, and internal rules hinder the amount of Gardai that could be allocated/recruited in the near future<sup>58</sup>. The police also considers the number of allocated forensic accountants as insufficient for its investigative tasks<sup>59</sup>. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) is responsible for prosecuting corruption offences and its Special Financial Crime Unit (SFU) deals with cases of high complexity<sup>60</sup>. The prosecution underlines a lack of resources to deal with increasing volumes of digital data in dealing with financial crimes, including forensic accountants<sup>61</sup>. The Economic Crime Forum<sup>62</sup> is currently implementing actions under the 2021 implementation

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<sup>52</sup> Data from special Eurobarometer 561 (2025). Flash Eurobarometer 557 (2025).

<sup>53</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, pp. 11-12. The "Hamilton review" by the Department of Justice (2020) recommended the development and approval of a multi-annual strategy and an accompanying action plan by Q1 2022. The drafting was then delayed to 2023, 2024 and now to 2025.

<sup>54</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 38. Country visit Ireland, Advisory Council and Department of Justice.

<sup>55</sup> Country visit Ireland, Advisory Council and Department of Justice.

<sup>56</sup> Country visit Ireland, Transparency International Ireland. Transparency International calls for that implementation report of the Strategy to include citizens' contributions.

<sup>57</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> Country visit Ireland, GNECB. Irish government (2025f), p.15. In February 2022, 125 staff were allocated to the GNECB. As of 2025, GNECB has 115 agents, 23 more than in 2024, and 2 sergeants and 2 Gardai are attached to the ABCU. As of May 2025, the ABCU are working on 12 active investigations with an additional ten cases under assessment. Three investigations concern foreign bribery of foreign public officials, and two foreign bribery investigations remain under assessment for criminal offences. In 2025 one foreign bribery investigation was closed due to insufficient evidence. The Hamilton Review recommended to ensure adequate resources to the GNECB. See Recommendation n. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Country visit Ireland, GNECB. In order to provide the police with a higher level of specialisation, 4 forensic accountants are allocated to the Garda Organisation. The recruitment of 3 more forensic accountants is planned in 2025.

<sup>60</sup> Country visit Ireland, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. The Directing Division consists of prosecutors who examine criminal investigation files and decide whether or not to take a prosecution, and whether a prosecution commenced by *An Garda Síochána* should be maintained.

<sup>61</sup> Country visit Ireland, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions Office. These issues were already underlined in the 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> The Economic Crime Forum of senior representatives reports to the Advisory Council, with the aim of facilitating greater inter-agency coordination, collaboration and information sharing and met five times in

plan of the Hamilton Review, including those in relation to information sharing between public and private stakeholders<sup>63</sup>. The Economic Crime Forum has identified specific trainings that the national police may be able to provide, although it faces increasing challenges in delivering such trainings due to a lack of resources<sup>64</sup>. Cooperation between the Corporate Enforcement Authority (CEA) and the Garda Síochána is established through a Memorandum of Understanding, which continues to work well<sup>65</sup>. The legislative changes required to facilitate Ireland's cooperation with the EPPO as a non-participating Member State are fully operational, as of 1 November 2023. This was done by way of amendments to the Criminal Justice (Mutual Assistance) Act 2008. Ireland's co-operation with the EPPO as a non-participating Member State is operational and working well<sup>66</sup>. An inter-agency group is exploring the implications of Ireland joining the EPPO. While a formal government decision is awaited on this issue, the 2025 Programme for Government contains a commitment to signing up to the EPPO<sup>67</sup>.

**Challenges regarding cooperation with third countries remain.** In 2023, an amendment removed the requirement for an act of corruption to be an offence under the law of the specific place where it was perpetrated ("double criminality")<sup>68</sup>. The police consider that this change will assist prosecutions of foreign corruption<sup>69</sup>. As reported last year, the Anti-Bribery and Corruption Unit reiterates the difficulty in investigating foreign bribery because of lack of cooperation with third countries through mutual legal assistance<sup>70</sup>. In 2024 three foreign bribery investigations were closed due to prosecutions in other jurisdictions or insufficient evidence<sup>71</sup>.

**Awareness-raising and training measures on integrity improved, and new structures and processes are being set up to strengthen integrity and to enhance accountability of the police.** The anti-corruption unit of the national police, the Garda Anti-Corruption Unit (GACU), is tasked with investigating and preventing corruption within the police<sup>72</sup>. The GACU is following up on the recommendations of the Garda Síochána Inspectorate Report to better develop internal anti-corruption policies<sup>73</sup> and delivers an updated learning programme and briefings<sup>74</sup>. A law adopted on 7 February 2024<sup>75</sup> provides for the establishment of a new

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2024. Irish Government (2025a), written input p. 22. 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, p. 11. Country visit Ireland, Department of Justice.

<sup>63</sup> Country visit Ireland, Advisory Council.

<sup>64</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, p. 14.; Country visit Ireland, GNECB.

<sup>65</sup> CEA (2022). The Memorandum has been reviewed in 2024. Country visit Ireland, CEA.

<sup>66</sup> Irish Government (2025f), p.14. Parliamentary question (2025).

<sup>67</sup> Irish Government (2025c), p. 120.

<sup>68</sup> In November 2023, the Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act was enacted, amending section 12 of the Criminal Justice (Corruption Offences) Act 2018. The Phase 4 evaluation visit to Ireland of the OECD Working Group on Bribery was supposed to take place in late 2025 but has been postponed to 2027-2028.

<sup>69</sup> Country visit Ireland, GNECB.

<sup>70</sup> Country visit Ireland, GNECB. 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> Country visit Ireland, GNECB.

<sup>72</sup> Country visit Ireland, Department of Justice. Irish Government (2025f), p. 14. The total number of Garda Personnel attached to the GACU is currently 37 (33 Sworn Members, four Garda Staff).

<sup>73</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, p. 15.

<sup>74</sup> The briefings include preventative practices and the necessity for all police personnel to speak up and report wrongdoing. GACU (2025), written input, p. 5. Alongside the Garda Ethics & Cultural Bureau, the GACU distributes a quarterly newsletter which provides a summary of criminal and disciplinary investigations in respect of Garda personnel. The focus is on improving policing practice and enhancing professional conduct. Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 50.

Policing and Community Safety Authority which will merge the functions of the Policing Authority and the inspection function of the Garda Síochána Inspectorate<sup>76</sup>. In addition, this law establishes a new Office of the Police Ombudsman (Fiosrú), which replaced and will strengthen the mandate of the former Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC). New recruitments and streamlined processes are under implementation<sup>77</sup> and draft secondary regulations and budgetary matters are currently being finalised<sup>78</sup>.

**There has been some further progress in the strengthening of the ethics framework<sup>79</sup>.** Ireland presented a review study of the existing statutory framework for Ethics in Public Office in 2023<sup>80</sup>. Following the review, the Government tasked the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform with preparing a legislative draft, which is reported to be at an advanced stage of preparation<sup>81</sup>. The main points to be covered under the legislative draft are expected to include strengthening the legal obligations on public officials to disclose actual and potential conflicts of interest, and the power of the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO)<sup>82</sup>. Civil society organisations urged the new government to strengthen the ethics framework<sup>83</sup>. The Programme for Government 2025<sup>84</sup> contained a renewed commitment to update the ethics legislation, and the Government included the ethics reform bill in its programme of legislation for priority drafting in the summer 2025 session of the Parliament<sup>85</sup>. Given the state of play, there has been some further progress on the implementation of this part of the recommendation made in the previous years.

**There has been limited progress in the strengthening and digitalisation of asset declarations<sup>86</sup>.** Rules on asset and interest declarations apply to public office holders, members of Parliament and a range of other public officials<sup>87</sup> under the Ethics Acts<sup>88</sup>. SIPO is responsible for delivering guidelines, advice, and investigating possible contraventions. Declarations of liabilities are currently not presented in an accessible format<sup>89</sup>. The

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<sup>75</sup> Irish Government (2025b), additional input. Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2023, Act 1 of 2024. S.I. No. 108/2025 - Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024 (Establishment Day) Order 2025.

<sup>76</sup> 2023 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, p. 10.

<sup>77</sup> Country visit Ireland, Office of the Police Ombudsman (Fiosrú)/GSOC.

<sup>78</sup> Irish Government (2025b), additional input. These draft Regulations are currently being finalised. See also 2024 Rule of Law report, Ireland, p. 15.

<sup>79</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law report recommended to Ireland to "strengthen and digitalise the existing ethics framework, including the monitoring and enforcement capacity of the Standards in Public Office Commission".

<sup>80</sup> 2023 Rule of Law report, Ireland, pp. 12-13.

<sup>81</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 19.

<sup>82</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 19.

<sup>83</sup> Country visit Ireland, Irish Council for Civil Liberties and Transparency International Ireland. Transparency International Ireland (2025), written input, p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> Irish Government (2025c), p. 149.

<sup>85</sup> Irish Government (2025d), p. 13.

<sup>86</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law report recommended to Ireland to "strengthen and digitalise the existing ethics framework, on asset declarations".

<sup>87</sup> 2024 Rule of Law report, Ireland, pp. 16-17. Disclosure obligations arise for the following categories: Oireachtas; Office Holders; Civil Service (designated positions); public bodies (designated directorships and designated positions) and special advisers.

<sup>88</sup> The Ethics in Public Office Act 1995 and the Standards in Public Office Act 2001 are cited together as the Ethics Acts. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has responsibility for these Acts.

<sup>89</sup> Country visit Ireland, SIPO. 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, p. 16; GRECO (2024b), p. 8.

digitalisation of declarations, which is expected to be included in the bill revising the Ethics framework, would ensure a streamlined process for the submission of periodic statements of interests, easier processing by SIPO and access by civil society, as well as support the handling of complaints and investigations procedures<sup>90</sup>. Civil society considers that the statements should include both assets and liabilities<sup>91</sup>. The digitalisation of these declarations would be optional<sup>92</sup>. As progress on strengthening the asset disclosures, as well as their digitalisation, depend on the adoption of the Ethics bill<sup>93</sup>, with legislative drafting planned in the summer of 2025, limited progress was made on the implementation of this part of the recommendation.

**Amendments to the lobbying regulation from 2024 have largely been implemented.**

Legislative amendments on lobbying entered into force in January 2024 while the new sanctions started applying on 1 June 2024<sup>94</sup>. The lobbying register was extended as planned by Statutory Instrument<sup>95</sup> in September 2024, taking effect on 1 January 2025, so that the lobbying of senior officials in high-level bodies will now be reported on the same basis as for central and local government<sup>96</sup>. The law also includes administrative financial sanctions for certain contraventions, including for breaches of the cooling-off provision<sup>97</sup>, which has also been extended<sup>98</sup>. SIPO conducted awareness raising activities with lobbyists and Designated Public Officials (DPOs) prior to the entry into force of these new sanctions<sup>99</sup>. While SIPO itself did not consider its resources inadequate<sup>100</sup>, there is some concern among stakeholders in this regard<sup>101</sup>. As reported last year, civil society organisations welcome the legislative changes, while stressing the need for further reforms to address the exclusion of some relevant agencies from the register<sup>102</sup>.

**The Electoral Commission has launched a review of the political party financing framework and is expected to publish recommendations in 2025.** Political party financing is regulated under the Electoral Act, applicable since 1997. The Electoral Commission is

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<sup>90</sup> Country visit Ireland, Transparency International Ireland and Irish Council for Civil Liberties. 2024 Rule of Law report, Ireland, p. 17.

<sup>91</sup> Country visit Ireland, Transparency International Ireland.

<sup>92</sup> 2024 Rule of Law report, Ireland, p. 17. The reform aims to extend disclosure obligations in respect of ministers, senior advisors and officials who would be obliged to disclose significant liabilities above EUR 50 000.

<sup>93</sup> Country visit Ireland, Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform. 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, pp. 16-17.

<sup>94</sup> As of yet, the application of these sanctions to any individual or organisation has not been required. Irish Government (2025), additional input. 2024 Rule of Law report, Ireland, p. 18.

<sup>95</sup> S.I. No. 424/2024 - Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 (Designated Public Officials) Regulations 2024.

<sup>96</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 24.

<sup>97</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, p. 18, Fn. 144 Section 22 of the 2015 Act set out restrictions on post-term employment as a lobbyist. With the 2023 Act, a breach of the cooling-off period, or lobbying during that period without SIPO's consent, is a "relevant contravention".

<sup>98</sup> The post term employment restrictions apply to Ministers, Ministers of State, and Special Advisers, and public servants prescribed as a Designated Public Official (DPO). In 2024, cooling off provisions have been extended to 190 new DPOs in 62 additional public bodies.

<sup>99</sup> All public bodies with DPOs were notified of the Amendment Act in advance of the commencement of administrative sanctions system on 1 June 2024. Irish Government (2025b), additional input.

<sup>100</sup> Country visit Ireland, SIPO.

<sup>101</sup> Irish Council for Civil Liberties (2025), written input, p. 25.

<sup>102</sup> Transparency International Ireland, Irish Council for Civil Liberties and Irish Environmental Network (2025), written inputs, p. 12, p. 25 and p. 17 respectively. Country visit Ireland, Irish Environmental Network.

working on a review of this Act<sup>103</sup>. In the context of this review, there are ongoing discussions about whether the Electoral Commission should take over some of the current functions attributed to SIPO with regard to political party financing<sup>104</sup>, which should be finalised by mid-2025<sup>105</sup>. This review should be followed by a report including recommendations, which would form the basis of new legislation, as mentioned in the Programme for Government<sup>106</sup>. As reported last year, civil society has concerns about the current format of the declarations of donations to political parties which makes it difficult to access information<sup>107</sup>.

**Cooperation between government and civil society in protecting whistleblowers continues and the first report on whistleblower data since the amended legislation entered into force shows an increase in disclosures.** The Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act 2022 entered into force in 2023. In January 2025, the Ministry for Public Expenditure published its first report on 2023 data<sup>108</sup> coming from public bodies, prescribed persons<sup>109</sup> and the newly established Office of the Protected Disclosures Commissioner. Some civil society organisations acknowledge a notable increase in whistleblower reports since the adoption of the Amendment Act<sup>110</sup>. Moreover, funding for Transparency International Ireland (TII) to offer information and support to whistleblowers remains stable<sup>111</sup>, while the organisation advocates for a reward for whistleblowers, to encourage them to speak<sup>112</sup>.

**New legislation aims to mitigate corruption risks in planning and development sectors, identified as high-risk areas for corruption.** Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU shows that 0% of companies in Ireland (EU average 25%) think that corruption has prevented them from winning a public tender or a public procurement contract in practice in the last three years<sup>113</sup>. 80% of businesses perceive the level of independence of the public procurement review body (High Court) as very or fairly good when it is reviewing public

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<sup>103</sup> Electoral Act 1997. See 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, p. 19, Fn. 148 and 150.

<sup>104</sup> SIPO has supervisory roles under the Electoral Act 1997 (as amended) and the Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Amendment) Act 2014. The Electoral Act 1997 regulates political financing, including political donations and election expenses; the Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Activities) (Amendment) Act 2014 regulates expenditure of public funds to political parties and independents.

<sup>105</sup> Irish Government (2025b), additional input.

<sup>106</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 51. Research will focus on a wide range of themes, including reducing voting age or voting from abroad. Country visit Ireland, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Irish Government (2025c), p. 149.

<sup>107</sup> Country visit Ireland, Irish Council for Civil Liberties and Transparency International Ireland. 2024 Rule of Law report, Ireland, p. 19.

<sup>108</sup> Over 1 100 reports of wrongdoing were submitted, of which 734 were deemed to require further follow-up and 211 were related to breaches of EU law. Irish Government (2025e).

<sup>109</sup> Under the Act, the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP delivery and Reform has the power to designate competent authorities as prescribed persons. The number of prescribed persons authorised to receive protected disclosures is 108.

<sup>110</sup> Transparency International Ireland (2025), written input, p. 13.

<sup>111</sup> Irish Government (2025b), additional input. Funding has been increased from EUR 285 000 in 2022 to EUR 368 500 in 2025 (same as 2024). TII also completed their second Integrity at Work Survey which will be published in 2025.

<sup>112</sup> Country visit Ireland, Transparency International Ireland.

<sup>113</sup> Flash Eurobarometer 557 on Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU (2025). This is 25 percentage points below the EU average.

procurement cases<sup>114</sup>. The Single Market and Competitiveness Scoreboard on access to public procurement in Ireland reports 16% of single bids for 2023 (EU average 29%). A new Planning and Development Act was enacted on 17 October 2024<sup>115</sup>. Civil society organisations are still concerned about its potential consequences, focusing on concerns about transparency and the implications for corruption<sup>116</sup>, given that planning is seen as a high-risk area<sup>117</sup>. To address transparency issues, the 2024 Act also contains measures to tackle abuse of the planning system, such as dealing with false planning submissions and appeals<sup>118</sup>. Other sectors which have been identified by stakeholders as primary areas of risk for corruption are public and private procurement, public utilities and natural resources, match-fixing<sup>119</sup> and the financial sector<sup>120</sup>.

### **III. MEDIA PLURALISM AND MEDIA FREEDOM**

**The media regulator continues to function independently.** The legislation entrusts *Coimisiún na Meán* (the Media Commission) with the regulation of broadcasters, video-on-demand providers and online platforms and ensures that it is functionally autonomous and independent in the performance of its regulatory competence<sup>121</sup>. In 2024 the Media Commission was designated as one of the national public authorities tasked with overseeing the protection of fundamental rights in the context of artificial intelligence, in line with the requirements of the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act). The Media Commission also expects to be entrusted with further functions and tasks with the implementation of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)<sup>122</sup>. Since 2025, a self-financing system based on levies that the Media Commission collects from the services operating under its regulatory remit ensures its financial stability and independence<sup>123</sup>.

**There has been some progress on the recommendation related to the governance and funding framework for public service media<sup>124</sup>.** In October 2024, the Government approved the General Scheme of the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill (the General

<sup>114</sup> Figure 59, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard.

<sup>115</sup> The Act includes a number of measures to enhance transparency in the planning sector with a view to prevent corruption and conflict of interests. Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 33.

<sup>116</sup> Irish Environmental Network (2025), written input, pp. 19-29. Concerns are related to the appointment and role of the Governing Board of the Planning Commission (the “An Bord Pleanála”, that will be renamed “Coimisiún Pleanála”) and of the Planning Commissioners and Chief Planning Commissioner.

<sup>117</sup> Country visit Ireland, Advisory Council. Transparency International Ireland (2025), written input, p. 14.

<sup>118</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 39.

<sup>119</sup> Country visit Ireland, GNECB. Irish Government (2025a), written input, pp. 27-34. Irish Government (2025b), additional input. Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC, 2025), written input, pp. 2-3.

<sup>120</sup> Transparency International Ireland (2025), written input, pp. 14-15.

<sup>121</sup> Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022, part 3; the MPM 2025 considers the independence and effectiveness of national regulatory authorities to be at a very low risk, given the robust institutional architecture on which the Media Commission can rely, Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), pp. 13 and 16-17.

<sup>122</sup> In particular, it is expected that the Media Commission will take responsibility in the area of media market concentrations, transparency of media ownership, state advertising, audience measurement and right to customise the media offering, Country visit Ireland, Coimisiún na Meán.

<sup>123</sup> From January 2024 to December 2024, the Media Commission also increased its staff from 79 to 200 in order to carry out its extensive functions. A request from the Media Commission to be equipped with an additional 100 staff is currently under consideration by the Government, Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 43; Country visit Ireland, Coimisiún na Meán.

<sup>124</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended to Ireland to “ensure that rules or mechanisms are in place to provide funding for public service media that is appropriate for the realisation of its public service remit while guaranteeing its independence”.

Scheme)<sup>125</sup>, with a view to reforming the governance and funding system of the public service media<sup>126</sup>. The General Scheme aims to increase independent governance of public service media and provides that the Director-Generals of public service broadcasters are to be recruited through a public selection process and appointed by the management board<sup>127</sup>, without the involvement of the Government. The General Scheme also proposes to upgrade public service media's funding system by entrusting *Coimisiún na Meán* (Media Commission) with enhanced monitoring and assessment functions. In particular, the Media Commission would be required, every three years, to carry out a review of the adequacy of public service media's funding, and would be able to make recommendations to the Government on the level of public funding deemed necessary for the fulfilment of their public service remit. The Government would be required to respond to such recommendations<sup>128</sup>. Overall, stakeholders considered the General Scheme a positive development for increasing public service media's accountability and independent governance<sup>129</sup>. At the same time, there was dissatisfaction<sup>130</sup> with the Government's decision to maintain the TV licence fee funding model<sup>131</sup>. Some stakeholders also noted that, although required to respond to the Media Commission recommendations on funding, the Government was not also obliged to follow them<sup>132</sup>, as well as the potential impact that the new funding framework could have on the public service broadcasters' operations<sup>133</sup>. There has thus been some progress in relation to the 2024 recommendation.

**New legislation to address media market concentrations, transparency of media ownership and state advertising as well as new funding initiatives are under development while the regulatory framework for the audiovisual media market has been recently updated.** Public access to information on media ownership continues to be facilitated through the Mediaownership.ie database and the Media Ownership Monitor Ireland project<sup>134</sup>. A legislative proposal is under preparation to develop and expand a national media ownership database in line with the relevant requirements on media ownership

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<sup>125</sup> Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (2024).

<sup>126</sup> The General Scheme was further revised in April 2025 and the legislative process before the Parliament will commence once Government finalizes the formal drafting of the Bill, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (2025).

<sup>127</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, pp. 44-45.

<sup>128</sup> The Media Commission will also carry out a parallel annual review of the yearly performance of RTÉ and TG4 and assess the appropriateness of their public funding, with the possibility to recommend adjustments for the current and following years, Irish Government (2025a), written input, pp. 41-42; Country visit Ireland, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

<sup>129</sup> Country visit Ireland, Coimisiún na Meán, RTÉ, and National Union of Journalists.

<sup>130</sup> Country visit Ireland, National Union of Journalists; Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), p. 500.

<sup>131</sup> Although the Government committed to consider offsetting - by means of direct exchequer funding - the possible gaps between the amount of licence fee collected and the minimum level of funding required for RTÉ, the National Union of Journalists consider that the TV licence fee funding model is no longer fit for purpose and fails to ensure financial stability of public service media in the long term. In this light, they would have preferred that the General Scheme had entailed moving to a model entirely based on direct exchequer funding from the Government, Country visit Ireland, National Union of Journalists.

<sup>132</sup> Country visit Ireland, Coimisiún na Meán and RTÉ.

<sup>133</sup> Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), pp. 5, 8, 10, 17, and 30; in particular, representatives from RTÉ indicated that under the new funding framework public service broadcasters would be subject to a high amount of burdensome reporting obligations. Similarly, representatives from RTÉ also indicated that the correlation between the funding and their performance could also pose risks for their functional independence, Country visit Ireland, RTÉ.

<sup>134</sup> These two initiatives were launched in 2020 and 2023 respectively and are both financially supported by the Media Commission, 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, pp. 23-24.

transparency set out in the EMFA<sup>135</sup>. The legislative proposal also aims to revise the existing media market concentration regime in view of the new framework introduced by the EMFA<sup>136</sup>. The lack of specific rules regulating the allocation of state advertising to the media, which is carried out under the general framework for public procurement, affects the clarity regarding the distribution and placement of advertisements to individual media outlets<sup>137</sup>. In this respect, the Government is preparing new legislation to establish a framework for the allocation of state advertising and implement the relevant fairness and transparency requirements foreseen by the EMFA<sup>138</sup>. The Government also allocated funding to support the media sector and public-interest media content through a range of schemes administered by *Coimisiún na Meán* (the Media Commission)<sup>139</sup>. In 2024, as part of the transposition of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), the Media Commission adopted several regulatory instruments which updated the regulatory framework for services offering audiovisual content<sup>140</sup>.

**Existing cooperation initiatives continue to ensure the overall safety of journalists although an increase in threats against reporters covering protests raises concerns.** The ongoing cooperation between the national police and media stakeholders in the context of the Media Engagement Group initiative (the MEG) continues to offer an effective tool for a safe environment for journalists in Ireland<sup>141</sup>. The MEG, monitors trends and issues related to media professionals' safety, offers dedicated safety seminars and briefings to media organisations and provides media personnel and media organisations with a reporting mechanism allowing them to inform the national police about concerns or incidents through a single point of contact<sup>142</sup>. In 2024 a total of 25 incidents were reported to the MEG and criminal investigations were opened on several cases<sup>143</sup>. Since the 2024 Rule of Law Report, no new alerts have been recorded on the Council of Europe's Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists<sup>144</sup> nor by the Mapping Media Freedom platform<sup>145</sup>. However, stakeholders expressed concerns about the safety of reporters covering protests as they are increasingly subject to threats<sup>146</sup>.

<sup>135</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 45.

<sup>136</sup> Irish Government (2025f), p. 1.

<sup>137</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Ireland, p. 25; Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), pp. 8, 10, 26, and 27-28.

<sup>138</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 44.

<sup>139</sup> EUR 16 million. Among these schemes that are being rolled out in phases, two – the Digital Transformation Scheme and the News Reporting Scheme – are expected to be rolled out by the end of 2025 whereas two other schemes – the Local Democracy Reporting Scheme and the Courts Reporting Scheme – are already in operation as pilots. A total of EUR 5.7 million was allocated to 102 successful applicants following a competitive and independent assessment process, Country visit Ireland, Coimisiún na Meán and Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media; Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 28.

<sup>140</sup> Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 6. These regulatory instruments include the Audiovisual On-Demand Media Service Code & Rules and the Broadcasting Codes and Rules, which updated the rules for on-demand media services and broadcasters in several areas, such as audiovisual commercial communications, accessibility matters and protection from audiovisual harmful content, Country visit Ireland, Coimisiún na Meán.

<sup>141</sup> Country visit Ireland, National Union of Journalists; Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), p. 502.

<sup>142</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, pp. 45-46.

<sup>143</sup> Among the incidents reported, 10 related to cases of online abuses, threats and intimidations and five to cases of physical abuses, threats and intimidations, Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 46.

<sup>144</sup> Council of Europe, Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists (2025).

<sup>145</sup> Mapping Media Freedom, Ireland country profile.

<sup>146</sup> Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), country report for Ireland, p. 16; Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), p. 501-; Country visit Ireland, National Union of Journalists and Irish Council for Civil Liberties. The



**There has been some further progress towards completion of the reform of the defamation regime, which is currently under consideration in the Dáil (Parliament)<sup>147</sup>.** In August 2024 the Government published the Defamation (Amendment) Bill 2024 (the Bill)<sup>148</sup>. The Bill is intended to reform the defamation regime in Ireland and to introduce safeguards countering strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs)<sup>149</sup>. The Bill also foresees the abolition of juries in High Court defamation cases. Although the main purpose of the abolition is to reduce the risks of disproportionately high damages being awarded, some stakeholders expressed concerns in light of the role played by juries in ensuring the involvement of the general public in determining matters related to damage to reputation and freedom of expression<sup>150</sup>. The Bill had lapsed following the November 2024 Irish elections<sup>151</sup>, but was reintroduced to Parliament by the new Government in February 2025 and included as a priority item in the 2025 Programme for Government<sup>152</sup>. Considering these developments, there has been some further progress in relation to this recommendation.

#### **IV. OTHER INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES RELATED TO CHECKS AND BALANCES**

**The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) has been entrusted with new tasks, but is concerned that it lacks the resources to cover these.** IHREC has continued its activities, focusing on five strategic priorities in 2023: economic equality, justice, respect and recognition, futureproofing, and public sector duty<sup>153</sup>. According to IHREC, as Ireland's National Human Rights Institution and National Equality Body, it is being attributed new tasks, without sufficient resources to respond to all challenges, which could also entail reputational risks<sup>154</sup>. IHREC has reported structural problems of access to justice for some vulnerable groups, including disabled people.

**On 1 January 2025, Ireland had 2 leading judgments of the European Court of Human Rights pending implementation, the same number as the previous year<sup>155</sup>.** At that time, Ireland had no leading judgments from the past 10 years that remained pending as the only two pending judgments were over 10 years old. The average time that the judgments had been pending implementation was 12 years and 7 months (compared to 11 years and 7 months in 2024)<sup>156</sup>. The oldest leading judgment, pending implementation for 15 years, concerns the failure to ensure the timely trial of a criminal case which violated the applicant's

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National Union of Journalists also stressed that an increasing tendency of the police to seize reporters' photos of public riot events creates further risks for the safety of journalists. In particular, journalists are more exposed to harassment and threats from protesters, who tend to identify them as 'facilitators' of the police. This trend is considered to affect also public interest journalism at large, as some media outlets decided not to cover certain protests in order not to put at risk the physical well-being of their journalists, Country visit Ireland, National Union of Journalists.

<sup>147</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended Ireland to "[c]omplete the reform of the Defamation Act to improve the professional environment for journalists taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists".

<sup>148</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 41.

<sup>149</sup> Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 13.

<sup>150</sup> Country visit Ireland, Irish Council for Civil Liberties; the Bar of Ireland (2025), written input, p. 17; Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), p. 481.

<sup>151</sup> The Bar of Ireland (2025), written input, p. 17.

<sup>152</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 41; Irish Government (2025c), p. 134; (2025d).

<sup>153</sup> IHREC (2024), p. 10.

<sup>154</sup> Country visit Ireland, IHREC.

<sup>155</sup> For an explanation of the supervision process, see the [website](#) of the Council of Europe.

<sup>156</sup> All figures calculated by the European Implementation Network (EIN) and based on the number of cases that are considered pending at the annual cut-off date of 1 January 2025. EIN (2025), written input, p. 5.

right to a fair trial within a reasonable time<sup>157</sup>. The right provided for in the Court Proceedings (Delays) Act 2024 mentioned earlier in this chapter, will implement this judgment once commenced. As regards the respect of payment deadlines, on 31 December 2024 there was no case awaiting confirmation of payments (the same as in 2023)<sup>158</sup>. On 16 June 2025, the number of leading judgments pending implementation had remained two<sup>159</sup>.

**Around eight in ten companies perceive the level of investment protection, a key element for the single market, as very high in Ireland.** 83% of companies are very to fairly confident that investments are protected by law and courts<sup>160</sup>. Stakeholders confirmed that they do not see an issue with investment protection in Ireland. 75% of companies perceive the level of independence of the national competition authority (the Commission for Competition and Consumer Protection) as very or fairly good<sup>161</sup>. A limited number of judicial mechanisms are in place at the level of the Supreme Court to ensure the implementation of administrative court judgments, which include the possibility to quash administrative decisions for continued non-compliance with the court's instructions to officials. However, these mechanisms do not include fines for responsible officials for non-compliance, the possibility to substitute the annulled administrative act, or direct enforcements measures<sup>162</sup>.

**Different initiatives aimed at fostering a rule of law culture have been taken forward.** In 2024, the Department of Foreign Affairs established the EU Enlargement and European Fundamental Values (EEFV) Fund to support the implementation of eligible projects and activities in Member States, enlargement countries and through the Council of Europe<sup>163</sup>. The objective of the EEFV Fund is to support candidate countries in their preparation for their accession to the EU and to promote and protect European fundamental values, including the rule of law. Moreover, initiatives have been developed to ensure the promotion of a rule of law culture at higher education level.

**Some further progress was made on the recommendation to address legal obstacles related to access to funding for civil society organisations<sup>164</sup>.** The civic space in Ireland remains open<sup>165</sup>. As in previous years, civil society organisations have raised concerns about the impact of the legal prohibition under the Electoral Act to receive donations above a certain threshold for 'political purposes' or from foreign donors<sup>166</sup>. Stakeholders have expressed disappointment that the long-promised review of the 1997 Electoral Act to address

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<sup>157</sup> Judgment of the ECtHR, 31333/06, *McFarlane v. Ireland*, pending implementation since 2010.

<sup>158</sup> Council of Europe (2025), p. 157.

<sup>159</sup> Data according to the online database of the Council of Europe (HUDOC).

<sup>160</sup> 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard, Figure 54. Only 8% of the surveyed investors perceive the frequent changes in legislation or concerns about the quality of the law-making process, and the quality, efficiency or independence of justice, as reasons for the lack of confidence in investment protection.

<sup>161</sup> 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard, Figure 60.

<sup>162</sup> 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard, Figure 49. The data presented reflects exclusively the mechanisms in place at the level of the highest administrative jurisdictions; the same or other mechanisms may be in place at lower instance administrative courts.

<sup>163</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 60.

<sup>164</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended Ireland to "further continue efforts to address legal obstacles related to access to funding for civil society organisations, as part of the reform of the Electoral Act".

<sup>165</sup> Rating by CIVICUS; ratings are on a five-category scale defined as: open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed and closed.

<sup>166</sup> Under the Electoral Act 1997, donations may be received by third parties up to a limit of EUR 2500 from a donor in any given calendar year. SIPO has interpreted the relevant legislation as also comprising certain activities, carried out by civil society organisations, such as advocacy work including outside electoral periods.

restrictions on civil society funding has not yet materialised<sup>167</sup>. At the request of the Government, work is well advanced at the Electoral Commission on a review of the 1997 Electoral Act, including a detailed examination of the legal obstacles related to access to funding for civil society organisations<sup>168</sup>. A report with recommendations is expected to be published in the second half of 2025. Overall, some further progress has been made on the 2024 recommendation.

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<sup>167</sup> Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), p. 482 and Civil Society Europe (2025), written input, p. 5.

<sup>168</sup> Irish Government (2025a), written input, p. 51. The review is a priority for 2025.

## Annex I: List of sources in alphabetical order\*

\* The list of contributions received in the context of the consultation for the 2025 Rule of Law report can be found at [https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2025-rule-law-report-targeted-stakeholder-consultation\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2025-rule-law-report-targeted-stakeholder-consultation_en)

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## **Annex II: Country visit to Ireland**

The Commission services held virtual meetings in February 2025 with:

- Advisory Council on Economic Crime and Corruption
- Association of Judges of Ireland
- Bar of Ireland
- Chambers Ireland
- Chief Justice
- Coimisiún na Meán
- Competition and Consumer Protection Commission
- Corporate Enforcement Authority (CEA)
- Courts Service
- Department of Foreign Affairs
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Department of Justice
- Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform
- Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
- Garda Anti-Corruption Unit (GACU)
- Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB)
- Independent business association for Irish SMEs (ISME)
- Irish Council for Civil Liberties
- Irish Environmental Network
- Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
- Judicial Council
- Law Society of Ireland
- Legal Services Regulatory Authority
- National Union of Journalists
- Office of the Comptroller and the Auditor General
- Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions
- Office of the Police Ombudsman (Fiosrú)/ Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC)
- RTÉ
- Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO)
- Transparency International Ireland

\* The Commission also met the following organisations in a number of horizontal meetings:

- Amnesty International
- Araminta
- Civil Liberties Union for Europe
- Civil Society Europe
- European Civic Forum
- European Partnership for Democracy
- European Youth Forum,

- International Commission of Jurists
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- JEF Europe
- Philea – Philanthropy Europe Association.
- Transparency International