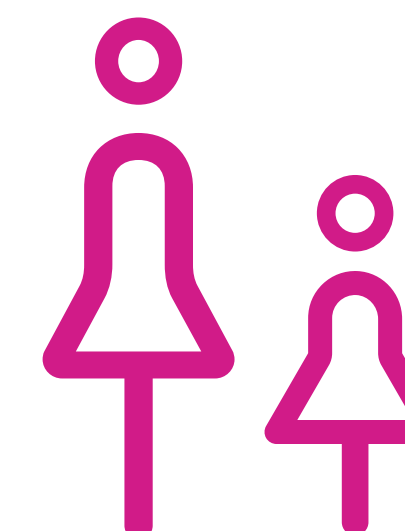
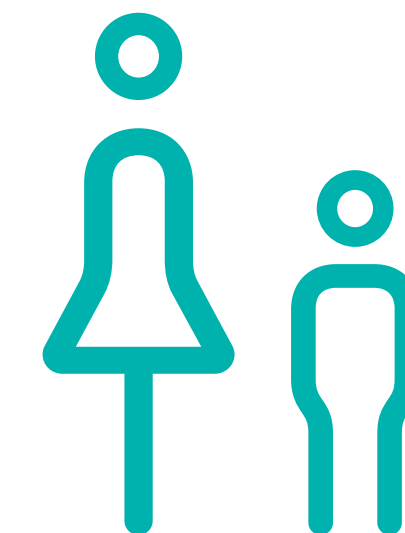


# Human Rights, Equality and One Parent Families

A Guide to  
Delivering Public  
Services



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# Foreword

**By Mary Robinson**

*First President of One Family, seventh President of Ireland, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chair of The Elders*

This year One Family celebrates 50 years of empowering and supporting one-parent families. In 1972, as the first President of Cherish (now called One Family), I saw first-hand how one-parent families were shunned, silenced, and shamed, overlooked by policymakers. I also saw how One Family's formula of empowerment through solidarity, information and education challenged the status quo for one-parent families. From the beginning, One Family understood that the key to systemic and long-term change is to empower people to change the world around them for themselves. Their sustained commitment to equality and the rights of all members of one-parent families over the last 50 years is impressive, as is the knowledge, understanding and expertise they have built up.

Recent decades have seen transformative change in Ireland. When I wrote the Foreword for One Family's first Human Rights and One-Parent Families guide in 2006 it was a time of great prosperity; yet despite the immense fortune on display at that time, one-parent families faced significant inequalities – legally, financially and socially. Since then, Ireland has experienced a decade of brutal cuts and a global pandemic, during which

one-parent families and their children have fared particularly poorly. So called 'austerity' cuts in response to the financial crash of 2008, such as changes to the One-Parent Family Payment, directly targeted and impoverished many one-parent families pushing thousands of children into poverty. Today one-parent families live with the legacy of these cuts, with children in one-parent families now four-times more likely to live in consistent poverty than children in two-parent families.

The cuts to supports for one-parent families were accompanied by reduced funding for, the downgrading of, or in some cases the closure of key equality, human rights and anti-poverty bodies. It was an extremely distressing time for one-parent families, particularly children. And despite the economic recovery at the end of the decade, and some positive moves to correct some of the failures of the 'austerity' era cuts, poverty continued to weigh upon children in one-parent families as they were consistently among the most at risk of poverty. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, life got considerably harder for one-parent families, as they experienced discrimination while trying to access shops and increased challenges with home-schooling, caring for children while sick or accessing basic services. Still today, non-marital families are not equally recognised or protected by the Irish Constitution.

It is in times of adversity when defending human rights and fighting against inequality can seem a less pressing concern; but this is precisely when they are most important. Knowing about rights and the laws and policies that prevent discrimination empowers people to change the world around them. Human rights and equality are not merely concepts, they are real-life tools which can change a person's circumstances for the better and protect them from harm. It is also vitally important that those in positions of power, work with or assist one-parent families know and understand their obligations to protect human rights and prevent discrimination.

There have been steps forward on human rights and equality since the publication of the first Human Rights and One-Parent Families guide, including the development of the Equality Acts and the ratification of some international treaties and covenants. One such positive development in recent years has been the establishment of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. This Duty places a pro-active responsibility on those providing public services to ensure they are not infringing on the rights of or discriminating against those they seek to serve.

By providing accessible information on international human rights conventions and equality legislation and how the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty can best be used to advance the rights of one-parent families this booklet advances the work of One Family in providing one-parent families and those working on their behalf with a powerful voice to call for change.





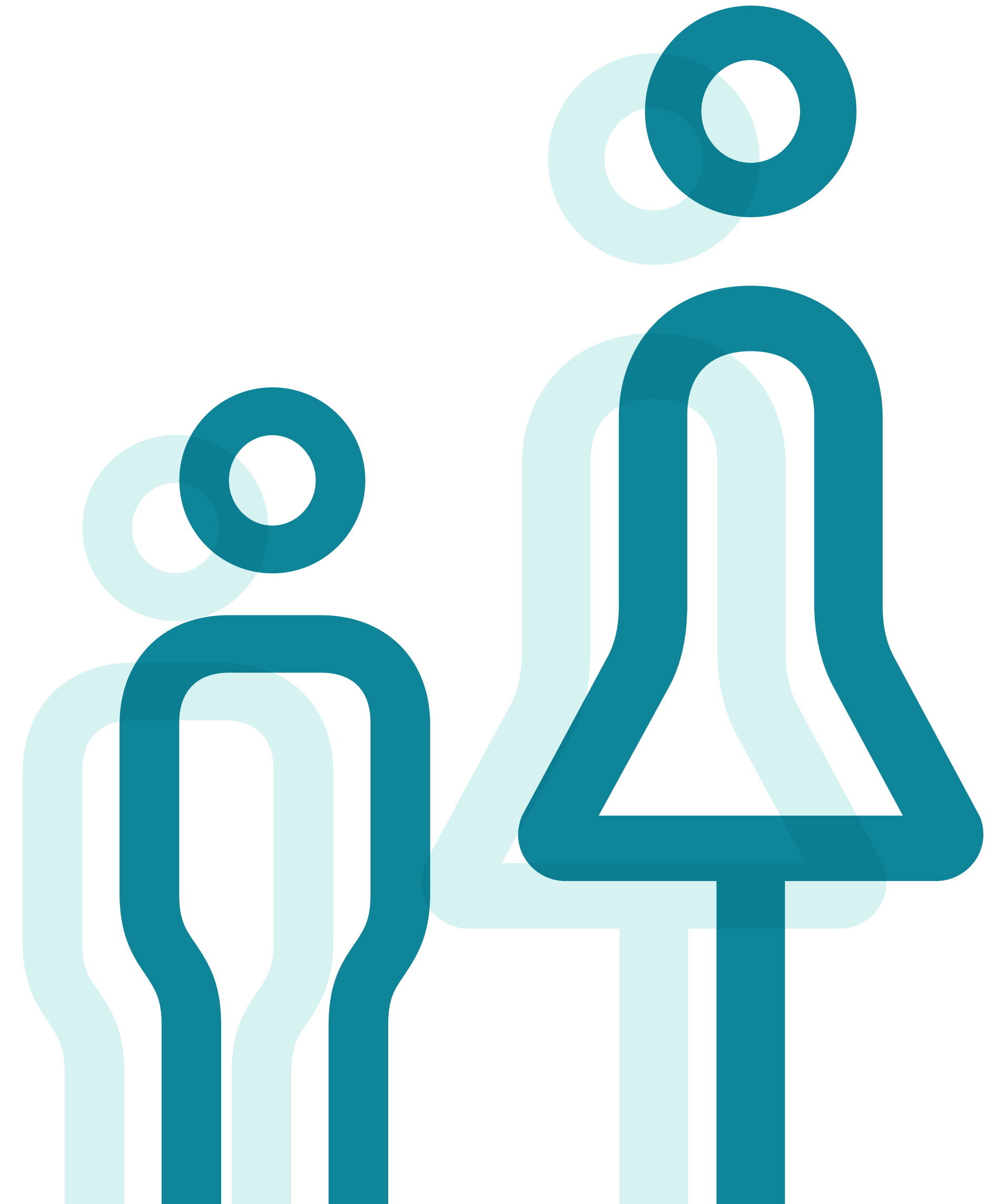
## Acknowledgements

The Human Rights, Equality and One Parent Families research and publications have been kindly supported by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Grant Scheme. This guide is informed by information and resources published by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

One Family would like to thank Mary Robinson, the first president of the organisation, for contributing the foreword to this booklet.

One Family also wishes to thank Dr Jennifer van Aswegen of JVA Consulting for carrying out the research with parents on our behalf and for her work in the development of this publication. We would also like to thank Dr Judy Walsh, Head of Subject for Social Justice at the UCD School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice for her help in reviewing this guideline.

Finally, we would like to thank the parents who took part in the research, either by survey or focus group, as without their input the research and publication would not have been possible. In particular, we extend our thanks to the members of the Rights Holder Steering Group who helped guide the project.



# 1. Introduction

*"I feel that it's about our rights I suppose. The right to dignity, respect and to feel like an equal, you know? No better or no worse. The basic right, to not have to prove yourself, you know, by having a profession or by having a qualification, that it shouldn't matter."*

**A parent who participated in the research**

One Family is Ireland's national organisation for people parenting alone, sharing parenting and separating. We were established as Cherish in 1972 by a group of single mothers who wanted to challenge the unjust treatment and discrimination experienced by one-parent families at that time. Since then, One Family has fought for one-parent families to be treated equally to other family types in Ireland.

One Family wants equality and respect for all families. We believe all children have a right to a happy family life. We support families by providing specialist services and we campaign to improve the lives of one-parent families by changing the policies and structures that affect them. We are proud of the changes we have helped make over the last 50 years to how one-parent families are treated; but unfortunately, Ireland still has a long way to go to ensure adults and children in one-parent families are treated equally and without discrimination.

The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (the Duty) places a responsibility on public bodies to end discrimination, promote equality and protect human rights of service users and staff. This statutory duty must be reflected in the strategies and plans of each public body and also present as they carry out their day-to-day work. The aim of the Duty is to put equality and human rights at the heart of how public bodies execute their functions and to positively transform how public bodies interact with their service users and staff.

## About this guide

This guide has been written by One Family to provide information and guidance for people working in a public body about the rights of people in one-parent families in Ireland. There is an accompanying guide for people in one-parent families called *Human Rights, Equality and One-Parent Families: A Guide to Knowing Your Rights and Recognising Discrimination*. It is available at [www.onefamily.ie](http://www.onefamily.ie).

One Family first published a guide on the rights of people in one-parent families in 2006. A lot has changed since then, including the development of a Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. The aim of this guide is to provide information for people working in public bodies and support them in preventing discrimination, promoting equality and protecting the rights of people in one-parent families. The information and guidance contained in this publication are informed by research carried out with parents in 2021/2022.

This guide gives an overview of the human rights and equality protections provided to one-parent families under international and Irish law. It provides information on the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty and how it can be used to support people in one-parent families.

## Disclaimer

This guide aims to give general information about rights and equality, relevant international and national legislation and the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. The information contained in this guide is informed by research with parents and a range of legal, social policy and civil society resources relating to equality and human rights. We have done our best to make sure the information is up-to-date and accurate. The information contained in this publication is not legal advice.





## 2. Background

**The history of one-parent families in Ireland and the experiences of one-parent families today provide a context for this guide. This guide has been informed and shaped by research with parents in one-parent families, carried out by One Family in 2021/2022.**

*“How lone parents are treated so abysmally is definitely gender-biased in my opinion. We have a terrible history on how women and their children are treated here and this history affects peoples assumptions, in the public sector as well as out of it.”*

**A parent who participated in the research**

### History of one-parent families in Ireland

Ireland has a long and shameful history when it comes to one-parent families. In the past, parents and children in one-parent families commonly experienced stigma and mistreatment by the State, religious institutions and society. Magdalene Laundries, Mother and Baby Homes, forced adoption and other abusive and discriminatory practices were commonplace in Ireland throughout the 20th century. The last of the Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries closed in the late 1990s. While these type of institutions and harsh practices may be

gone, some of the attitudes and beliefs which create stigma and discrimination against one-parent families can still be found in our structures, institutions, policies and in wider society today.

### About one-parent families in Ireland today

Today there are many one-parent families in Ireland, making up a diverse range of family types. The most recent data on one-parent families comes from the 2016 Census. It tells us that one in five people in Ireland live in a one-parent family, while one in four families is headed by a lone parent. The vast majority (86.4%) of one-parent families are headed by mothers but many families share parenting of their children. There is not much data on shared parenting in Ireland; however, many of the families referred to in the Census as ‘households headed by one adult’ likely have some level of shared parenting. It is anticipated the number of one-parent families may rise when the results of the 2022 Census are published.



# 3. Human rights, equality, public services and one-parent families

This section gives a snapshot of the voices of parents who took part in One Family's *Human Rights, Equality and One Parent Families* research in 2021/2022. It outlines their experiences of using public services as a member of a one-parent family and what changes they think should be made to improve the way public bodies respond to people in one-parent families.

## Overview

During 2021-2022 One Family commissioned research to explore the experiences of people in one-parent families when using and interacting with public services. In total 148 parents from one-parent families took part in the research via online survey or focus group. The research questions and discussion topics focused on public service delivery. Some of the feedback from parents related to public or other services with no obligation under the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. Participants spoke about their experiences of public service delivery within the past year. Parents who participated in the focus groups were invited to take part in a *Rights Holder Steering Group*. The Steering Group participated in and guided the development of this guide and the accompanying guide for the public sector.

- Around 80 per cent of research participants were mothers, 18 per cent were fathers and 2 per cent preferred not to indicate gender.
- 27 per cent described themselves as sharing parenting and 73 per cent as parenting alone.
- 67 per cent said they had experienced unfair treatment, inequality or discrimination from a public service body.
- Half of participants said they had experienced a positive interaction with a public service body.
- Participants described engaging with a wide variety of public bodies. The Department of Social Protection was the public body parents had most interactions with most frequently, followed by the Court Service, and the Health Service Executive.

## What parents said

Parents were asked about their experiences when interacting with public services, both negative and positive. They were asked what the impact these interactions had on them and their families and what changes they would like to see in how public services are delivered to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect human rights.

Some key themes parents discussed were:

- **Dignity and respect** – these values were key in how parents described both positive and negative interactions with public services. They were central to how parents believed they should be treated by public bodies.
- **Protection from harassment** – parents described experiencing degrading, humiliating, intimidating or offensive treatment which undermined their dignity during some interactions with public services.
- **Prevention of discrimination because of civil or family status** – parents described a range of interactions with public bodies in which they felt discriminated against because of their family type.
- **Prevention of gender discrimination** – both Mams and Dads reported feeling discriminated against because of their gender. In many cases, they felt this was directly linked to their status as belonging to a one-parent family.

## Positive experiences

A variety of positive experiences with public bodies were discussed by parents. In schools and other educational bodies, parents described feeling like their family type was treated equally.

*“In general, I have had a positive experience in dealing with teachers and felt an effort to ensure our family type was included in the classroom environment. I feel my son is welcome and feels his family type is normal in the school.”*

*“When my youngest was in a community crèche the staff were very supportive and (let me pay) when I could. They gave me great advice and encouragement to stay working and helped me out.”*

Some Department of Social Protection Intreo Officers and Case Officers were also singled out for their positive approach towards one-parent families, along with Revenue Officers.

*“When I split up with my child's Dad, I had to get on to Revenue....and there was just somebody on the phone, and they were just really human. Just like “Oh, well, I hope you're okay now”, you know... it was just a really human interaction.”*

### The power of being treated equally

The impact of positive interactions can be powerful for parents. Not only do they describe feeling empowered to continue engaging with public services, but the experiences where they felt their rights were respected and they were treated equally had a positive effect on their own feelings of self-worth.

*"I felt respected, listened to, supported, my strengths acknowledged, and it helped me know not everyone in (public bodies) looks down on people like me."*

*"(I felt they) value me as who I am, reminded me that I am not alone. I know my worth and it built resilience moving forward."*

*"Gave me some confidence that people are there to help and will help."*

When asked about the impact a positive experience of using public services, some parents described practical and sometimes crucial outcomes for their families.

*"We were able to get out of homelessness."*

*"We now have heating."*

*"The impact of that experience changed our lives for the better. It changed the course of all our lives."*

### Negative experiences

Parents described negative experiences with a variety of public bodies. Issues that were described included feeling discriminated against because of their family type and not being treated with dignity or respect.

#### Discrimination

Parents described feeling discriminated against mostly for being in a one-parent family, but also for their gender or disability.

*"When my son was in ICU care, as I was parenting alone, some hospital staff weren't happy for me to have a family member with me as it wasn't my child's parent."*

*"My experience .....had a negative effect on my family as I felt because my family fell outside their definition of a one-parent family, we would not be supported."*



*"You are assumed to have no education or are only suitable for low-paid jobs. All that is sent to you is to get you into these jobs rather than helping with childcare to do the job you're trained for. Add being a migrant and it's even worse."*

*"I have been discriminated against because of my gender. I was told by a judge in the Family Court that "These things favour the mother."*

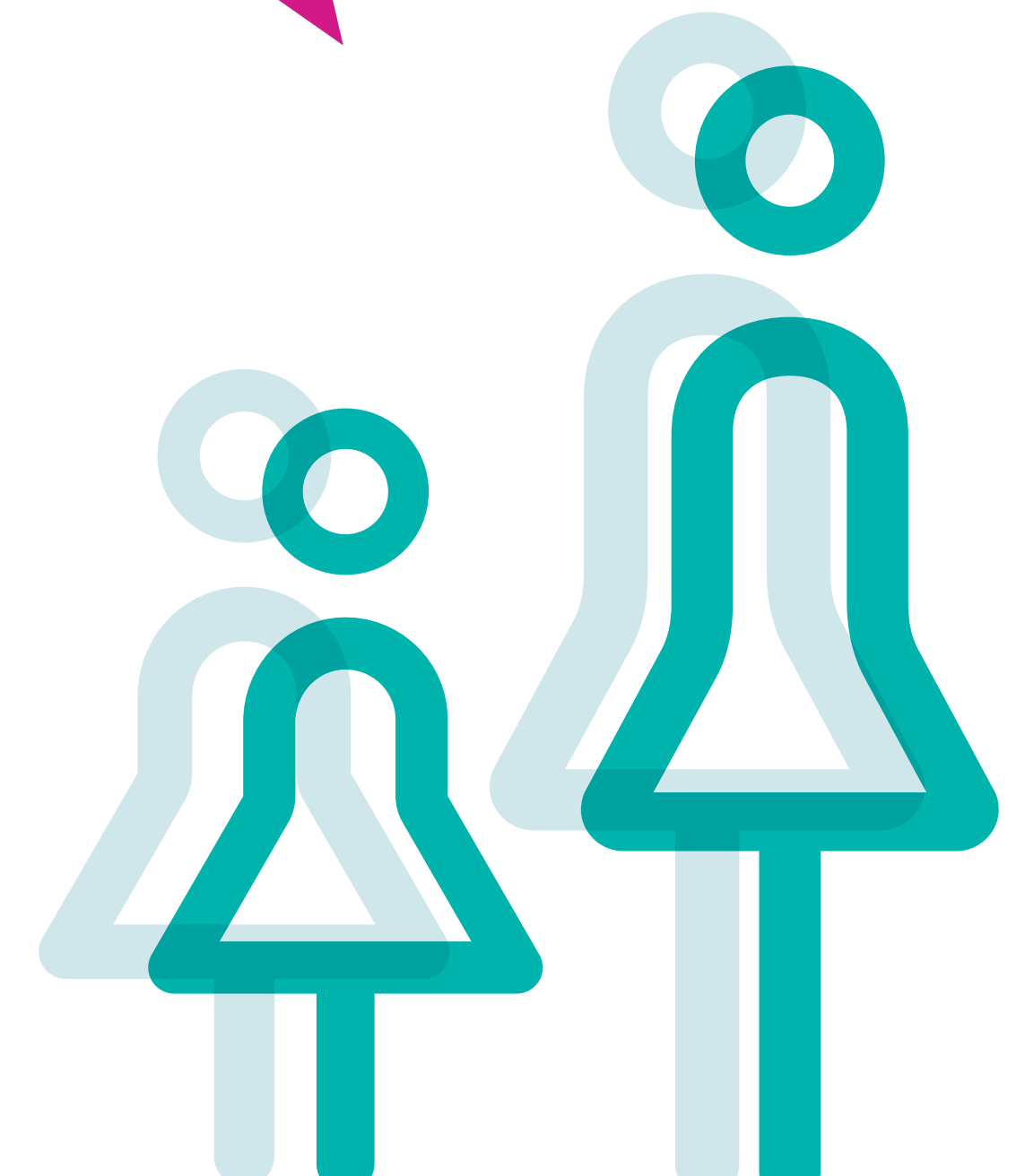
### **Dignity, respect and privacy**

Parents discussed feeling like they were not given the respect they deserved, being treated with a lack of dignity and feeling they had no privacy in their interactions with public bodies. They expressed feeling frustrated and disheartened by stereotypical assumptions, judgemental language, stigma and being treated like they were asking for charity rather a public service user. A common theme was difficulty accessing services, information and referrals. Parents identified the difference that helpful and supportive interactions where they were treated with respect could make to their outcomes.

While parents did not name their experiences as such, some of the treatment they described could constitute harassment in that it violated their dignity or created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.

*"The woman I was speaking to and was referred to said to me it is my own fault, that if I didn't have my child, I could have a career. That was it. I left the meeting, and I complained."*

*"(My One Parent Family Payment) had been diverted to another post office by an Intreo Officer in order to get me to come in. Why not ring someone? The stress of this....(I) had no petrol but somehow had to dash to the office, queue up then find out they wanted a form to be submitted to them (no form posted to me) and then I had to drive to another post office to access money for the week. This is inhumane and cruel and so degrading. The manager laughed and said this is how they get people's attention."*





*"I think when you're approaching the court services, initially going in the door, from the point of view is privacy, we have no privacy. You're going immediately to a hatch that's in the public. Your information is discussed in front of everybody from security on the door to the person behind you in the queue. And then I think maybe the approach of the staff, I understand that they have to be professional, but I think just rudeness is not acceptable. You should be polite. We're not asking them to advise us in any way. I just think common courtesy."*

### **The impact of discrimination**

Parents described the impact of feeling they were being treated differently as a lone parent, because of their gender or experiencing a lack of privacy, dignity and respect in their interactions with public bodies. For some parents, it put them off accessing services in the future. They described feeling like they hit a 'stone wall' and that they had nowhere to turn to. Others described feeling traumatised, having their self-worth undermined or being made to feel less than other people.

Parents said these interactions often left them feeling frustrated, untrusting of public bodies, fearful or apathetic about engaging with public services. For this reason, it is important for those delivering public services to take parents' previous experiences into account and approach each interaction with empathy and understanding.

*"Very traumatising. Still feel emotional when I think about how we were treated that day."*

*"Damages (your) self- esteem, makes life seem pointless, wouldn't feel confident in asking for support I am eligible for. Shame on them."*

*"Made feel very low and lesser than. In a crisis I went for help and left feeling worse."*



*"It was embarrassing and frustrating. I was made to feel I was doing something wrong or hiding something when I was not. I felt patronised every time I went into the office."*

Other parents described the impact on their child, their relationship with their child or their ability to parent.

*"I was left short of money..... short of childcare....(with) no incentive to work without affecting my payment, and shamed at meetings, pressurised to find full-time work. I got letters about night security jobs! Stressed! I felt I wasn't good enough as a parent for my child."*

*"I felt completely alone and unsupported while trying to manage my child's mental health issues and take care of my own mental health."*



## 4. About Human Rights and Equality

**This section gives an overview of what human rights are and who is responsible for protecting your rights. It also outlines what we mean by equality.**

*"It honestly feels like the minute you mention you're a lone parent this stigma is attached and used to judge everything you do."*

A parent who participated in the research

### What are human rights?

Human rights are basic standards and freedoms that everyone is entitled to. Human rights are universally accepted and are protected by international law and treaties, which Ireland has signed up to.

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is the foundation for human rights laws and treaties. It was created in 1948 from a desire to avoid the kind of inhumane atrocities seen during the Second World War and Holocaust. At the centre of the 1948 Declaration are the values of dignity, respect for all human beings, and freedom from discrimination.

Since then, human rights law has grown and is relevant to all aspects of society, including the delivery of public services. Human rights seek to protect people from harm and enable everyone to live a dignified life. There have also been human rights mechanisms developed to protect the most vulnerable groups in society.

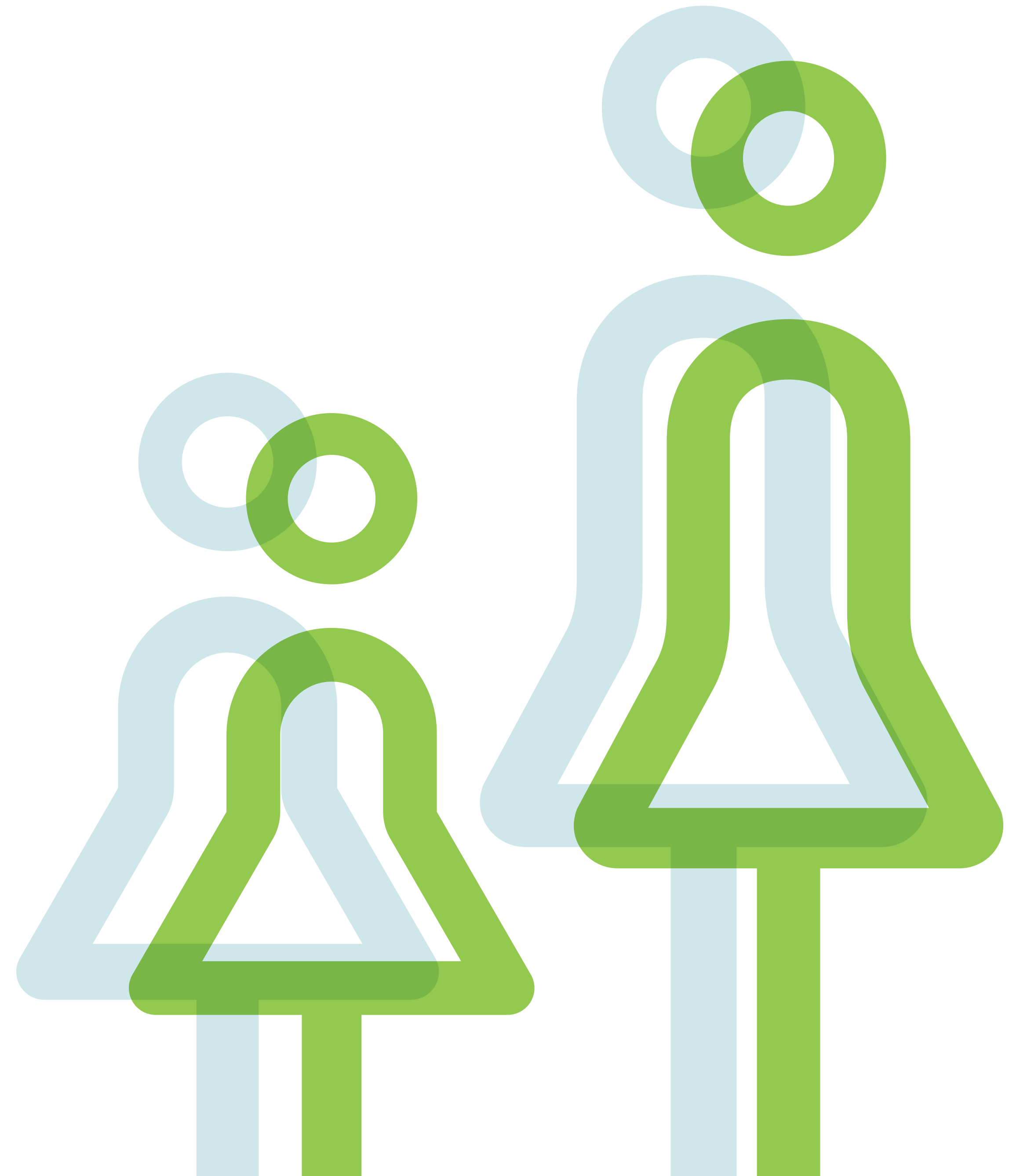
### Who protects my rights?

Under international law, countries must respect, fulfil and protect human rights. In Ireland this means the Government is mainly responsible for protecting rights by developing policies, institutions and services which respect and uphold human rights.

## What do we mean when we talk about equality?

Equality is about ensuring people have equal rights, freedoms and opportunities. Laws and policies that aim to advance equality recognise that people are often harmed and discriminated against by injustices such as racism or sexism. Discrimination happens when someone is treated badly or disadvantaged because they belong to a social group that is undervalued or disrespected. Equality means no one should be discriminated against because of, for example, their gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, race or family type. Equality measures often focus on groups or individuals who are discriminated against or those most vulnerable to being excluded from society. Equality and protection against discrimination are guaranteed under Irish law.

Equality and human rights are connected by having non-discrimination at their core. Article 2 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* says that everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms “*without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.*” For this reason, human rights and equality often go together. Laws, treaties, and covenants that deal with human rights are relevant for equality and *vice versa*.





## 5. About Human Rights and Equality Laws

This section describes the different international and national human rights and equality laws protecting people in one-parent families.

*“Treat people as equals – with dignity and care. Many people who are or become single parents have been through trauma and the last thing they need is to be treated as second class.”*

A parent who participated in the research

### How are my rights protected internationally?

There are many international treaties, laws and institutions that shape how human rights are protected in Ireland. The main international human rights structures relevant to people in Ireland are the United Nations and a regional system in Europe.

### The United Nations and human rights

The United Nations (UN) is an international organisation made up of countries or Member States. It was established in 1945 and its members agree to the principles and purpose set out in its founding document, called the United Nations Charter. Ireland is a member of the United Nations.

The United Nations is responsible for drafting and overseeing international human rights laws and treaties. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the central pillar of international human rights law. This sets out the basic human rights that form the foundation for all subsequent UN human rights treaties.

The main human rights treaties of the United Nations are:

Treaty	Date	Has Ireland Ratified
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	1966	Yes in 1989
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	1966	Yes in 1989
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)	1965	Yes in 2000
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (ICEDAW)	1979	Yes in 1985
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)	1984	Yes in 2002
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	1989	Yes in 1992
Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CRMW)	1990	No
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD)	2006	Yes in 2018
Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CPPED)	2006	No

**How is Ireland’s progress on human rights monitored?**

Ireland must make sure its laws and policies respect the rights set out in each of the treaties it has ratified. The UN periodically examines whether Ireland has put in place the laws and policies needed to fulfil its obligations under the treaties it has ratified. These ‘periodic reviews’ are an opportunity for non-governmental and other interested bodies to have their say on the Government’s progress in protecting human rights.



## Human rights in Europe

Human rights are protected regionally in Europe by two separate institutions: the Council of Europe and the European Union.

### European Convention on Human Rights

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is the foundation for the human rights system in Europe. It was created by the Council of Europe in the early 1950s and incorporated into Irish law in 2003. Today there are 46 Member States who have signed up to the ECHR, including Ireland.

Some of the rights and freedoms protected under the ECHR include:

- the right to life;
- the right to liberty and security;
- the right to respect for private and family life;
- freedom of expression.

### The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU

All institutions and Member States of the EU must comply with the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Charter came into effect in 2009 and sets out rights and equality protections under six headings: Dignity, Freedoms, Equality, Solidarity, Citizens Rights and Justice. Examples of Articles contained in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU include:

- equality between men and women;
- respect for private and family life;
- right to marry and right to found a family;
- fair and just working conditions; and
- freedom of movement and of residence in the EU.

### EU Equality Directives

The EU is responsible for several Equality Directives which influence equality legislation and policy in Ireland. A directive is a legislative act that sets a goal that all EU countries must achieve. How the goal is achieved is up to the individual country to decide. The EU equality framework includes other directives on areas such as race, gender, maternity and parental leave.

## What laws protect human rights and prevent discrimination Ireland?

Much of the human rights legislation in Ireland comes directly from the international agreements and treaties the Government has signed. Ireland has several key pieces of legislation that protect human rights, promote equality and prevent discrimination. These are outlined below.

### The Irish Constitution

The Irish Constitution, Bunreacht na hÉireann, is Ireland's core legal document. First adopted in 1937, it sets out how Ireland should be governed and the rights of Irish citizens. Articles 38-44 of the Constitution set out fundamental rights. These include the right to equality before the law and the right to freedom of expression. Since its adoption several Articles of the Constitution have been amended or added to bring it up to date with Ireland's international human rights obligations and to recognise changes in society. To change the Constitution, the Government must hold a referendum or national vote. For example, in 2012 children's rights were added and equal access to marriage regardless of sex was included in 2015, and in 2018 abortion was permitted for the first time.

### Changing the Constitution to cherish all families equally

Article 41 of the Constitution pledges special protection to the marital family. This Article, along with others about gender and caring responsibilities are out of touch with modern life. One Family is among a group of civil society organisations calling for a referendum in 2023 on changing the Constitution to value all family types equally. If you would like to learn more about this, please visit [www.onefamily.ie](http://www.onefamily.ie).



## Irish Equality Law

Irish equality law is made up of several different pieces of legislation or Acts designed to stop discrimination and ensure the equal treatment of everyone in Ireland.

### Grounds protected under Irish equality law

Common to all of Ireland's equality legislation are nine grounds which are protected from being the basis for discrimination. These protected grounds are:

- gender;
- civil status;
- family status;
- age;
- disability;
- sexual orientation;
- race;
- religion; and
- membership of the Traveller community.

## Civil and Family Status

Two of the grounds are directly relevant to people in one-parent families. The *civil status* ground prohibits discrimination as between who are single, married, separated, divorced, widowed, or in a civil partnership. People in one-parent families are also protected under the *family status ground*. That ground protects people who experience discrimination because they are the parent of a child. Discriminating against you or anyone in your family because you belong to a one-parent family is against the law. You may also be protected under one or more of the other protected grounds, depending on your circumstances.



**What would discrimination because of your family type look like?**

Alicja is a lone parent to eight-year-old Jozef and five-year-old Tomek. Each year she puts a little money aside every week to pay for a family holiday. Every year she picks the hotel or holiday camp they go to based on which accommodation offers a specific rate for one-parent families. This year she is finding it difficult to find anywhere offering a rate for one parent and children. The usual places she has stayed in the past are busy or no longer offer a one-parent family rate. Worried she will miss out on securing a booking at all she pays for a “family package” in a popular family resort. She pays the same rate as a family with two adults and two children. It’s often the same when she books a family gym membership, buys family passes to tourist attractions and pays for family insurance packages. She feels it’s so unfair.



## Discrimination

Different types of discrimination are recognised under Irish equality law. These are:

- **direct discrimination** – treating someone less favourably than others based on a protected ground. This includes discrimination by association, which involves treating someone less favourably because they associate with a person who differs under the nine protected grounds.
- **indirect discrimination** – putting policies or rules in place that apply to everyone, but that put someone who differs under any of the protected grounds at a disadvantage compared with others.
- **harassment and sexual harassment** – harassment is any form of unwanted behaviour related to the protected grounds and sexual harassment is any form of unwanted sexual behaviour. In both cases the purpose or effect of the harassment is disrespect and violation of dignity and creating a hostile, intimidating or degrading environment for the person.

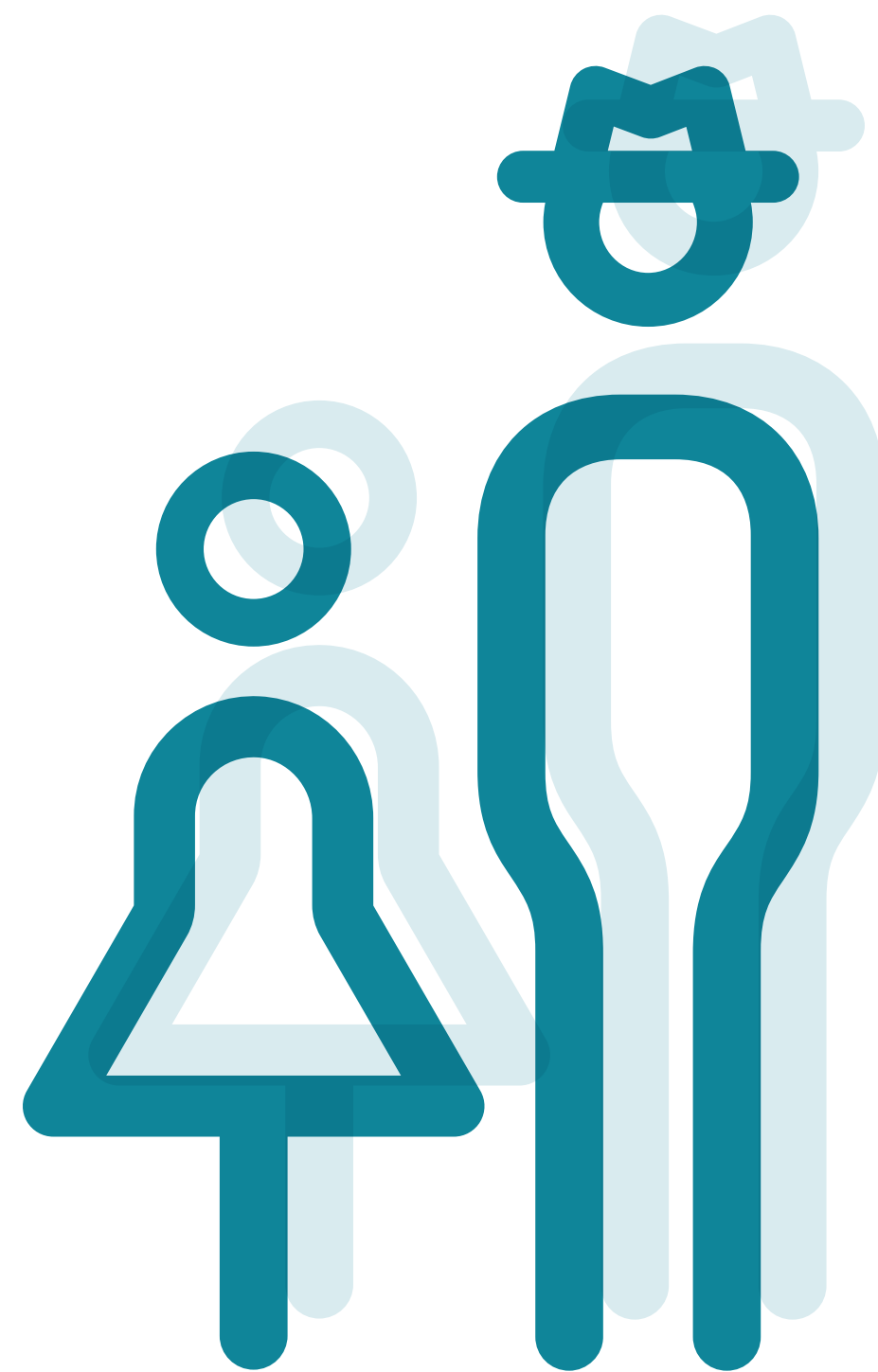
Equality law also places a responsibility on employers and service providers to take reasonable steps to accommodate people with disabilities.

## Equal Status Acts

The Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 are a set of laws protecting people from the discrimination that can happen in everyday life. They specifically apply to access to and use of goods and services, accommodation and education. They prohibit discrimination or harassment based on the nine protected grounds. They also include two additional grounds. The first is protection from discrimination because a person receives Rent Supplement, Housing Assistance Payment or any other social welfare payment. This ground only applies to accommodation and not to other provision of goods and services or to education. The second extra ground covered by the Equal Status Acts is the victimisation ground which applies to anyone who has sought legal redress, attended as a witness or opposed an unlawful act, or has given notice of their intention to do so.

## Exemptions

There are several exemptions provided in equality legislation. Some are specific, such as an exemption for “single sex” schools to allocate places based on gender. Others are general, such as the exemption for private activities, such as renting a room in a private home.



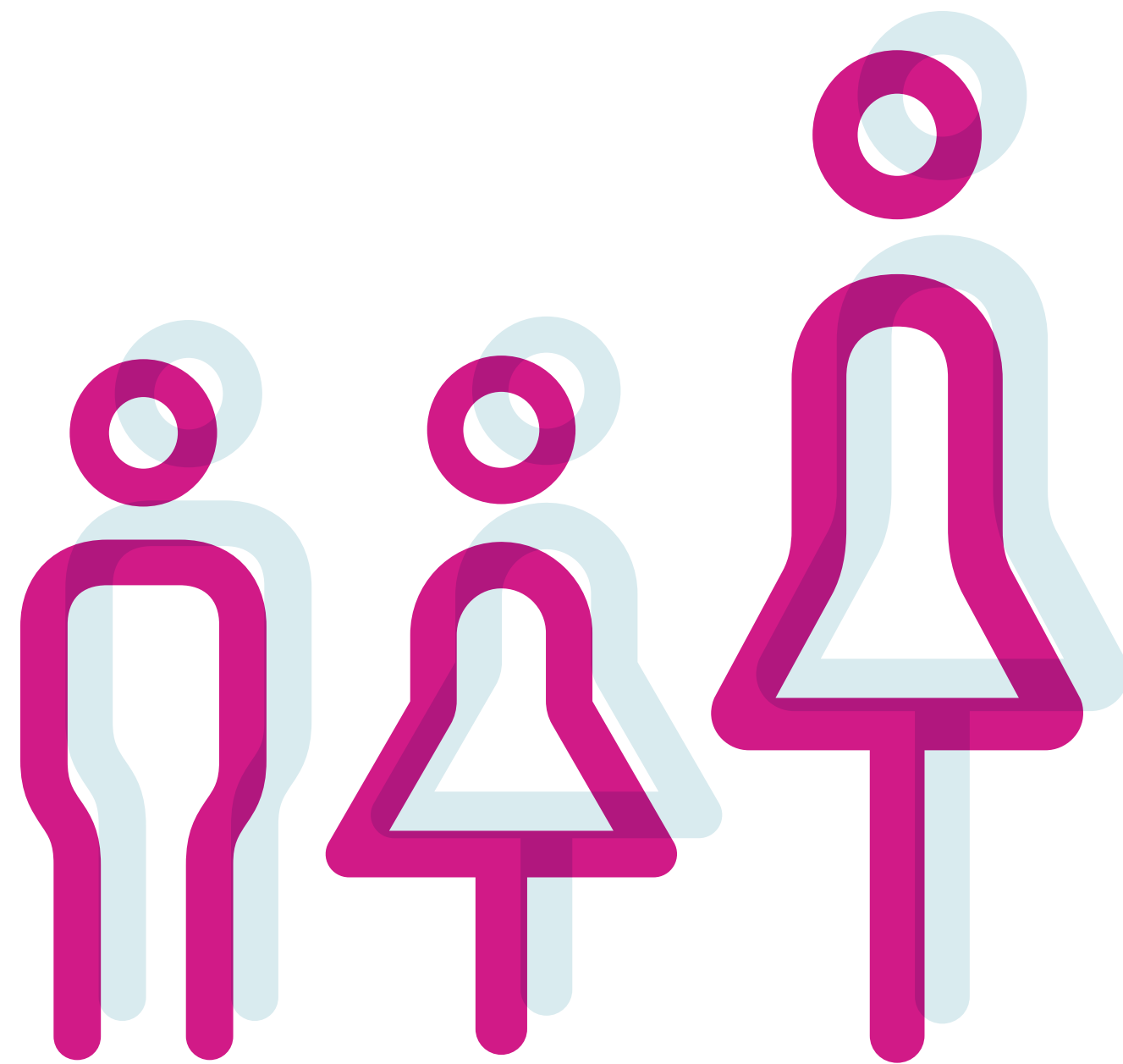
### What would gender discrimination look like?

Patrick has joint legal custody of his daughter Freya. Freya's Mam has poor mental health and finds it a struggle to cope with the day-to-day care of her daughter. For this reason, Freya spends weekdays and most of the weekend with Patrick. This arrangement worked well for everyone in the family, until Patrick found out his landlord was selling the apartment he rents. Patrick couldn't find anywhere else to live. He registered as homeless in the hope of accessing family homeless accommodation with Freya. He was distressed to find that he was not eligible for family accommodation as a Dad sharing custody and would only be considered for sole adult male accommodation by his Local Authority. This means Freya can't stay with him. Patrick worries about the impact this will have on her.



## Employment Equality Acts

The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2021 relate to work and employment. Like the Equal Status Acts, they prohibit discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment in any place of employment based on the nine protected grounds. This includes any work under an employment contract, vocational training or work experience. The Act covers a range of employment aspects such as advertising jobs, equal pay and the terms and conditions of jobs and dismissal.

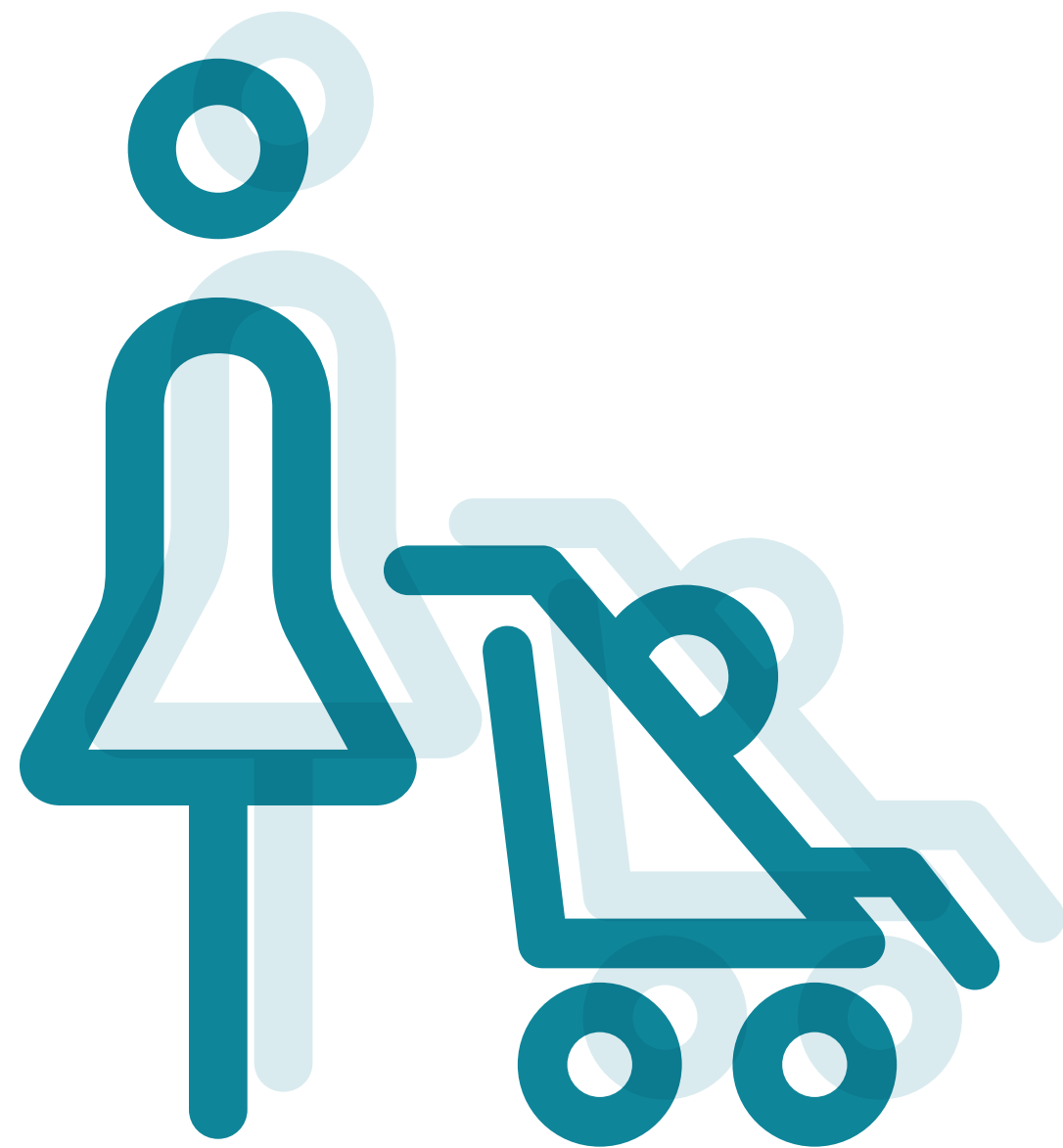


### **What would employment discrimination against people in one-parent families look like?**

Miriam is parenting her two children alone. She is training to be a teacher part-time. At the end of her training she had to complete a work experience placement in a secondary school. As she was coming to the end of her placement a job opportunity was advertised in the school. She was eligible, so she applied for the position. The interview was made up of the school Principal and members of the school Board of Directors. The interview went well, until towards the end the principal asked about her children. He asked how she planned to manage childcare if she got the job. Taken aback, Miriam answered she would manage the same as any parent. The principal continued to probe about how her status as a parent in a one-parent family could impact her ability to attend work reliably and do her job. She did not get the position and felt she had been discriminated against because of the family she belonged to.

## Positive Action

Equality law allows for employers and service providers to give preferential treatment to people based on the protected grounds. Such treatment is called ‘positive action’ and is designed to create equality of opportunity for people disadvantaged under the protected grounds. This can include charging a preferential fee for goods or services considering people’s different circumstances or creating employment conditions and programmes aimed at increasing the number of employees from a particular group.



### What would positive action look like?

Amir is a manager in a public body. He will be expanding his team and will have several new positions to recruit. A few years ago, his department reviewed their workplace profile and set targets for achieving a more diverse workforce in their strategic plan. Because of this, all managers have had training in equality, inclusivity and diversity. The public body has also set up some supports to help increase diversity and give equitable opportunity all applicants. This includes a programme of training, mentoring and internships available to women, ethnic minorities, lone parents, people with disabilities and members of the Traveller Community. This programme has been running for a few years and Amir is hopeful he will be able to recruit from its graduates. He will approach graduates directly when he advertises and advertise with representative organisations for each of the target groups. When he writes the job advert, he states the company welcomes applications from each of the target groups. It also highlights equitable family leave arrangements for people in one-parent families and access to subsidised on-site childcare facilities. At its next strategic review, the company finds it has far exceeded its goal of increasing diversity in its workforce. In a difficult recruitment market, the public body now has a wider pool of talented, skilled, loyal and experienced people from which to recruit.

## 6. Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty and One-Parent Families

**This Section is about the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty and one-parent families. It outlines the key things to think about when providing a public service to or interacting with someone in a one-parent family in your role as a public servant or employee. It explains the terminology you should use when speaking to and about people in one-parent families.**

*“To see the person beside you (treated differently) because they don’t look a certain way or have the right accent or talk a certain way. To be treated differently, to be standing side by side and to feel so helpless and powerless. I just think that’s absolutely wrong. So, it’s more about the rights and dignity and respect, irrespective of your gender or anything else.”*

A parent who participated in the research

### What is the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty?

The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty is a legal obligation that makes all public bodies responsible for the promotion of equality, prevention of discrimination and the protection of human rights. Also sometimes called the ‘Public

Sector Duty’ or ‘the Duty’ for short, it was introduced into Irish law in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, with the aim of putting equality and human rights at the heart of how public services are delivered. The Public Sector Duty means that, while carrying out their functions, all public bodies must have regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity and treatment for staff and persons to whom it provides services
- protect the human rights of staff and the persons to whom it provides services.

### How does the Public Sector Duty work?

The Public Sector Duty means public bodies have specific legal obligations to make sure their policies, practices and services promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect human rights. The Duty requires public bodies to take proactive steps to promote equality, protect human rights and combat discrimination. This means public bodies must go beyond avoiding discrimination against service users. Public bodies must also consider and review how they will advance equality for the groups protected under equality legislation and how they



will protect the rights contained within Ireland's human rights framework.

Under the Public Sector Duty each public body must take three core steps and each step must be done in a manner accessible to the public:

- 1. Assess** – each public body must assess the equality and human rights issues for service users and staff that it believes to be relevant to its functions and purpose and include the results in its strategic plan.
- 2. Address** – public bodies must then outline in their strategic plan what policies, plans and actions they already have in place or plan to do in the future to address these issues.
- 3. Report** – public bodies must then report on developments and achievements in relation to those policies, plans and actions in its annual report.

Public bodies carry out these three tasks in the context of purpose, functions, size and their available resources.

## The role of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) oversees the implementation of the Public Sector Duty in public bodies. Under the 2014 Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, IHREC is responsible for giving guidance to public bodies and encouraging them to develop good human rights and equality policies, plans and practices.

Where IHREC considers that there is evidence of a failure by a public body to perform its functions in line with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty it may invite a public body to carry out a review, or to prepare and implement an action plan related to the performance of its functions, or both. The focus of the review or action plan may be on equality of opportunity and human rights in general terms, or on a particular aspect of human rights or discrimination in the body, or both. IHREC has developed extensive guidance on implementing the Public Sector Duty, including case studies. These resources can be accessed freely online at [www.ihrec.ie](http://www.ihrec.ie).



## What should I think about when providing a public service to someone in a one-parent family?

While public bodies must uphold and protect all of the Irish human rights and equality framework, there are certain protections that are particularly pertinent to people in one-parent families and were highlighted by parents taking part in the Human Rights, Equality and One-Parent Families research.

### Discrimination because of family type

People in a one-parent family are legally protected from discrimination because of the type of family they belong to. It is important to challenge preconceived ideas or judgements about what a one-parent family looks like. A one-parent family may be a family with a mother, father or other guardian who is parenting alone, or it could be a family where parents or other guardians are sharing parenting of their children. One-parent families can include stepparents, foster parents, grandparents and other types of guardians. Whatever the make-up of a one-parent family, public bodies must not discriminate against them because of the type of family they belong to.

*“My experience...had a negative effect on my family as I felt because my family fell outside their definition of a one-parent family, we would not be supported.”*

Moreover, public bodies should take positive action to counter the inequalities people in one-parent families experience. For example, parents in one-parent families often have additional caring responsibilities when it comes to their children. They may find it harder to attend meetings, particularly outside of childcare or school hours. Positive action in this instance may include putting a policy in place to prioritise or safeguard certain appointment times for people in one-parent families, to speak with parents and work out a schedule that recognises their caring responsibilities and to take an understanding approach and allow leeway for cancellation due to family obligations such as sick children.

### Intersectionality - belonging to multiple groups

People in one-parent families may also belong to another group, protected by equality law. One-parent families may include people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, migrants or ethnic minorities or members of the Traveller community. When providing public services to people in one-parent families it is important to recognise other types of discrimination they may be vulnerable to. The distinct discrimination a person experiences based on membership of two or more protected groups can overlap, intersect and mean

a person is at an additional disadvantage. People in one-parent families who belong to one or more other groups protected by equality legislation should be prioritised in strategies and policies for positive action or additional support.

### **Gender discrimination**

Gender discrimination is experienced by both mothers and fathers in one-parent families, and this is borne out by our research with parents. Gender discrimination against parents in one-parent families is often layered on top of discrimination due to family type or influenced by their role as a parent in a one-parent family. Transgender and non-binary people in one-parent families may also experience discrimination because of their gender identity. Through One Family's work with families, we know that both adults and children in one-parent families who identify as transgender and non-binary often experience discrimination and a lack of supports, such as appropriate health and social care services.

### **Dignity, respect and freedom from harassment for people in one-parent families**

*"I felt respected, listened to, supported, my strengths acknowledged, and it helped me know not everyone in (public bodies) looks down on people like me."*

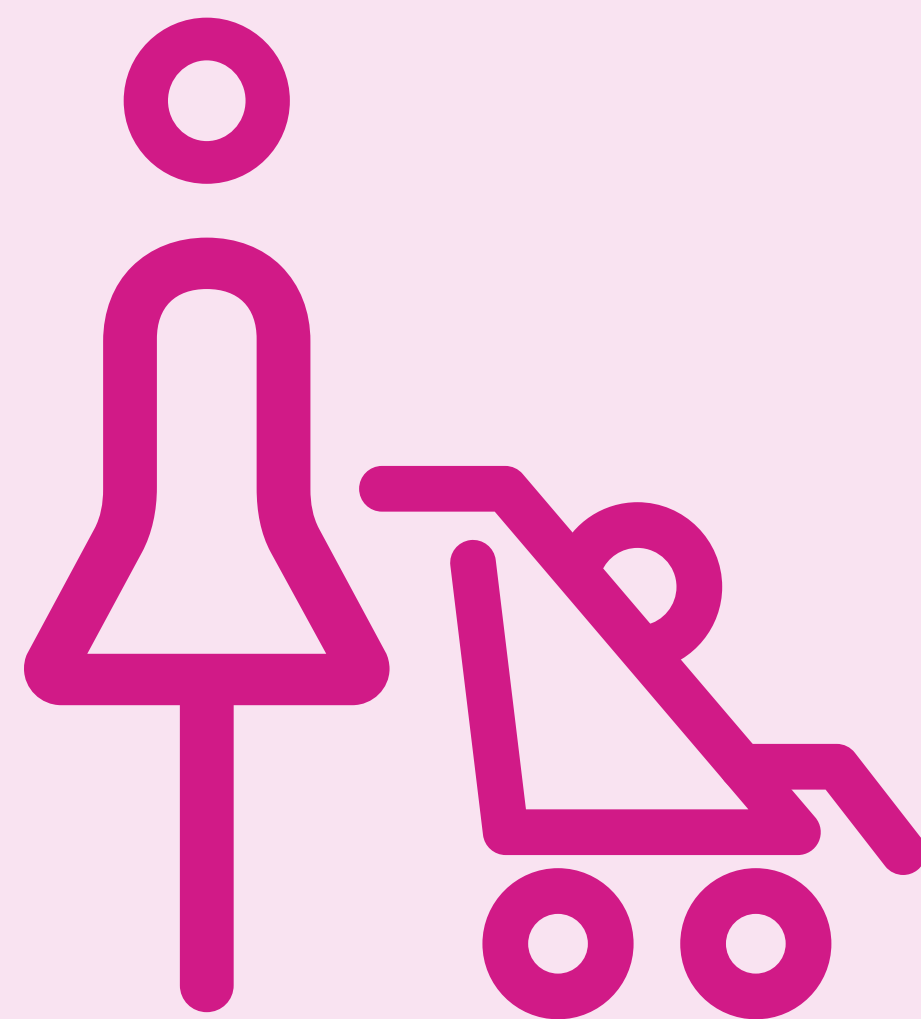
Dignity and respect are values which underscore the rights contained in the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. All public bodies have a responsibility to treat people with dignity and respect and prevent harassment, yet poor treatment, sometimes including harassment, was a key theme to come out of our research parents. Parents also outlined the impact feeling respected and afforded dignity by people providing public services could have. They described how positive interactions could have a significantly positive impact not only on their experience with that public body, but also on their attitude towards future engagement with other public services. In some cases, parents reported a direct link between feeling respected during an interaction with a public body and on their family's outcomes.

Below are two examples from parents in their own words about an interaction with a public body.

## Effie's Story

When my daughter was two or three, I went to the social welfare office to look for supports. I was struggling, trying to balance working and a young child. The person I dealt with treated me horrendously, like I wasn't human. I was very nervous. I had my son in the buggy with me. The woman that came to ask me into the office, her body language, the way she looked at me, the way she spoke to me, her tone of voice was very disrespectful. I have been brought up to always be polite to people, you know, in any situation. So I went into the room, and I put my hand out and I said, "Hi, my name is Effie" to shake her hand. And she just looked at me and said, "I'd rather not." And at that point, I started crying.

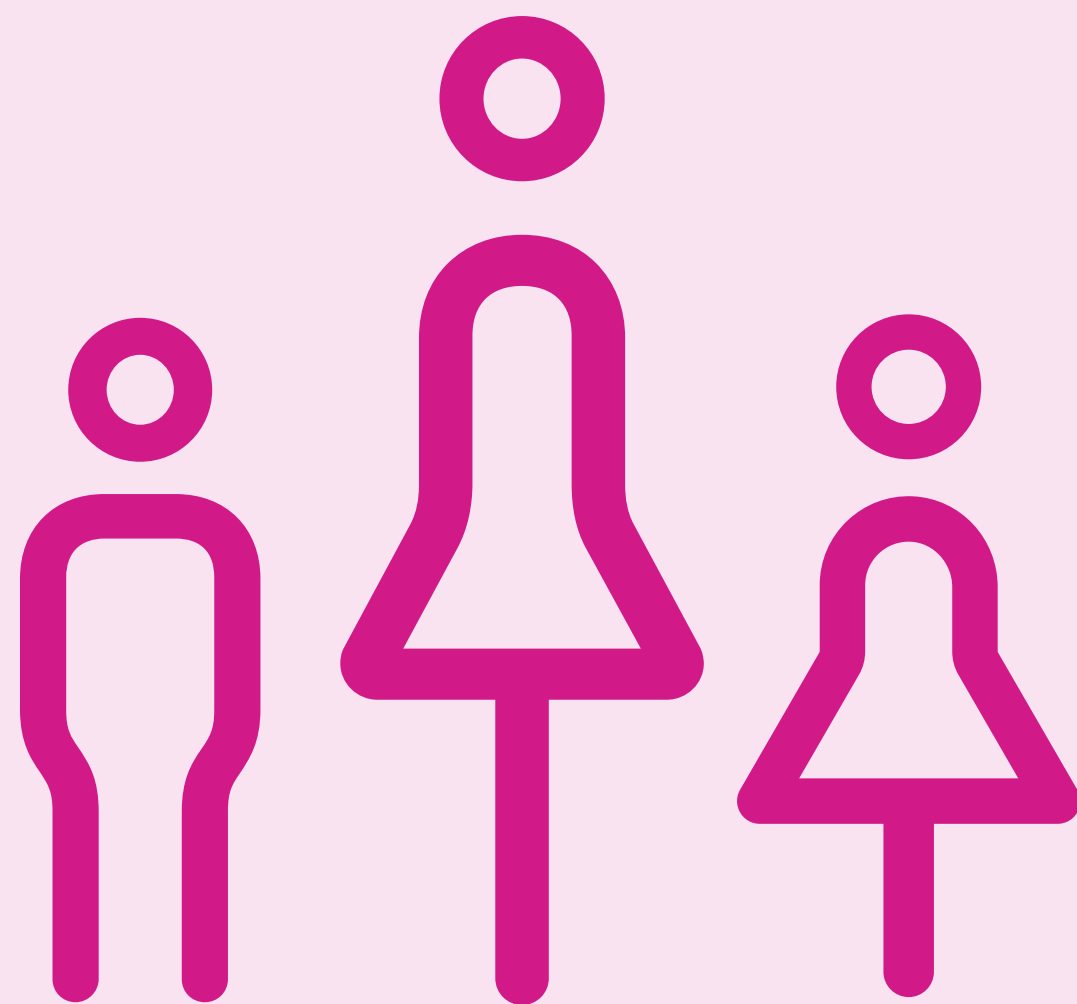
She showed no empathy, no consideration. As the meeting continued, she didn't explain to me what the process was, or why she was asking such personal very detailed questions about my relationship and why I was asking to be supported as a single parent. She obviously didn't feel that I deserved what was going on explained to me. I was told if I wasn't prepared to do what the system was asking me that I wasn't entitled to anything. There was no leeway. There was no understanding that this was a mother trying to find a way to work, but also look after her child. She made me feel like less of a person, less of a contribution to society. I am educated, I've worked since I was 15 years old. I felt traumatised, like I had to lie or hide who I was. Her method of communication and lack of ability to empathise is something I will never forget. Public bodies and their staff should treat people with respect like everybody deserves no matter what their situation is.





## Siobhán's Story

Just this week actually I had a really positive experience. I want to get back to work so I've been looking at different options. I live very rurally and trying to get information is hard. I considered a CE scheme even though obviously it's not going to bring in money but just to get back in the headspace of work. I had been told by three different officials, both online and by ringing the central number that I'll get help with childcare and with travel costs. For us living rurally it's half an hour in the car both ways and another 15 minutes to the childcare, but I was told "apply for it apply for it you'll get all this help". I still needed to clarify before I committed to the job. Finally, a woman got back to me, she was absolutely brilliant, so professional.



She stood out in 13 years of dealing with this department, she was not only professional but so kind and so insightful. When she helped me figure out, I was going to be out of pocket by at least €35 because it was going to cost €25 in petrol and €32 in childcare. She said that all I would get is a €20 top up on my weekly payment, and she said there's no way you can do this you'd be paying to go on a CE scheme. She took all my details, my background, my experience and qualifications and she said a CE scheme is not for you. She said for the qualifications and experience you have; you should be in paid employment. You deserve to get a financial return for the experience and skills you have. It was just so timely and so appreciated, and really stood out from all the other dealings I'd had. It was having that validation and that belief, and she didn't just leave it there. She said, "Do what you want to do it's your choice but if you decide not to take the CE position come back and I'll help you", not just "I believe in you now off you go." So now I have a contact number for someone who is very professional, insightful and proactive. Very respectful. She didn't just leave me hanging, it wasn't just empty words.



## How to speak about one-parent families

*"I was pregnant, I had nowhere to live, I was a nervous wreck. And I went into the (public) services for support, and a man just looked at me with such contempt and he said, 'You're not going to get yourself a house now, just because you've gotten yourself into a stupid situation.'"*

The language we use shapes the world around us. The language and terms used to describe people in one-parent families and their circumstances can affect their experience of using public services. Just as using harsh, inappropriate, or outdated terminology can undermine and discriminate, using positive language and inclusive terminology can be empowering for people in one-parent families. If unsure about what terms someone is comfortable with, you should ask them. It is also useful to mirror the language someone uses about themselves and their family. Below is a list of key terms you may hear or use:

**A person parenting alone** – People who are parenting alone may be a mother, father or other person with sole responsibility for caring for a child or children, such as a grandparent. Sometimes the term *lone* parent is used to describe someone parenting alone. Terms like *single parent*, *unmarried mother/father* should be avoided, unless a parent's marriage/civil status is of direct relevance or the parent uses it themselves.

**Contact/contact time** – Contact or contact time is the time a child or children spend with a parent that they don't live with. The term *access* is sometimes used interchangeably with *contact*; however, *access* is a legal term that describes the child's right to maintain contact with their parents.

**Custody** – the legal division of the day-to-day care, residency and upbringing of a child or children. Sometimes one parent or guardian has primary custody and sometimes it is split evenly between parents which is called *joint custody*.

**Guardian** – a person with legal responsibility of a parent to make decisions and perform duties in relation to their child's upbringing. This may be the child's parent or another relation, adult or the State. Guardianship lasts until the child is 18 years old.

**Kinship carers** – the full-time parenting of a child or children by their grandparent, sibling, aunt, uncle or other relative when their parents are no longer able to look after them.

**Non-resident parent** – a parent who does not have the main caring responsibilities but has contact with their child or children.

**One-parent family** – a family with children where a parent or guardian is parenting alone, sharing parenting or separating. Children may live in two one-parent families if they spend time with both of their parents.

**Resident parent** – a parent who has the main caring responsibilities for a child or children.

**Step-parent/step-family** – a family where a new partner of a legal parent takes on a parenting role. This may be formalised through marriage or may be informal through a long stable relationship.

**Blended family** – a family where each parent may have children from a previous relationship and/or the new partners may have a child together.

**Shared parenting** – shared parenting is when both parents, who live separately, have an active parenting role in their child's life, irrespective of how much time they might actually spend with their child. Shared parenting might also be referred to as 'co-parenting'.

**Separating/Separated Families** – Families where parents were formerly in a relationship together or were married but who have now separated and ended their partner relationship.

## What can you do to help?

What should you do if you encounter discrimination against someone because of their family type, or on any of the other grounds protected in equality legislation or you feel someone's human rights are being denied in your workplace? Below is a list of things to consider and actions you can take:

**Be informed** – Make sure you are informed about the policies and procedures that are in place in your organisation to support people experiencing discrimination and protecting people's rights. These might include equality and diversity policies, a complaints policy, human resources policies and data protection policy. Does your organisation have a Public Sector Duty Action Plan? Does the plan include the core requirements of the Duty to Assess, Address, Report? If so, make yourself familiar with the activity already underway within the organisation. Think about your own work and how you can incorporate promoting equality, preventing discrimination and protecting human rights day-to-day.

**Listen** – If someone raises a complaint of discrimination with you it is important to listen carefully and without judgement to what they are telling you. In the case of a complaint or where you witness someone being discriminated against, you should take notes of the complaint/encounter. Include details such as what happened, the date, time, location, who was involved and any other important details. Make sure they know what they disclose will be treated with respect and confidentiality.



**Take it seriously** – Take every complaint or observation of discrimination seriously. Do not make judgements without proper assessment of the facts or before following the correct complaints procedure. Treat every incident seriously no matter how small you perceive it to be; what might seem like a small issue to you, could be a big problem for the person experiencing discrimination.

**Show solidarity** – Experiencing discrimination can be hurtful, confusing and isolating. These feelings can be compounded when interacting with a public body. The person who has been discriminated against may feel powerless. They may also be fearful of the influence the public body and its representatives can have on their circumstances. They may worry about repercussions. It is important to acknowledge complaints thoughtfully. Consider the impact the disclosed discrimination has on the person and the stress and worry that making a complaint can have. Make sure the person making a complaint knows you are listening to them and taking them seriously. Let them know what will happen next.

If you witness discrimination taking place, check if the person being discriminated is alright. This can be done discreetly; find somewhere quiet to talk to them, especially if they are upset. Let them know you saw what happened, that you understand, and that you take it seriously. Give them information on where they can go for information and support (see Section 8), information on the public body's complaints procedure and its obligations under the Public Sector Duty.

**Take Action** – When it comes to discrimination, doing nothing shows the person being discriminated against that you think what happened is okay. It tells other people around you that discrimination is acceptable and can create a culture in which people are apathetic in the face of inequality. Do not assume someone else will take action. Research shows the more people that witness a discrimination, the lower the likelihood that someone will help. This is because everyone assumes someone else will take action.

What action you take will depend on the circumstances, but it may include raising the issue with a supervisor informally, making a formal complaint, discussing the issue with an Equality or Social Inclusion Officer within the public body, contacting the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission for information, making or supporting someone to make a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission, making a complaint to the relevant ombudsman or contacting the ombudsman's office for information or support (details are available in Section 8).

**Follow Up** – Where possible and appropriate you should follow up with the person who experienced the discrimination and keep them up to date on what is happening with their complaint, or make sure the relevant person does this.

## 7. What can public bodies do to improve the experiences of people in one-parent families?

**This section sets out how public bodies can make their services more accessible to and inclusive of people in one-parent families.**

### What change would parents make?

Participants in the *Human Rights, Equality and One-Parent Families* research were asked what changes they believed public bodies should make to improve services for one-parent families. Training was one of the most common suggestions from parents. Their suggestions ranged from training on human rights and equality, to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence training, to training that would challenge public sector staff to examine their own unconscious biases and treat everyone with respect, regardless of their background.

*“Train staff to treat people equally.”*

*“Training on ‘unconditional positive regard’ and empathy/customer service training. Training on the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act.”*

*“Training. Some people are in jobs so long and the outlook has changed. The public are not a bunch of scammers to be suspicious of, but people in the community with dignity you are paid to assist. Wording documents and forms should be updated.”*

*“Training for providers, if that’s what’s necessary in order for people to deal respectfully with service users, training in what it means to be a lone parent and the barriers we face. To not assume lone parents are happy on welfare and are uneducated.”*



*"There's one aspect which is training but another is personal self-development. People can have a day's training on 'here's the facts on lone parents' but it's really digging into what their own personal assumptions are. And those assumptions are often supported by cultural assumptions. So yes training, but training with an element of probing self-development to know what your own biases truly are and not just what you're being told to believe on a whiteboard."*

*"Training to treat customers with dignity and respect. Operate with efficiency and don't blame the person seeking help, blame the system. Also don't judge others on their life circumstances or current. Things can happen to anyone."*

Some parents had logistical suggestions for how public bodies could be more inclusive and attentive to the needs of one-parent families. These included using digital technology to make attendance at appointments and meetings easier and taking a flexible approach to scheduling which recognises the responsibilities parents have. Expanding eligibility to schemes, such as civil legal aid or the Affordable Housing Scheme, to be more inclusive of people in one-parent families was also suggested.

*"Appointments outside of work and school hours so that we can attend with our child."*

*"See us as a family like any other. Have payment plans. Have a maintenance collection unit. Have access to legal aid for parents supporting children by themselves."*

*"Allow all lone parents to avail of affordable housing, regardless of if they previously owned a property."*

Other parents believed that understanding the lived experiences of people in one-parent families through listening and consultation would help improve the services provided by public bodies.

*"Consultation with single parents on their actual needs and how best to deliver those services in a way that is respectful and empathetic. A course on active listening for all public servants."*

*"Listen without prejudice."*

*"Listen to what I have to say."*

## What action should public bodies take?

Below are some methods public bodies should use to help them in their implementation of the public sector duty.

### Equality and Human Rights Assessment

As outlined, the Public Sector Duty requires public bodies to assess the equality and human rights issues service users and staff may experience. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission have a guidance role in relation to the Duty and recommend public bodies take an evidence based approach to undertaking an assessment and action plan, including consultation with public sector staff and service users and consideration of research reports from civil society organisations. The findings of this report should inform a public body’s assessment and action plan. IHREC recommends that in order to inform assessments public bodies should consult with a diversity of service users, including one-parent families, in order to take an evidence based approach to their assessment and action plan.

We know people in one-parent families are particularly vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion and they are a group which overlaps and intersects with many of the grounds protected under equality legislation. One-parent families therefore make a good starting point to base an equality and human rights assessment on. It is crucial that one-parent families are included in the assessment through consultation, participation or other engagement methods.

**Action:** Carry out an equality and human rights impact assessment informed by consultation with one-parent families. Use this assessment as a basis for expanding the assessment process to other protected groups.

### Engage with one-parent families

Consultation and engagement with people in one-parent families should be a central pillar, not only in the assessment phase of Public Sector Duty implementation, but in every aspect of a public body’s service delivery. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission provides comprehensive guidance on consultation and engagement, along with a consultation tool to support public bodies to undertake inclusive consultation and other resources available at [www.ihrec.ie](http://www.ihrec.ie). Engagement can take a variety of forms. It’s important to think about the needs of participants when designing a consultation as this can directly impact the level of engagement. Where services are provided to children and young people, public bodies should carry out age-appropriate engagement with them.

**Action:** Consider the following when thinking about engaging with one-parent families:

**Accessibility** – Is the format accessible to parents who may have additional caring responsibilities? For example, online or remote consultations can give parents more flexibility. Is it possible to provide childcare for in-person consultations? If you are engaging with children or young people, ask; Is the



design of the consultation age-appropriate? Are robust consent processes in place? Are there adequate safeguarding and child protection protocols? Parents have different work and care responsibilities and not everyone has access to transport so consider scheduling a variety of locations and times for in-person consultations.

**Transparency** – Have you communicated in clear language what the purpose of the engagement is, if it will be anonymous, how personal data will be treated and what a participant can do if they are unhappy or no longer wish to participate?

**Power** – People in one-parent families may feel uneasy about sharing a frank opinion or being critical of a public body they rely on. Always be aware of the power dynamic that exists between public body and service user. You can mitigate this by designing anonymous consultations, by engaging with former service users, or by engaging with families via representative organisations.

**Openness** – Be open to the views of people in one-parent families, even if they are not what you expect or want to hear. Feedback that challenges the status quo or expectations can be most effective in achieving change. Ensure the results of the engagement are fed back to participants so they can see the change they were instrumental in bringing about.

**Meaningfulness** – Engagement should always have a clear purpose that is communicated clearly from the outset. Participants' views and experiences should be valued and used for the purpose they were given. Participatory engagement should be considered as it is the most effective and inclusive engagement; this means including people from one-parent families in the design of the consultation, how the feedback is used and on an ongoing basis in the changes that are made. Whatever the type of engagement, avoid 'box-ticking' exercises that have no tangible outcomes.

### **Provide training to staff**

A core recommendation from parent participants in the Human Rights, Equality and One Parent Families research was training for staff working in public bodies. Training on human rights and equality should be incorporated into public bodies' Public Sector Duty Assessment and Action Plan. This should include modules on discrimination on the family type ground, along with each of the other eight protected grounds. The experiences of service users from one-parent families should be central to the design of any training. Explore opportunities for people from one-parent families to participate in the design and implementation of any training designed to improve their experiences.

**Action:** Consider including the following training as part of the development of a Public Sector Duty Assessment and Action Plan:

- Equality and human rights training with a focus on the groups protected under equality legislation.
- Training to recognise and respond appropriately to domestic abuse and coercive control, including education on abuse post-separation.
- Training on countering unconscious bias, positive action, empathy and how to treat people with unconditional positive regard.
- Training on trauma, its effects, how to recognise it and how to respond.
- For hiring and line managers, training on how to support one-parent families as employees.

### **Promote equality through quality employment and people management**

The Public Sector Duty applies to employees as well as service users. Public bodies can improve the experiences of both employees and service users alike by actively recruiting members of the groups protected under equality legislation, including people in one-parent families. There is a clear business case for equality, in that when organisations create

a work environment where everyone is treated with respect and dignity and their differences are accepted and celebrated, employees are more likely to be loyal to the organisation and to be more productive.

Ensuring there is a culture of inclusion and equality in place within a public body is key. This can be fostered through internal communications, training and by putting supports in place for those likely to experience discrimination. For parents in one-parent families barriers to employment often include; additional caring responsibilities, financial concerns about making work pay enough to support a family, access to part-time work or flexible hours, and whether part-time work is valued by an employer in terms of promotion or progression.

**Action:** Take the following steps to make workplaces more inclusive of and appealing to people in one-parent families:

- Include employees who are in one-parent families in the public body's human rights and equality assessment. Review the workplace profile and consider whether any employment policies or practices are likely to have a differential and possibly less favourable impact on these employees.
- Develop a plan for the recruitment of and creation of equal opportunities for people in one-parent



families with clear targets, and review it regularly. Ensure accountability when targets are not achieved, investigate shortcomings and respond accordingly.

- Actively encourage job applications from people in one-parent families and remove any barriers or biases from recruitment processes.
- Create quality part-time employment opportunities at all levels of responsibility in the organisation.
- Design flexible work practices that allow parents to balance work with caring for their children.
- Develop clear and fair professional development practices in training, coaching, mentoring, promotion and performance management.
- Ensure equal pay policies are in place, regardless of gender, family type or whether a role is part or full-time.
- Have zero tolerance for harassment or bullying and outline this clearly in policies. Make sure staff and managers are aware of and trained on their rights and responsibilities.



## 8. Useful Contacts

**Below is a list of organisations where you can find more information about one-parent families, human rights and equality.**

### Children's Rights Alliance

The Children's Rights Alliance is a membership organisation representing children. They have information and resources on their website about children's rights and a legal helpline.

**Helpline number:** 01 902 0494

**Email:** [help@childrensrights.ie](mailto:help@childrensrights.ie)

**Website:** [www.childrensrights.ie](http://www.childrensrights.ie)

### Citizens Information

Citizens Information provides free, independent information and advice on public services and citizens' entitlements. There are more than 200 Citizens Information Centres across Ireland providing free, impartial information, advice and advocacy. You can find details of their locations on their website or by calling their Phone Service.

**Citizens Information Phone Service:** 0818 074 000

**Website:** [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie)

### Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC)

FLAC is an independent voluntary organisation promoting equal access to justice for everyone. FLAC provides a telephone information and referral line offering basic legal information, online resources and a limited number of legal advice clinics.

**Telephone Information and Referral Line:** 01 906 1010

**Website:** [www.flac.ie](http://www.flac.ie)

### Garda Ombudsman

The Garda Ombudsman is responsible for dealing with complaints of misconduct by members of the Garda Síochána in an efficient, effective and fair manner. You can make a complaint online through their website.

**Phone:** 0818 600 800

**Address:** 150 Upper Abbey Street, Dublin 1, D01 FT73

**Website:** [www.gardaombudsman.ie](http://www.gardaombudsman.ie)

### HSE Patient Advocacy Service

The Patient Advocacy Service is a free and confidential service operated independently of the HSE. It provides information and support to anyone who wants to make a complaint about an experience they have had in a HSE public acute hospital or a HSE operated nursing home.

**Phone:** 0818 293 003

**Email:** [info@patientadvocacyservice.ie](mailto:info@patientadvocacyservice.ie)

**Address:** Level 3 Marshalsea Court, 22/23 Merchants Quay, Dublin 08 N8V

**Website:** [www.patientadvocacyservice.ie](http://www.patientadvocacyservice.ie)

## Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is Ireland's national human rights and equality institution. They have information, guides and tools about human rights, equality and the Public Sector Duty on their website. They also provide a number of supporting functions in relation to helping people defend their rights and an information service called Your Rights.

**Your Rights Helpline:** 01 858 3000 or Lo call 1890 245 545

**Email:** [YourRights@ihrec.ie](mailto:YourRights@ihrec.ie)

**Address:** Your Rights, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 16-22 Green St, Dublin 7.

**Website:** [www.ihrec.ie](http://www.ihrec.ie)

## Office of the Ombudsman

The Ombudsman examines complaints from people who feel they have been unfairly treated by a public service provider in Ireland. They can examine complaints made against most public bodies including, government departments, local authorities, the HSE and publicly funded third level bodies. You can find information about making a complaint and make an online complaint through their website.

**Phone:** 01 639 5600

**Address:** 6 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 W773.

**Website:** [www.ombudsman.ie](http://www.ombudsman.ie)

## One Family

One Family is Ireland's national organisation for people parenting alone, sharing parenting and separating. We provide services to families, including the AskOneFamily Helpline which provides listening support and information.

**AskOneFamily Helpline:** 01 662 9212 or 0818 662212

**Email:** [info@onefamily.ie](mailto:info@onefamily.ie)

**Website:** [www.onefamily.ie](http://www.onefamily.ie)

## Ombudsman for Children

The Ombudsman for Children investigates complaints about services provided to children by public organisations. The service is free and independent. The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) is a human rights institution that promotes the rights and welfare of young people under 18 years of age living in Ireland. You can make an online complaint through their website.

**Freephone:** 1800 20 20 40

**Email:** [ococomplaint@oco.ie](mailto:ococomplaint@oco.ie)

**Address:** Millennium house, First Floor, 52-56 Great Strand Street, Dublin, D01 F5P8

**Website:** [www.oco.ie](http://www.oco.ie)

## Social Welfare Appeals Office

The Social Welfare Appeals Office operates independently of the Department of Social Protection. It aims to provide an independent, accessible and fair appeals service with regard to entitlement to social welfare payments and to deliver that service in a prompt and courteous manner. To appeal a decision, you must fill out a form available online or from your local Intreo office and return it by email or post.

**Phone:** 0818 747434 or 01 673 2800

**Email:** [swappeals@welfare.ie](mailto:swappeals@welfare.ie)

**Address:** D'Olier House, D'Olier Street, Dublin, D02 XY31

**Website:** <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/031734-the-social-welfare-appeals-office/>

## Treoir

Treoir is a non-governmental organisation providing a free, confidential, specialist information service for parents not married to each other, living together or apart, their extended families and those working with them. Information is available on legal, social welfare and parenting issues.

**Phone:** 01 670 0120 or 01 670 0167

**Email:** [info@treoir.ie](mailto:info@treoir.ie)

**Website:** [www.treoir.ie](http://www.treoir.ie)



## Workplace Relations Commission

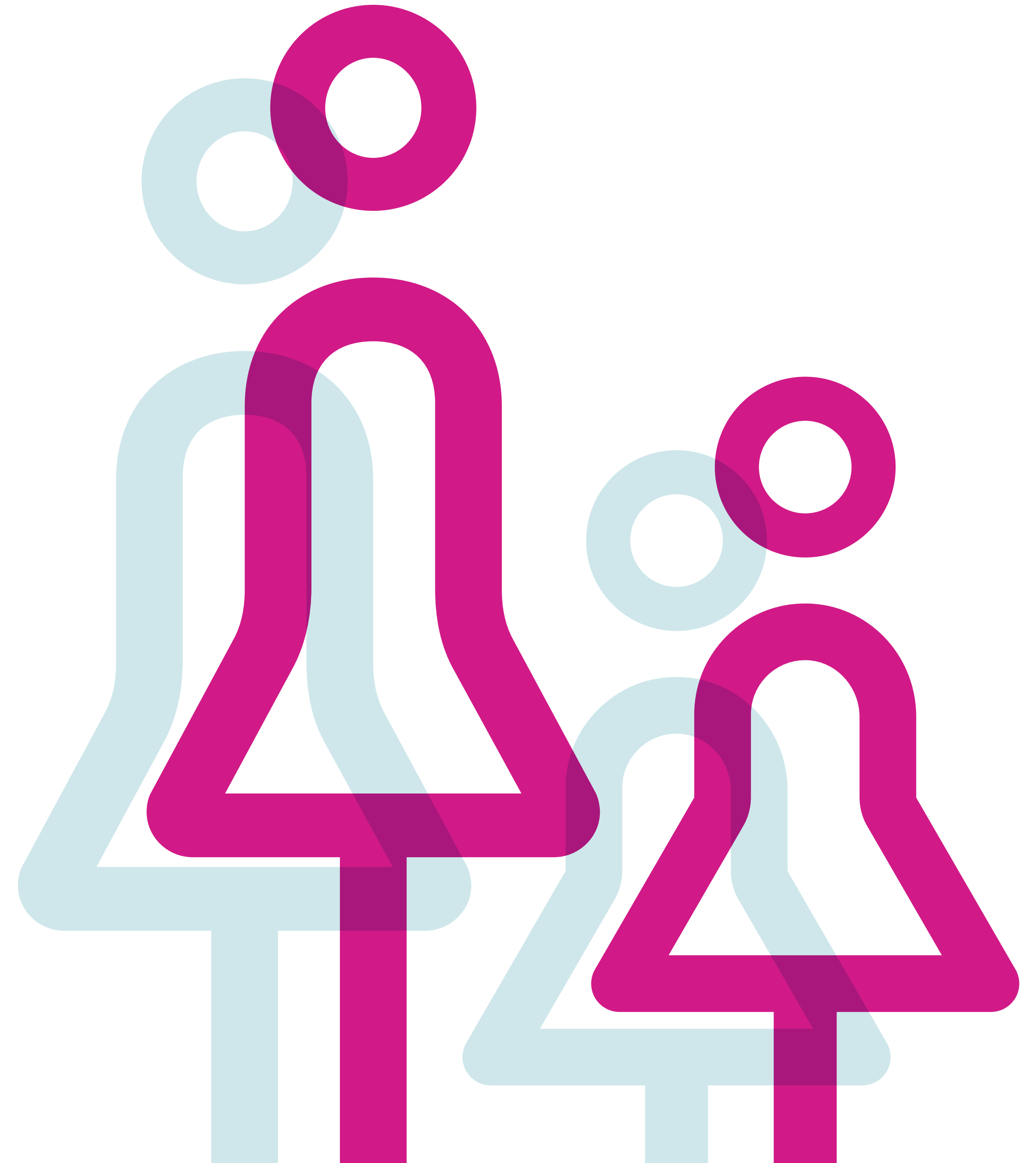
The Workplace Relations Commission is an independent statutory body that is responsible, among other things, for mediating, hearing and deciding equality cases and employment equality cases. You can make a complaint online through their website.

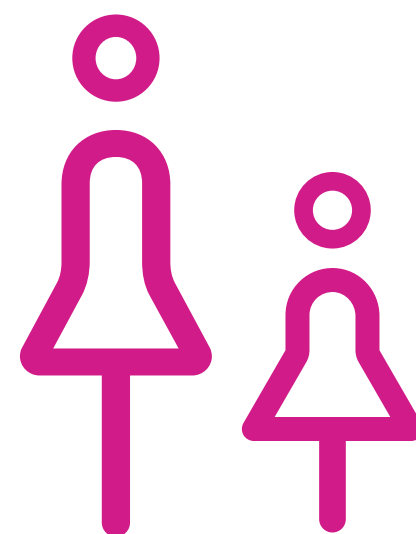
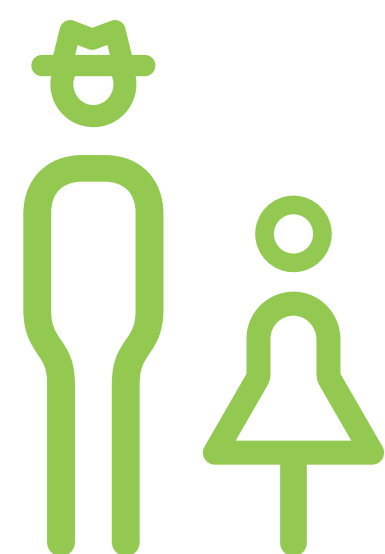
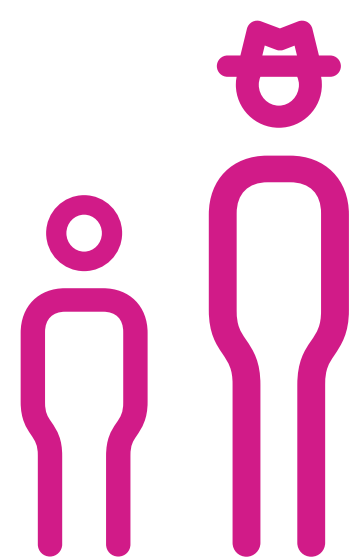
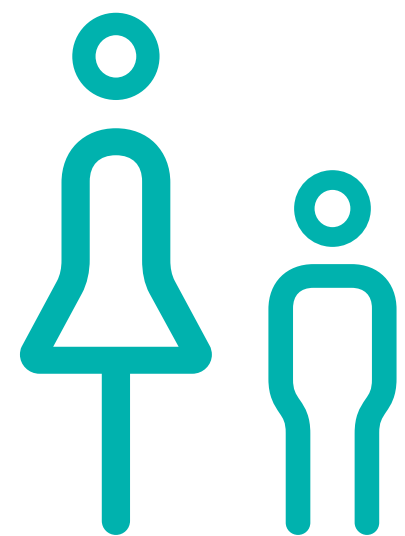
**Phone:** 0818 80 80 90 or 059 917 8990

**Workplace Relations Enquiry Form:** [https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/contact\\_us/](https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/contact_us/)

**Address:** O'Brien Road, Carlow, R93 E920

**Website:** [www.workplacerelations.ie](http://www.workplacerelations.ie)





**Coimisiún na hÉireann  
um Chearta an Duine  
agus Comhionannas**  
Irish Human Rights and  
Equality Commission

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