



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

IRELAND

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 24 OCTOBER 2025

ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Report



Warsaw
27 July 2026

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following an invitation from the authorities of Ireland, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) for the 24 October 2025 presidential election. The ODIHR EAM assessed the compliance of the electoral process with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections as well as with national legislation. In line with ODIHR's methodology, the ODIHR EAM did not observe election day proceedings in a systematic or comprehensive manner and visited a limited number of polling stations.

The 24 October presidential election was called on 3 September, prior to the completion of President Michael D. Higgins's second and final seven-year term. The election was conducted in a competitive and inclusive environment and administered by election authorities in an orderly and professional manner, enjoying a high level of confidence among stakeholders. The pre-election context was shaped by public expectations that the government would address persistent socio-economic challenges, including the housing crisis, rising living costs, and migration. The campaign was personality-centred, with online engagement playing a prominent role. Catherine Connolly was elected under the single transferable vote system, winning decisively with a majority of first-preference votes.

The electoral legal framework, although fragmented across several legal acts, provides a solid basis for the conduct of the presidential election. The 2022 Electoral Reform Act introduced significant reforms, including the establishment of an independent Electoral Commission and the modernisation of voter registration. However, provisions relating to the oversight of online political advertising and countering disinformation have not yet been commenced. While the Act addressed some prior ODIHR recommendations, others remain unaddressed, notably the consolidation of the electoral legislation and the status and role of citizen and international observers. The president is elected "by means of single transferable vote" in a direct election. To be elected, the candidate must obtain 50 per cent of the valid votes plus one or more valid votes than all other candidates combined.

The election administration is decentralized, with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage overseeing and co-ordinating all electoral operations and issuing regulations and policy guidelines. Returning officers across the country have the primary responsibility for the preparations and conduct of elections in their respective areas. The counting of votes is done centrally for each of the 43 constituencies. The election administration enjoyed stakeholders' full confidence in its ability to manage the process in a professional and impartial manner.

This is the first presidential election since the establishment of the Electoral Commission in 2023 as an independent body. It has assumed various electoral functions from other bodies, including revising constituencies, overseeing referendums, and keeping the register of political parties. ODIHR EAM interlocutors welcomed its establishment and expressed appreciation of its engagement, including in outreach and research activities and in producing post-election reviews with recommendations for improving the electoral process.

Irish citizens aged 18 and over who are included in the voter register are eligible to vote, with no limitations based on disability and voting rights extended to all prisoners. Voter registration is decentralised across local authorities, with 3.6 million voters registered for this election. The Electoral Commission conducted a comprehensive voter registration awareness campaign using a range of

¹ The English version of this report is the only official document. An unofficial translation is available in Irish.

innovative approaches in both traditional media and on online platforms. While there has been no comprehensive mechanism to check the accuracy of the register, this is expected to be addressed with the merger of the local registers into a single national database in 2026.

Citizens who are 35 years or older are eligible to run for office if nominated by at least twenty members of parliament or by a minimum of four local councils. Several ODIHR EAM interlocutors criticised how leading political parties enforced party discipline on councillors and members of parliament, arguing that this disadvantaged independent candidates by limiting their ability to secure nominations. Three candidates were registered; however, on 5 October, one candidate withdrew from the campaign.

The campaign was highly personality-centred, with candidates focusing on personal qualities, integrity, and suitability for office, alongside a vision of the presidency as a unifying role embodying shared values, moral leadership, and representation of all citizens. The withdrawal of Jim Gavin from the race reshaped the campaign dynamic into a two-candidate contest, rekindling public concerns about limited choice, and prompting increased calls to voters to spoil their ballots. Several ODIHR EAM interlocutors expressed concern about the growing prevalence of toxic, aggressive, and intimidating discourse targeting candidates and public figures, including rhetoric with elements of incitement to violence and hatred, with racist, misogynistic, and other intolerant elements.

The online domain played a major role in the campaign, with candidates, parties, and supporters actively using social media to reach voters. Ms. Connolly's online followership and engagement exceeded by far that of Ms. Humphreys, with the former also making extensive use of podcasts. Candidate posts were systematically more positive and less adversarial than those of parties, politicians, and other online actors. Ms. Connolly's paid advertising campaigns were more targeted and diverse, with smaller per-ad spending and higher overall volume, while Ms. Humphreys' relied on fewer unique and less targeted ads. Concerns about misinformation peaked shortly before election day with the circulation of AI-generated deepfakes, which were flagged by the Electoral Commission and others and subsequently removed (by Meta and Alphabet) or labelled as manipulated (by X).

Election campaigns may be financed from public and private funds and in-kind donations. The law provides for campaign expenditure ceilings, disclosure and reporting requirements, and a range of graduated sanctions for potential financial infringements. While post-election financial disclosure mechanisms are in place, there is no requirement for interim reporting prior to election day, limiting voters' access to official information on campaign income and expenditure. The Standards in Public Office Commission oversees campaign finances with extensive investigative powers. Overall, the legislation provides an adequate framework for the regulation and oversight of campaign finance.

Ireland's media landscape is diverse, yet media pluralism faces increasing challenges due to growing concentration of media ownership, which particularly affects the radio and regional media sectors. During the campaign, presidential candidates had ample opportunity to present their platforms in several televised debates and one-to-one interviews, with journalists questioning the candidates vigorously. The Irish-language public broadcaster *TG4* chose not to host debates, as only one of the candidates was a fluent Irish speaker, and a debate in Irish would have disadvantaged the other.

Women's participation and representation in public and political life continues to face significant hurdles. Despite a 40 per cent party list quota that resulted in a record number of women candidates at the last general election, women account for only 25 per cent of elected members in the Lower House of Parliament – among the lowest levels in the European Union. Women hold fewer than a quarter of ministerial and senator positions and comprise 26 per cent of local councillors. Structural barriers, including limited access to resources, insufficient party support, and increased exposure to online abuse and gender-based threats, continue to constrain participation, with women from intersecting and diverse backgrounds facing additional obstacles.

Election dispute resolution is administered exclusively through the courts, with the High Court having jurisdiction over presidential electoral petitions and the Supreme Court serving as the final appeal instance. The dispute resolution system is widely accepted and generally regarded as functional by stakeholders. Petitions must be filed within seven days of the declaration of results; however, the absence of adjudication deadlines may not guarantee prompt redress. Legal standing to file a petition is limited to the Director of Public Prosecutions, candidates, and their agents, which is not in line with international good practice. The significant financial deposit required to file a petition may also discourage legitimate challenges. Prior to election day, the High Court heard and dismissed two cases related to the candidate nomination process.

In line with the ODIHR methodology, the ODIHR EAM did not conduct a comprehensive and systematic observation of election day proceedings but visited a limited number of polling stations and counting centres in and around Dublin. In the polling stations visited by the ODIHR EAM procedures were generally followed. Preliminary and final election results were released promptly; however, no disaggregated voting results per polling station were published, detracting from transparency. The law does not provide for citizen and international election observation, contrary to OSCE commitments and prior ODIHR recommendations. Nevertheless, the authorities provided the mission with unimpeded access to all stages of the electoral process, including on election day.

This report offers recommendations to support efforts to bring elections in Ireland in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. Priority recommendations relate to introducing effective temporary special measures for women, consolidation of the electoral legal framework, supporting local voter registration efforts, establishing a regulatory and institutional framework governing the digital domain, increasing transparency of campaign finance and clarifying institutional responsibility for its oversight, providing adequate multi-year funding for public service media and guaranteeing observer access to all stages of the electoral process. ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Following an official invitation from the authorities of Ireland to observe the 24 October 2025 election of the President of Ireland, and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) from 2 to 30 October.² The mission, headed by J. Ray Kennedy, consisted of six experts drawn from six OSCE participating States, comprising three women and three men. The ODIHR EAM was based in Dublin city and visited Galway and localities around the capital.

The ODIHR EAM assessed compliance of the electoral process with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, as well as with national legislation. In line with ODIHR's methodology, the EAM did not observe election day and counting proceedings in a systematic or comprehensive manner but visited a limited number of polling stations and counting centres.

The ODIHR EAM wishes to thank the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and the Electoral Commission for their cooperation and assistance. The ODIHR EAM also expresses its appreciation to other state institutions, as well as the presidential candidates, their agents, political parties, the media, civil society, and other interlocutors for sharing their views.

² See previous ODIHR election-related [reports on Ireland](#).

III. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Ireland is a parliamentary republic with legislative powers vested in the bicameral parliament (*Oireachtas*), composed of an indirectly elected Senate (*Seanad Éireann*) and a directly elected House of Representatives (*Dáil Éireann*). Executive power rests with the government led by the Prime Minister (*Taoiseach*), who is nominated by the House of Representatives and appointed by the President (*Uachtarán na hÉireann*). The President serves as head of state with limited, constitutionally defined powers, including representing the people and the state, appointing members of the government and the judiciary, convening or dissolving parliament, signing laws, and acting as Supreme Commander of the Defence Forces. Many of these powers are exercised on the advice of the government.

In line with the constitutional requirements, the election was called by a Presidential Election Order on 3 September.³ Outgoing President Michael D. Higgins, who took office on 11 November 2011, stepped down after completing the two seven-year terms permitted by the Constitution. Widely respected and popular, President Higgins has over the years contributed to shaping public expectations of the presidency, including through his vocal engagement on social and policy-related matters of public significance.

Ireland has enjoyed a high degree of political stability, with the landscape dominated by the two center-right parties, *Fianna Fáil* and *Fine Gael*, which alternated in power for decades and have governed together since 2020. The country recently experienced a busy electoral cycle in 2024, which included multiple elections and two referenda on family and gender equality issues, both rejected by voters.⁴ Following the 2024 general election, eleven parties gained representation in the House of Representatives.⁵ *Fianna Fáil* and *Fine Gael* formed a coalition government together with independent lawmakers.

The pre-election environment was shaped by public expectations that the government would address persistent socio-economic challenges, notably the deepening housing crisis, the rising cost of living, and migration, which had become an increasingly prominent topic in the political and public debate.

Women's participation and representation in public and political life remains limited. Despite a 40 per cent party list quota that led to a record number of women candidates in the last general election, only 25 per cent of the 174 elected members of parliament (*Teachtaí Dála* - TDs) are women – among the lowest levels in the European Union (EU) and 95th globally.⁶ Women hold fewer than a quarter of ministerial and senator posts and they make up 26 per cent of local councillors.⁷ Persistent structural barriers, such as limited access to resources, insufficient party support, and increasing exposure to online abuse and gender-based threats, continue to constrain women's participation. Women with intersecting and diverse backgrounds face even greater obstacles. To address these gaps, national and international actors have called, among other measures, for strengthened implementation of quotas, their

³ See the [Presidential Election Order](#) by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage. In line with the Constitution, a presidential election must be held within 60 days of the expiry of the incumbent president's mandate. President Higgins' term in office was due to expire on 10 November 2025.

⁴ Women's and human rights organizations have called for amending Article 41.2 of the Constitution about "the role of women in the home" as it detracts from the aspired gender equality and perpetuates gender stereotypes. See 2025 [CEDAW Committee Concluding Observations](#), paragraphs 11 and 12; the 2025 Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) [Alternative Report to CEDAW Committee](#), paragraphs 21-26, and the 2025 [report](#) by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), p. 56.

⁵ *Fianna Fáil* won the most seats (48), followed by *Sinn Féin* (39), *Fine Gael* (38), *Labor Party* and *Social Democrats* (11 seats each), *Independent Ireland* (4), *People Before Profit - Solidarity* (3), *Aontú* (2), *100 % Redress* and *Green Party* (1 seat each). Remaining seats were won by independent candidates.

⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union Parline, [Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments](#).

⁷ Three of the 15 Cabinet Ministers, 6 of the 23 Ministers of State, and 27 of 60 senators are women.

extension to other elected and appointed positions, and the introduction of 'nested' quotas to improve intersectional representation, including of Traveller women.⁸

Political parties should identify barriers to women's participation through gender audits, review internal practices and implement measures to address gaps.

IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The electoral legal framework includes the 1937 Constitution (last amended in 2019), which defines the presidential mandate and the electoral system; the 1993 Presidential Elections Act, which outlines the procedures for the election of the president; the 1992 Electoral Act (last amended in 2024), which covers voter registration and procedures for the conduct of the presidential election; and the 1997 Electoral Act (last amended in 2024), which mainly regulates campaign finance. The legal framework underwent extensive changes with the adoption of the 2022 Electoral Reform Act (last amended in 2024), which amended the 1992 and 1997 Electoral Acts and the 1993 Presidential Elections Act. The 1997 Electoral Act is currently being reviewed by the Franchise Unit of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (hereafter Department of Housing). Ireland is a party to major international law instruments related to democratic elections.⁹

Despite being fragmented across several legal acts, the electoral legal framework provides a solid basis for the conduct of presidential elections and enjoys stakeholder confidence.

The framework is complemented by regulations implementing the electoral acts issued by the Department of Housing and known as Statutory Instruments (S.I.).¹⁰ Although the statutory instruments are available individually on the Department's website, they are not consolidated into a single document to include those later issued or amended.¹¹ This approach is not practical for the election stakeholders and could lead to uncertainty about what constitutes the applicable regulatory framework in an election.¹²

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage could for every election consolidate the relevant statutory instruments into a single document and publish them on its website to avoid uncertainty about the applicable regulatory framework.

⁸ See CEDAW Committee's 2025 [Concluding Observations](#), para. 23-24, appeals by the Alliance for Gender Quotas (September 2024 [Position Paper](#), p. 20) and IHREC May 2025 [report](#), p. 19, echoing recommendations by the Joint Committee on Gender Equality ([Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality](#), 2022) and of the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality (2021 [Recommendations](#)).

⁹ Including the 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICRD), 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1995 Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, 2003 UN Convention against Corruption, 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2011 Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating the Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (The Istanbul Convention). Ireland is a member of the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).

¹⁰ According to Section 3 of the 1992 Electoral Act both Houses of the Parliament may in case of disagreement annul such regulations within 21 days from their issuance.

¹¹ The following regulations apply to a presidential election: [S.I. No. 156 of 2007](#) Electoral Regulations, which outlines the requirements to nomination papers, ballot paper and lists what constitutes valid voter ID. [S.I. No. 383 of 2025](#) Electoral Act 1997 (Variation of Monetary Amount) Order which sets the criteria for the reimbursement of candidates' expenses. [S.I. No. 361 of 2025](#) Electoral (Amendment) Regulations regarding valid voter ID; [S.I. No. 329 of 2018](#) on the candidate nomination form; [S.I. No. 395 of 2018](#) Presidential Elections (Ballot Paper Template) Regulations, which provide for arrangements to facilitate independent voting by visually impaired voters.

¹² Paragraph 19 of the 2011 General Comment 34 to Article 19 of the 1996 ICCPR provides that "[s]tates should make every effort to ensure easy, prompt, effective and practical access to public information".

The 2022 Electoral Reform Act introduced significant reforms, including the establishment of an independent Electoral Commission to oversee elections and referendums, rules on online political advertising, measures to counter disinformation, and new provisions on fundraising, financial reporting, and disclosure. The Act modernised voter registration by introducing continuous registration, allowing pre-registration of those aged 16-17, and removing the distinction between physical and mental health for voters eligible to apply for postal and special voting. The Electoral Commission will eventually assume oversight functions under Parts 4 and 5 of the Act, which relate to online paid political advertising during election and referendum campaigns and to investigating and countering online disinformation, misinformation, and manipulative or inauthentic behaviour. However, these Parts had not been commenced for this election.

While the 2022 Electoral Reform Act addressed some prior ODIHR recommendations, such as the establishment of the Electoral Commission and improvements to the voter registration process, others remain unaddressed, notably those related to consolidation of the electoral legislation and the status and role of citizen and international observers in elections.

The different legal instruments at times use inconsistent terminology and retain outdated language. This might create difficulties for users. Nevertheless, the parliament continues to pass amendment acts rather than consolidating the existing acts into a single document. Both the Department of Housing and the Electoral Commission informed the ODIHR EAM that such an exercise could be reconsidered after this election and prior to the next election cycle in 2029.

To enhance accessibility and facilitate uniform implementation of the electoral legal framework, consideration should be given to formally consolidating the current electoral legislation.

The Constitution stipulates that the president is elected “by means of single transferable vote” in a direct election. This means that the president is elected with a majority of valid votes in a one-round election. The single transferable vote system envisages that voters rank the presidential candidates on the ballot in order of preference (1, 2, 3 etc.). To be elected, the winning candidate must obtain 50 per cent of the valid votes plus one (the election quota) or more valid votes than all other candidates combined. If no candidate obtains sufficient first-preference votes to meet the quota, the candidate(s) with the lowest votes are eliminated and their votes are transferred to the continuing candidates in accordance with the next available preference. This process continues until a candidate has sufficient votes to be declared elected. If only one candidate is nominated, the election is not held and that candidate is declared elected president.

V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The election administration is decentralized, with the Department of Housing overseeing and co-ordinating all electoral operations, providing legislative advice, and issuing regulations and policy guidelines. The Franchise Unit of the Department of Housing comprises nine members (five men and four women). The Presidential Returning Officer (PRO), appointed by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, oversees candidate registration and tabulates and announces the final election results.

The presidential election was administered locally by Returning Officers (ROs) within the 43 constituencies used for elections to the lower house of parliament.¹³ A total of 17 local ROs (nine men and eight women) oversaw the preparations for the polling and counting of votes in their respective

¹³ In the county and county boroughs of Dublin and Cork, the local sheriff is the local RO, while in all other counties and county boroughs the local RO is the county registrar. In Dublin, both ROs were assisted by elections managers who carried out much of the election preparations. The ROs are the same for presidential and general elections.

areas.¹⁴ The ROs enjoy wide discretion, including in engaging and training supervisors, presiding officers, and poll clerks to staffing polling stations on election day, as well as in hiring and training counting staff.¹⁵ Although ROs may delegate certain functions to deputy and assistant ROs, the announcement of the election results for the entire RO area remains the responsibility of the RO. The Department of Housing issued a comprehensive memorandum for ROs outlining the applicable legal and regulatory framework and providing practical guidelines on all aspects of the election process.

The law does not guarantee a gender-balanced recruitment of election administration staff, and local returning officers were not collecting gender disaggregated data on the number of the men and women engaged in the conduct of polling and counting.¹⁶ Although not bound by any centrally issued guidelines on gender equality, the ROs met by the ODIHR EAM informed that they were mindful about the topic and strived to hire men and women in equal numbers. Returning Officers enjoy wide discretion in recruiting and selecting polling and counting staff and typically advertise these positions only when vacancies arise. In some constituencies, polling and counting staff are drawn exclusively from public officials.

To promote the participation of women in election administration, the presidential returning officer should collect and publish disaggregated data on gender representation of polling and counting staff.

The election administration enjoyed stakeholders' confidence in its ability to manage the election process in a professional and impartial manner.

With a few exceptions, all presiding officers that the ODIHR EAM met with appeared to have prior election experience; and nearly all polling staff in Dublin stated that as preparation for this election, they had watched the online training video for presiding officers and taken the online quiz-test. A similar adapted video was displayed during the only in-person training of presiding officers that the ODIHR EAM was informed of and attended.¹⁷ The Department of Housing had prepared a manual with practical guidance for presiding officers.¹⁸

Training of polling and counting staff could be provided in a more engaging and interactive manner, and training materials should be tailored specifically to the type of election they are intended to cover.

The Electoral Commission was established in 2023 with the stated purpose to modernize the conduct of elections and referendums. It currently comprises seven members (four men and three women) and is chaired by a woman. The Chairperson, a former Supreme Court Judge, is appointed by the President upon nomination of the Chief Justice. Two members serve *ex officio* – the Ombudsman and the Clerk of the House of Representatives.¹⁹ The Commission meets in-person once or twice a month and its agendas and meeting minutes are published, although with some delay. The day-to-day work is led by

¹⁴ If the RO's area comprises more than one constituency, the RO appoints a deputy RO for each additional constituency. If part of the area is in another county or county borough, the RO appoints an assistant RO for that area.

¹⁵ A polling station ("table") is staffed by a presiding officer and an electoral clerk.

¹⁶ Paragraph 40.13 of the [1991 OSCE Moscow Document](#) commits participating States to "ensure the collection and analysis of data to assess adequately, monitor and improve the situation of women".

¹⁷ The lecture-style training for some 50 presiding officers from Dublin Bay South was held on October 19 in Dublin. It featured one interactive element, an exercise in how to fill-in the ballot paper account, and was not conducted by a skilled trainer.

¹⁸ The manual generally appeared to be a useful practical tool and, among others, offered advice on how to communicate with voters with special needs such as persons with disabilities. A few passages of the manual appeared to refer to outdated practices.

¹⁹ The Commission currently has seven ordinary members, but a call has gone out to fill the remaining two vacant seats and bring the total membership of the Commission up to nine members. Ordinary members are appointed by the President upon nomination by the government based on recommendations by the Public Appointments Service.

a Chief Executive Officer, who is part of the Commission's six-member management team (three women and three men).²⁰

The Electoral Commission assumed various responsibilities from other bodies including constituency review for parliamentary and European Parliament elections, the registration of political parties, and providing neutral information on the question proposed in national referendums. The Commission also conducts electoral research and makes recommendations to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, provides the public with information about elections and referendums, and encourages public participation in elections and democratic processes, as well as provides oversight of the voter register. All ODIHR EAM stakeholders welcomed the establishment of the Electoral Commission and expressed appreciation of its broad and dedicated engagement in outreach and research activities and in producing post-electoral event reports with recommendations for improvement of the electoral process.

Prior to and during the election period, the Commission undertook a wide range of concrete education and public engagement activities to encourage eligible voters to register and to go and vote.²¹ Many initiatives specifically targeted young and first-time voters (18-25 years) as well as future voters (16-17 years). The Commission engaged influencers and, for the first time, conducted a comprehensive and engaging voter outreach campaign on TikTok. According to the Commission staff, its public outreach campaign resulted in over 90,000 voter applications.²²

Returning officers co-ordinated the safekeeping of ballot material, including during the transfer of ballot boxes to counting centres on election night, with the national police. The Department of Housing and the Electoral Commission are both part of a National Election Co-operation Network which also comprises state bodies specialized in data protection, cybersecurity and risk assessment and mitigation. The Network may issue internal threat alerts if challenges arise. The ODIHR EAM was not informed about any security threats or incidents in relation to the election.

The Department of Housing and the Electoral Commission regularly consult disabled peoples' organizations (DPOs), the National Disability Authority (NDA), the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), and others to make electoral processes more inclusive for persons with disabilities. However, some interlocutors noted that service providers are disproportionately involved – rather than DPOs – in advising state and local authorities on necessary accommodations and assistive tools for people with disabilities which may negatively affect their right to equal participation in the electoral process.²³

The election legislation provides for reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities, including the selection of accessible polling stations, wheelchair-accessible booths, large-print voting instructions, Braille ballot templates, and an audio guide for visually impaired voters.²⁴ Where a polling station is not independently accessible, the RO must give public notice at least eight days prior to election day and may authorize the voter to cast the ballot in another polling station in the same constituency, provided the voter submits a request at least seven days prior to election day, leaving only a day for submission of request. This compressed timeframe may place a disproportionate burden on voters with disabilities and limit the effective exercise of their right to vote, particularly where they rely on the formal notice to become aware of accessibility barriers.

²⁰ The Chief Executive is empowered to make proposals to the Commission on matters relating to its functions and may perform additional duties as authorized by the Electoral Reform Act or required by the Commission.

²¹ See the Commission's comprehensive [Education and Public Engagement Strategy](#).

²² See [Electoral Commission's media release](#) of 8 October 2025.

²³ Article 4.3 of the [UN CRPD](#) requires State parties to closely consult and actively involve persons with disabilities, through their representative organizations in all relevant legislation, policies, and decision-making processes.

²⁴ The Department of Housing provided all ROs with an accessibility checklist for buildings used for polling station premises prepared by the NDA.

To ensure the effective exercise of the right to vote and to strengthen the effectiveness of the accommodation measure, voters should be provided with a reasonable period to request alternative voting arrangements.

Notably, each polling station received one ballot paper template in Braille, adjustable to fit the ballot paper along with an audio guide – a freephone service providing an audio version of candidate information – to enable visually impaired voters to mark their ballots independently.²⁵ However, IHREC noted that barriers to electoral participation for persons with disabilities remain.²⁶

Persons with disabilities may use assisted voting and special voting procedures. Voters who are unable to mark the ballot independently may request assistance in the polling booth. If the presiding officer is satisfied that assistance is warranted, permission is granted; there is no need to provide further documentation. The rules allow voters to be assisted by a companion aged 16 years or older. Such person may assist no more than two voters, while the presiding officer may assist multiple voters without limit. The provision that entitles the presiding officer to assist voters requesting assistance challenges the secrecy of the vote and best practice since the same person should, as a rule, not assist multiple voters.²⁷ Presiding officers may turn down a request for assistance in the last two hours before the closing of the poll if the polling station is busy. This rule appears unnecessarily restrictive. The role of the presiding officer could be to help such voters identifying a person of choice to assist them.

The provision for assisted voting should be reconsidered to exclude that the same person including the presiding officer assists multiple voters. The right of voters to be assisted by a person of their choice should be extended to special voting and on election day should not be limited in the final two hours before the closing of the polls.

Positively, and for the first time, in cooperation with Down Syndrome Ireland, the Electoral Commission produced easy-to-understand information materials, including a voter registration guide, reflecting a growing recognition that voters with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities also require specific support. Similarly, when candidate Jim Gavin “withdrew”, but technically stayed in the race, the Commission was approached by the organization with a request to explain how to best explain the implications of Gavin’s non-withdrawal to voters with intellectual disabilities.

VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

Irish citizens aged 18 years or older and permanently residing in the country are eligible to vote. There are no restrictions based on intellectual or psychosocial disability and prisoners are allowed to vote as well. Citizens permanently residing abroad are not eligible to vote, except for diplomats and their spouses/civil partners and military personnel.²⁸

²⁵ Based on membership feedback, DPO Voice of Vision Impairment (VVI) informed the ODIHR EAM that the tactile ballot paper template was difficult to handle for vision-impaired voters, and would be even more so in elections with many candidates on the ballot. See also 2025 [Submission by VVI](#) to the Joint Committee of the parliament on Disability Matters.

²⁶ In its June 2025 [Submission](#) to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, IHREC recommended the Committee to request the State to “address and remove information, physical, assistance and attitudinal barriers that prevent disabled people from participating in the democratic process”

²⁷ According to the Article 29 a. (iii) of the [2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), the States Parties shall guarantee “the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities as electors and to this end, where necessary, at their request, allowing assistance in voting by a person of their own choice”. See also the Venice Commission [Revised Interpretative Declaration to the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) on the Participation of People with Disabilities in Elections, para II.3.

²⁸ Citizens who are temporarily abroad for work, study or business may retain their registration in Ireland for a period of up to 18 months and return home to vote on election day.

The issue of extending the franchise to all Irish citizens abroad in presidential elections has been debated since the 1980s.²⁹ An extension would require a referendum on amending the Constitution and the subsequent introduction of complex legislation to regulate the registration of overseas citizens and the practical arrangements for taking their vote.³⁰ Most ODIHR EAM interlocutors considered the current policy as unfair; however, there is no political consensus whether to extend the right to vote to all overseas citizens or only to those residing in Northern Ireland. While no existing commitment requires an OSCE participating State to extend voting rights to its citizens abroad, enfranchising some but not all citizens abroad in presidential election may challenge the principle of equal suffrage.³¹

If out-of-country voting is introduced, registration and voting procedures should be made uniform for all eligible voters abroad to ensure equal suffrage.

Voter registration is active and decentralized, with registers maintained by registration offices in 31 local authorities across the country. Voters are not required to present proof of de-registration in one constituency when registering in another, and there is no comprehensive mechanism to check register accuracy or remove duplicate or redundant entries. Nevertheless, most ODIHR EAM interlocutors expressed confidence in the registration process and did not raise concerns about multiple voting.

The 2022 Electoral Reform Act provided for the establishment of a national voter register database, the Local Government Electoral Registration System (LGERS). The merger of the 31 local registers into a single verifiable database maintained by the Dublin City Council as the Designated Registration Authority, is expected by the end of 2026. As a pilot project, the voter registers of four Dublin local authorities have been merged into a single verifiable database, accessible to Dublin voters, for registration or updating their records. This platform will eventually become the single national entry point for online voter registration. Meanwhile, the remaining 27 local registers were accessible online for voters through a separate portal. Both online systems were widely advertised.

A particular challenge for improving the accuracy of the voter registers has been the absence of a unique identifier on voter records.³² The introduction of the Personal Public Service number (PPSN) on voter records in combination with voters' *Eircode* (dwelling identification code) and date of birth is meant to improve the accuracy. While the PPSN is not legally required to be on the electoral register, it is required to complete an online voter registration application.³³ The Electoral Reform Act also provides for a "pending electors list", which allows 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-register and be automatically added to the voter register when they turn 18 years of age.

Voters could register until 7 October, with a 29 September deadline for applications for postal and special voting. A total of 3,614,450 voters were registered for this election, including 14,566 voters on postal voter lists, and 16,154 voters on special voter lists. Each registration office made its updated register available for public inspection after the deadline and polling cards containing the voter's registration number and polling station address were mailed to all registered and eligible voters ahead

²⁹ See also the 2013 [Fifth Report](#) of the Convention on Amending the Constitution to give citizens resident outside the State the right to vote in presidential elections at Irish embassies, or otherwise.

³⁰ In 2019 the government presented the [Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution \(Presidential Elections\) Bill](#) to facilitate this extension, but it failed to pass with the advent of Covid-19 and the ensuing restrictions.

³¹ Paragraph 7.3 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) commits participating States to "guarantee universal and equal suffrage to adult citizens".

³² In a recent [oversight report](#), the Electoral Commission identified significant accuracy gaps throughout the country and recommended improvements, including substantial increase in funding, conduct of accuracy audits, and introduction of clear progress plans and benchmarks for improving the registers.

³³ The PRO informed the ODIHR EAM that a PPSN is not mandatory for registering to vote. Voters who do not provide the PPSN cannot register online; they must complete a paper application form and have their identity verified in person (at a police station or at the local registration authority) before submitting the form to register.

of election day.³⁴ By law, victims of domestic abuse, could apply to be anonymous and not appear on any voter register; anonymous voters vote by postal ballot.³⁵

The law provides for postal voting for diplomats serving abroad and their spouses or partners, military personnel, police officers, individuals held in prisons or detention centres, and polling staff serving outside their area of permanent registration. Voters whose occupation, service or employment prevents them from voting in person on election day, and full-time students living away from home while studying in Ireland can also register to vote by mail.³⁶ Voters who are unable to vote in person at regular polling stations because of illness or disability, but not resident in a care home or similar facility, may also apply for a postal ballot, but they need to provide a medical certificate. The requirement to obtain and present a certificate from a medical practitioner appears to be overly burdensome and costly for ill and disabled voters.

Consideration should be given to waiving all charges associated with medical certification imposed on persons applying for postal voting due to illness or disability.

Special voting is available to ill or disabled voters residing in nursing facilities, care homes, or hospitals. It is a form of advance mobile voting conducted before election day by special presiding officers who bring the ballot materials to the voters and administer voting on-site. Only the Police may be present when the special presiding officer carries out the voting, and if assistance is requested, only the special presiding officer may provide it; at odds with the Article 29 of the UN CRPD.

The Electoral Commission conducted a comprehensive voter registration awareness campaign using a range of innovative approaches in both traditional media and on online platforms.³⁷ Commission employees attended multi-day public events such as open-air concerts and sports competitions encouraging attendants to register or update their details, to reach the young and unregistered voters. Local registration authorities informed the ODIHR EAM that they also carried out voter-outreach activities and some also co-operated with civil society groups representing underrepresented communities, including Irish Travellers, to reach out to unregistered voters in these communities.

VII. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Every citizen over the age of 35 is eligible to stand for office. Presidential candidates must be nominated either by at least twenty members of the parliament, or by local councils of not less than four administrative counties (or county boroughs).³⁸ Former or incumbent presidents who are seeking re-election may nominate themselves, but only once.

The nomination period ran from 5 to 24 September. Individuals seeking support for nomination at local level must ensure that each of the councils (or corporations) passes a resolution to this effect and affixes its seal to the nomination paper before submitting it to the PRO. The PRO examines nomination papers on the last day of nomination following the expiry of the application deadline. Candidates or their

³⁴ Third party inquiries about voter register records are permitted. The so-called pending list for 16- and 17-year-old persons is not subject to publication and inspection.

³⁵ The right to become an anonymous voter extends to members of the household of the person whose safety would be at risk if their name and address were published on the voter list.

³⁶ The Electoral Commission informed the ODIHR EAM that it intends to research the possibility of extending the postal voting to additional categories such as voters temporarily abroad for work or leisure on election day while safeguarding the integrity of the vote.

³⁷ Outreach activities at the local level have also targeted registered voters whose records lack any of the three identifiers. The registration office in Dún Laoghaire-Rethrown told the ODIHR EAM that they had mailed some 20,000 voters on the register with missing data fields with a request to provide their PPSN, Eircode and date of birth.

³⁸ No member of the parliament or local council may nominate more than one candidate in the same election.

authorized representatives must attend the examination, which is also attended by a judicial assessor who is either the president of the High Court or another judge nominated by that court.

The nomination papers must contain a short description of the candidate including surname, occupation and address. The PRO is entitled to amend the description if considered incorrect, insufficient to identify the person, or unnecessarily long. At the same time, the law provides a safeguard against a nomination paper being ruled invalid if there is an error or omission in the candidate's description provided the identity of the person is free of doubt.

The PRO may reject the nomination papers if candidates fail to meet the eligibility criteria or their nomination papers are deemed invalid. Grounds for invalidation include improper signatures, absence of the candidate or their agent during the examination, refusal to allow the PRO to amend the candidate's description, or submission of a withdrawal notice before the close of nominations. Although the law does not explicitly permit candidates or their agents the right to correct mistakes or omissions other than those pertaining to the description of the person, the PRO assured the ODIHR EAM that candidates are nevertheless given the possibility to correct errors during the examination.

The legislation should be amended to afford prospective candidates the explicit right to correct mistakes or omissions in their nomination papers prior to the ruling on nominations.

Three candidates were registered to run in the election following the examination of nomination papers, namely Catherine Martina Ann Connolly (Independent, 35 signatures), Jim Gavin (*Fianna Fáil*, 52 signatures) and Heather Humphreys (*Fine Gael*, 53 signatures). Several ODIHR EAM interlocutors criticized how the two leading political parties enforced the party discipline on its local councillors and members of parliament during this election. They argued that this practice disadvantaged independent candidates by limiting their ability to secure the required nominations, thereby potentially undermining both the competitiveness of the candidate nomination process and the presidential election itself.³⁹

On 5 October, presidential candidate Jim Gavin announced his withdrawal from the campaign. After consulting the Attorney General, the PRO clarified that a candidate could not withdraw after the ruling on nominations, and that the law requires the ballot to contain the names and descriptions of the registered candidates.⁴⁰ Hence, voters had a choice between three candidates on election day.

VIII. ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

A. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND REGULATIONS

While the fundamental freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly relevant to electoral competition are constitutionally guaranteed, the legal framework provides only limited regulation of traditional forms of campaigning. It sets timeframes for placing and removing campaign posters, and entitles candidates to send one campaign communication by post to each household free of charge.⁴¹ Political activity and campaign materials are prohibited inside and within 50 meters of polling stations on election day, during the poll, and for half an hour before and after. There are no rules defining other forms of campaigning and the period during which various forms of campaign activities may take place. A campaign silence period is not envisaged, except for 'additional care' requirements applicable to media (see *Media* section).

³⁹ The PRO [received](#) 2 nominations from three local councils for Gareth Patrick and Kieran McCarthy but both were rejected for falling short of the legal requirement that a candidate must be nominated by at least four councils.

⁴⁰ See PRO's 5 October [Statement](#) and [Frequently Asked Questions](#) clarifying that Jim Gavin would remain on ballot.

⁴¹ Per the 1997 Litter Pollution Act, posters can be displayed from 30 days before the election or the date of signing of the Presidential Election Order and must be removed within 7 days following the election.

The regulatory framework in the digital domain has evolved significantly in recent years, including in response to EU-level developments, forming part of what is known as the Online Safety Framework. This includes the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act, in force since March 2023, which established the media regulator, *Coimisiún na Meán* (CnaM), with powers to oversee social-media and video-sharing platforms through binding online-safety codes.⁴²

Building on this framework, the EU Digital Services Act (DSA) was transposed into the national legislation through the Irish Digital Services Act.⁴³ CnaM has been designated as the Digital Services Co-ordinator (DSC), with powers to handle complaints, investigate, impose fines, and issue compliance notices and orders to address infringements by online intermediary service providers. At the same time, just before the EU Regulation on the Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising (2024/900) (TTPA) entered into force across the EU in 2025, the European Commission issued implementation guidelines,⁴⁴ and the government published the national TTPA implementing regulations on 10 October.⁴⁵ The latter designated the Electoral Commission as the national focal point and delineated oversight and enforcement responsibilities among the Electoral Commission, CnaM, and the Data Protection Commission. Since the TTPA took effect mid- campaign, the government granted a “grace period” until 31 October before enforcement would apply to avoid confusion on applicable rules.

The 2022 Electoral Reform Act envisaged granting the Electoral Commission monitoring and investigatory powers over online platforms during electoral periods to address mis- and disinformation and manipulative or inauthentic behaviour. These provisions were not commenced, in part due to concerns from the European Commission about their alignment with the DSA and broader Digital Single Market rules, leaving the Electoral Commission without statutory powers in this area at the time of the election.⁴⁶ At the policy level, the adoption of a National Counter Disinformation Strategy in April 2025 was welcomed by stakeholders as an effort to improve institutional co-operation on disinformation.⁴⁷ However, ODIHR EAM interlocutors regretted that it remained largely aspirational, lacking a concrete roadmap for platform oversight and measures addressing ‘recommender system’ algorithms.⁴⁸ The lack of algorithmic transparency and the resulting limited ability of regulators to identify and prevent their misuse were seen as continuing vulnerabilities.

Overall, the evolving digital regulatory framework established the core architecture for social media and digital electoral integrity oversight. However, regulatory gaps remained during this election regarding the monitoring of online content, disinformation, misinformation, co-ordinated inauthentic behaviour, and political advertising, pending further legislative development and alignment.

Authorities should prioritize completing and operationalizing the digital regulatory arrangements relevant to elections by reviewing, updating and, as appropriate, commencing outstanding provisions of the Electoral Reforms Act in a manner consistent with the EU Digital Services and Digital Single Market rules. This should ensure that the Electoral Commission is vested with effective statutory powers to monitor and address risks related to online content during electoral periods.

⁴² The first [Online Safety Code](#), published in October 2024, imposed duties on video-sharing platforms with EU headquarters in Ireland to protect users from harmful content and established sanctions for breaches.

⁴³ The Irish 2024 DSA Act also amended the Broadcasting Act 2009 and other legislation to establish the national supervisory and enforcement regime under the EU DSA.

⁴⁴ See [Guidelines to support the implementation of Regulation \(EU\) 2024/900 on the transparency and targeting of political advertising](#), European Commission, 8 October 2025.

⁴⁵ See [European Union Political Advertising Regulations 2025](#), S.I. No. 474 of 2025, 10 October 2025.

⁴⁶ See the European Commission [Notification 2024/0374/IE](#) of 1 October 2024.

⁴⁷ The government [designated](#) 1.1 million EUR to support the implementation of the [strategy](#).

⁴⁸ The lack of attention to the manipulative use of ‘recommender system’ algorithms in policy documents, including the [Online Safety Code](#) and the [National Counter Disinformation Strategy](#), drew concern from ICCL and more than [60 organizations](#) ahead of the adoption of the former. Despite its initial proposal for the Online Safety Code to oblige platforms to turn off ‘recommender system’ profiling by default, CnaM has subsequently [suggested](#) that these matters are best addressed under the DSA.

B. CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT

As is typical for presidential elections in Ireland, the campaign was highly personality-centred. Given the largely ceremonial nature of the post, candidates focused on personal qualities, integrity, and suitability for office, while promoting a vision of the presidency as a unifying role embodying shared values, moral leadership, and representation of all citizens. At the same time, broader themes such as foreign policy, housing, and migration featured regularly in the discourse, with candidates' positions tested also on issues beyond the presidential remit. The strong focus on personal records exposed candidates to intense public and media scrutiny, which, according to several ODIHR EAM interlocutors, can be highly intrusive and personally damaging, potentially discouraging prospective candidates from entering the race.

The withdrawal of Jim Gavin from the race reshaped the campaign dynamic into a *de facto* two-candidate contest. His decision caused turbulence within his nominating party, *Fianna Fáil*,⁴⁹ triggered shifts in candidate endorsements, and sharpened focus on the remaining contenders.⁵⁰ The further narrowing of voter options also rekindled public concerns about limited choice, which found expression in increased calls for voters to spoil their ballot on election day.⁵¹

The two remaining candidates canvassed actively across the country, making efforts to appeal to various societal groups, including youth, women, seniors, people with disabilities, and those with diverse backgrounds.⁵² They prioritized door-to-door campaigning, posters, leaflets, and small events for voter outreach. What started as an amicable campaign turned increasingly adversarial as election day neared. As opinion polls showed Ms. Connolly in the lead, her campaign became the target of sharper criticism from opponents.

Apart from broadly formulated requirements to be impartial and serve the public interest, ethics legislation for those in elected positions and public officials as well as the related codes of conduct do not regulate campaigning by public officials or require separation between their political activities and public functions.⁵³ Similarly, the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO) guidelines, while outlining rules related to the use of public resources, do not address the involvement of public officials in election campaigns.⁵⁴ In practice, candidates relied heavily on endorsing parties, supporters, and volunteers as the operational and mobilizing backbone of their campaigns. This often included public officials, TDs, senators, and local councillors – who were canvassing, distributing materials or making media appearances with or on behalf of candidates, at times referencing their official positions, or combining campaign activities with their ministerial duties.⁵⁵ While commendable efforts to distinguish

⁴⁹ *Fianna Fáil* faced internal questions about its candidate selection process. A [survey](#) published in the wake of Gavin's withdrawal saw the government's, prime minister's, and party's support rates drop.

⁵⁰ While Connolly continued to rely on the backing by a consolidated flank of progressive parties and politicians on the left of the political spectrum, Ms. Humphreys' candidacy attracted additional support from politicians at *Fianna Fáil*, including the prime minister, other parties, and independents.

⁵¹ A *Spoil The Vote* campaign was launched one week before election day, following the proliferation of calls on social media for voters to spoil their vote in response to a limited choice of candidates on the ballot.

⁵² Ms. Connolly's campaign was run in a particularly engaging manner, with her [campaign website](#) featuring a calendar of events and materials in easy-to-read and large-text formats for persons with disabilities.

⁵³ Public office ethics are governed by the 1995 Ethics in Public Office Act and the 2001 Standards in Public Office Act. [Codes of Conduct](#) apply to civil servants, office holders, TDs, senators, and local councillors.

⁵⁴ See [Guidelines for the Presidential Election to be held on 24 October 2025](#), SIPO, p. 23-24.

⁵⁵ Martin Heydon, Minister for Agriculture, and Jack Chambers, Minister for Public Expenditure, served as Directors of Elections for *Fine Gael* and *Fianna Fáil*, respectively, and campaigned for candidates Humphreys and Gavin, respectively. Prime Minister Micheál Martin, while being presented as speaking in an official capacity, criticized candidate Connolly in his party's X [post](#). In a promotional [post](#), Ministers of State Marian Harkin, Michael Healy-Rae, Noel Grealish, and Kevin Moran endorsed Humphreys while being presented as speaking in their official capacities. Simon Harris, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Peter Burke, Minister for Enterprise (X [post](#)), and Hildegard Naughton, Minister of State, and Paschal Donohoe, Minister for Finance (X [post](#)) were observed canvassing for candidate Humphreys during what appeared to be working hours.

between public and campaign activities were noted in some cases, in others, the line between the two was indistinguishable to voters, contrary to OSCE Commitments and international good practice.⁵⁶

To ensure a clear separation between campaigning and public functions, the legal framework should clearly define the scope of permissible activities by public officials during campaigns. The development of practical guidelines for candidates, parties, and public officials tackling these aspects could facilitate compliance.

Several ODIHR EAM interlocutors expressed concern about the growing prevalence of toxic, aggressive, and intimidating discourse targeting candidates and other public figures. Two of the three initial candidates, Jim Gavin and Heather Humphreys, publicly voiced concern about the personal and reputational impact of smear campaigns directed at them and their families. Interlocutors noted that while harassment and intimidation occasionally occur offline, such practices are particularly prevalent online.⁵⁷ A substantial body of prior research, including by a dedicated Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life, set up by the parliament, highlighted persistent patterns of abuse and harassment, underscoring that these dynamics are not episodic but reflect a broader, continuing vulnerability in public and political life.⁵⁸

Relevant authorities, in co-operation with parliament, parties, and civil society, could consider developing and operationalizing a framework to prevent and address harassment, intimidation, and abuse targeting individuals engaged in political life. This could include incident monitoring and reporting mechanisms, strengthened institutional co-ordination, and support measures to ensure safe participation in public affairs, both offline and online.

ODIHR EAM interlocutors also noted an increase in rhetoric containing elements of incitement to violence and hatred, including racist, misogynistic, and intolerant speech targeting persons with intersecting vulnerable backgrounds, especially online.⁵⁹ At the same time, reports and prosecution of such offenses were seen as not reflecting its prevalence due to the lack of comprehensive data and underreporting linked to perceived futility.⁶⁰ Although the Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act 2024 strengthened protections against hate crimes, it did not address incitement to violence or hatred, leaving regulation to the 1989 Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act.⁶¹ Despite past national and international

⁵⁶ Paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document provides for “a clear separation between the State and political parties; in particular, political parties will not be merged with the State.” Paragraph 4.2 of the [ODIHR and the Venice Commission Joint Guidelines on Preventing and Responding to the Misuse of Administrative Resources during Electoral Processes](#) requires the law to “provide for a clear separation between the exercise of politically sensitive public positions, in particular senior management positions, and candidacy”.

⁵⁷ The police intervened in one instance of an assault on two of women canvassers for Connolly.

⁵⁸ According to the CnaM’s [review](#) and the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life’s [survey](#), 60 per cent of candidates in the 2024 general and local elections and 73 per cent of elected representatives and political staff encountered offensive or threatening online behaviour. A [report](#) by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and the Hope and Courage Collective recorded 55 incidents of politically motivated violence, threats, and harassment, 90 per cent of which occurred on social networks. See also European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) Ireland’s 25 October 2025 [preliminary findings](#).

⁵⁹ Among other instances of abusive discourse reported to the ODIHR EAM, one public figure belonging to intersecting vulnerable groups shared multiple examples of hateful messages on X that were flagged but either received no response or were not addressed and deemed compliant with platform standards.

⁶⁰ [Research](#) by the Immigrant Council regarding 2024 local elections found that many candidates facing racism, hateful rhetoric, and harassment did not report incidents, with 47 per cent believing it would not change anything and 59 per cent of those who did, reporting no or inadequate police follow-up. Similarly, the CnaM’s [review](#) found that 59 per cent of local and 42 per cent of general election candidates did not report abusive or hateful content to platforms, doubting effective handling.

⁶¹ International standards encourage States to regulate inciteful speech consistently with [ICCPR](#) Articles 19 and 20(2), [EU Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA](#), and Council of Europe instruments such as [Committee of Ministers Recommendation R\(97\)20](#) and [ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 15](#), while treaty bodies under CEDAW and CRPD, as well as [ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 7](#), underline the importance of ensuring protection against hatred targeting women, persons with disabilities and other groups facing discrimination.

calls for strengthened speech regulations, the list of protected characteristics remains incomplete.⁶² The Act also requires proof of intent to incite hatred, rather than only its harmful effect, limiting its practical enforceability and effectiveness.⁶³

Authorities should strengthen the legislation on inciteful speech, including by expanding the list of protected characteristics to align with national equality laws and international standards. Institutional responsibilities for monitoring and enforcement, including during electoral periods, could be clarified and better co-ordinated.

C. ONLINE CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT

The online domain played a major role in the campaign, with candidates, parties and supporters actively using social networks to reach voters.⁶⁴ The ODIHR EAM's monitoring of the online campaign showed Ms. Connolly garnering the highest engagement with a total of 1,329,706 likes and 291,200 followers across four platforms, compared to Humphreys' 238,687 likes and 52,214 followers.⁶⁵ The most common themes in posts concerned candidates' probity, personal conduct, and character, followed by the topic of alleged unfairness or illegitimacy of the nomination process. Candidates' posts were systematically more positive and less adversarial than those of parties, politicians, and actors such as the online media outlet *The Ditch* and the *Spoil The Vote* campaign. Negative or adversarial organic posts on X were strongly correlated with higher engagement. Unlike other candidates, Connolly made extensive use of podcasts as an important campaign tool, making more than nine appearances.

Candidates pursued different online paid advertising strategies. Connolly ran more targeted and diverse campaigns with smaller per-ad spending and higher overall volume, while Gavin and Humphreys relied on fewer and less targeted ads. The decisions by Google and Meta to stop delivering paid political ads in the EU in a reaction to the impending entry into force of the TTPA took effect a short period into the electoral campaign, at the end of September and beginning of October, respectively. Based on ODIHR EAM data collected before the bans on paid ads went into force, the candidates' overall spending levels were broadly similar.⁶⁶ Several interlocutors viewed the bans as problematic, noting that they deprived contestants of legal avenues for effective digital outreach channels and may have incentivized circumvention, including through third parties or ads disguised as non-political content, or the creation of more polarizing content favoured by platform algorithms.

Concerns about misinformation were most pronounced early in the campaign, linked to one announced but not formally pursued candidacy, and peaked shortly before election day with the circulation of AI-generated deepfakes, which were flagged by the Electoral Commission and others and subsequently

⁶² The Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act covers race, colour, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origin, membership of the Travelling community and sexual orientation as protected characteristics, but does not include grounds such as gender, disability, age or civil and family status, which various national and international actors have proposed adding.

⁶³ In its October 2025 [report](#), the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) reiterated its past calls to pass strengthened hate speech legislation "as a matter of priority" and noted the lack of comprehensive data on investigations, prosecution, convictions, and sentencing. Ireland is also facing an [infringement procedure](#) from the European Commission for not transposing the 2008 Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia. In August, the Coalition Against Hate Crime involving over 20 CSOs [renewed past calls](#) on the state to strengthen protections against "hate speech" and on technology companies to monitor, remove, and prevent its spread on their platforms.

⁶⁴ The CnaM's [Digital News Report Ireland 2024](#) found that 59 per cent of adults used Facebook, 42 per cent Instagram, 22 per cent TikTok, and 21 per cent X. According to CnaM's [research](#), 95 per cent of candidates in the 2024 local and general elections used social networks to advance their campaigns.

⁶⁵ The monitoring covered the period from 3 September to 24 October, yielding a dataset of 3,282 observations covering 41 accounts of candidates, parties, public figures and commentators across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X. No data on followers or likes was available for Jim Gavin due to the deletion of his social media accounts immediately after his withdrawal.

⁶⁶ Based on Meta's Ad Library data for the period from 3 September to 24 October, [Gavin](#) spent an estimated EUR 14,289, [Connolly](#) EUR 18,950, and [Humphreys](#) EUR 22,132.

removed by Meta and Alphabet; X labelled them as manipulated.⁶⁷ This included an AI-generated video styled as a public broadcaster's news report that falsely depicted Catherine Connolly announcing her withdrawal from the race and the election being cancelled, with her rival set to assume the presidency. With its statutory powers on mis-/disinformation not yet in force, the Commission relied on a voluntary co-operation framework with platforms that was established in 2024. It also tracked misleading or false content that could affect electoral integrity, primarily to proactively counter such narratives through the dissemination of factual information.⁶⁸

As the DSC, CnaM pursues a risk-based supervision and enforcement strategy for illegal content online under the DSA and national online safety provisions, working in close co-operation with the European Commission and other DSCs in overseeing systemic risks. While it enables users to file complaints, they are advised to first flag problematic content to the platforms and contact the CnaM in case of unsatisfactory handling or inaction.⁶⁹ Having no authority to provide real-time or individual remedies, complaints filed with CnaM served to inform its longer-term risk mitigation oversight, such as its ongoing review of accessibility of platforms' notice-and-action mechanisms under DSA Article 16. CnaM did not report issuing any compliance notices or opening formal investigations in 2024 or during the 2025 campaign period.

In the four weeks around the election, platforms and CSOs who signed the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation co-operated through its Rapid Response System. This mechanism was welcomed as a useful and functioning format for regular exchanges on emerging issues, trends and concerns, and for prioritized handling of misinformation-related cases. However, several civil society and contestant representatives voiced doubts about the broader effectiveness of holding platforms accountable through user or CSO content flagging.⁷⁰ There was a prevalent sentiment that most of the content flagged as illegal, harmful, misleading, or non-compliant with the platforms' own standards did not result in meaningful action, fostering a sense of resignation and the perception that such user-platform collaboration was largely futile.⁷¹

In this context, the EU-wide mechanism for independent out-of-court dispute settlement (ODS) under the DSA is gaining prominence as a channel for users and organizations to challenge platform decisions. The Appeals Center Europe (ACE), certified by CnaM in September 2024, had by August 2025 issued 50 decisions related to Ireland, mostly concerning account suspension or restriction, bullying and harassment, and hateful speech and conduct.⁷²

⁶⁷ EDMO Ireland's September 2025 [report](#) found that 58 per cent of posts by Mr. Conor McGregor, who announced but did not pursue candidacy, carried false claims about the presidency, Constitution and historical events.

⁶⁸ The Electoral Commission also followed other misinformation threads, some seen as linked to bot activity with limited human circulation. In collaboration with the Electoral Commission, Facebook and TikTok directed users searching for election-related content to official information and media-literacy resources.

⁶⁹ Jointly with the police, CnaM developed an [information pack](#) informing candidates in elections about how to report illegal or harmful content online to different responsible institutions and platforms. Ahead of the election, CnaM held a roundtable with platforms to discuss risk mitigation strategies.

⁷⁰ Presently no CSO is authorized as a '[trusted flagger](#)' by the CnaM as the DSC.

⁷¹ In its 25 October 2025 [preliminary findings](#) on platforms' compliance with the DSA during this election, EDMO Ireland reported weak enforcement, with inconsistent and largely reactive responses to flagged content, often with no visible action. In its May 2025 submission to the European Commission, INAR expressed concern that the moderation burden had shifted towards CSOs and called on other CSOs to withdraw from 'trusted flagger' voluntary co-operation mechanisms with online platforms, citing their ineffectiveness in addressing 'recommender' algorithms as the structural facilitator of engagement-driven toxicity.

⁷² According to its [Transparency Report](#), ACE issued default decisions in favour of complaints in the majority of cases due to lack of responses from the platforms. Where content was provided by the platforms and reviewed, ACE upheld the platforms' decisions in more than 6 out of 10 disputes. ODS bodies' decisions are not binding. Ireland ranked fourth across the EU based on the number of eligible disputes per capita.

IX. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

The 1997 Electoral Act regulates both campaign and political finance. Amendments adopted in 2022 updated rules on political donations and enhanced the investigative and enforcement powers concerning financial accountability.⁷³ Overall, the legislation provides an adequate framework for the regulation and oversight of campaign finance. ODIHR EAM interlocutors assessed the campaign finance regulation as providing a sufficient level of transparency and accountability. However, the 1997 Electoral Act has been amended numerous times and is not available in a consolidated form, which affects legal clarity and accessibility.

A. INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

Campaigns can be financed from public and private sources. Candidates who are elected or receive more than one-quarter of the quota (12.5 per cent) of the vote are eligible for reimbursement of campaign expenses, up to a maximum of EUR 250,000.⁷⁴ Candidates may also send one campaign communication to each household via post free of charge.⁷⁵ Political parties may endorse candidates by funding their campaigns, but only with private funds.⁷⁶

Private campaign contributions are well regulated. Donations are subject to significant statutory limitations based on the origin, type, and amount of funds accepted, and may include monetary and in-kind contributions, fundraising proceeds and loans.⁷⁷ Candidates may accept donations from citizens and legal entities; foreign donations are prohibited unless the individual donor is an Irish citizen or the legal entity maintains a functioning office on the island of Ireland.⁷⁸ Anonymous donations are permitted up to EUR 100, whereas cash donations and donations from non-registered corporate donors are capped at EUR 200 per calendar year.⁷⁹ Cryptocurrency donations are prohibited.

⁷³ The 2022 Electoral Reform Act added a new definition of cryptocurrency along with a general ban on accepting donations in cryptocurrency form. It also introduced new accounting and reporting obligations for the regular activities of political parties, including the preparation of consolidated annual statements of accounts.

⁷⁴ The reimbursement cap was increased from EUR 200,000 to EUR 250,000 ahead of this election due to the rise in the Consumer Price Index by [the order](#) of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage. A candidate who qualifies for reimbursement is not required to pass on any part of the reimbursement to any political party.

⁷⁵ Postage costs are covered from the state funding; however, the cost of producing campaign materials – such as leaflets – is considered an election expense and must be borne by the candidate.

⁷⁶ State funding of political parties is intended solely for specific non-electoral activities, such as the general conduct and management of party affairs and the lawful pursuit of party objectives. According to the [Exchequer Funding of Political Parties in 2023 & 2024 report](#) by the SIPO, all qualified political parties received a total of approximately EUR 6.5 million in 2024, with the largest beneficiaries being *Fianna Fáil* (EUR 1.6 million) and *Fine Gael* (EUR 1.5 million). To be considered a "qualified political party", a party must be registered and its candidates must have received at least 2 percent of the total first-preference votes cast for all candidates in the most recent *Dáil* election. Public funding is also provided through the Parliamentary Activities Allowance (PAA) to parliamentary leaders of political parties and, separately, to independent members of the parliament, as set out in the [2014 Oireachtas Act](#).

⁷⁷ An in-kind donation is defined as any donation of property or goods with the right to use them free of charge, or the difference between the usual commercial price and the actual price paid. Property, goods, or services provided free of charge or below cost price during the electoral period are regarded as in-kind donations. Such donations must be declared and valued at the usual commercial price for the purchase, use, or acquisition of the property or goods, or for the supply of the service donated. This can also include a loan provided by a third party or a financial institution at terms more favorable than those available in the normal course of business.

⁷⁸ The same rules apply to political parties, partnerships, or lobby groups.

⁷⁹ A donation is deemed anonymous if a donor's name and address are unknown. If a prohibited donation is received, a candidate must notify SIPO within 14 days and remit the donation to it. Corporate donors, including political parties other than the candidate's own, may contribute more than EUR 200 if they are registered in the Registry of Corporate Donors and have received formal approval. Any cash donation or donation from a non-registered corporate donor that exceeds EUR 200, must be returned to the donor or remit the donation or the part that exceeds the limit to the SIPO.

Candidates may obtain loans from financial institutions, other entities, or individuals under standard market conditions.⁸⁰ The maximum donation from a single donor is EUR 1,000 per calendar year.⁸¹ There is no aggregate ceiling on the total campaign contributions, nor any limit on candidates' personal contributions to their own campaign. Some ODIHR EAM interlocutors described the ceilings as low but reasonable and noted that a significant number of anonymous donations remain unaccounted for.⁸²

Third parties may engage in campaign activities by promoting or opposing candidates in the presidential election and may accept donations under the same regulatory framework that applies to presidential candidates, except that the donation limit is set at EUR 2,500 per donor per calendar year.⁸³ There is no aggregate ceiling on campaign income for third parties.

Overall, the restrictions on campaign contributions, including the low donation limits per donor, provide adequate safeguards. Although the absence of aggregate ceilings on anonymous donations runs contrary to international good practice, this is somewhat counterbalanced by the requirement that donations exceeding EUR 100 must be made via bank transfer and by the cap of EUR 200 on cash donations.⁸⁴

The expenditure limit for candidates is set at EUR 750,000.⁸⁵ While the use of publicly funded property, services, or facilities for election purposes is not prohibited, any associated costs must be accounted for as an election expense and reimbursed to the appropriate provider.⁸⁶ Election expenses incurred by political parties and third parties campaigning on behalf of a candidate are counted toward the candidate's expenditure limit.⁸⁷ However, there is no expenditure limit for third parties who campaign independently. Some ODIHR EAM interlocutors mentioned several third parties whose activities may have been campaign-related.⁸⁸

Each candidate must appoint an election agent to manage and account for campaign expenditure.⁸⁹ The law provides a detailed list of what constitutes election expenses incurred during the specified election

⁸⁰ If the financing conditions for loans are more beneficial than standard market conditions, then the benefit to the candidate may be regarded as a donation subject to limitations in terms of disclosure and maximum limits.

⁸¹ Multiple donations made by the same donor to a candidate in a given year, must be aggregated to ensure compliance with the limit. The limit also applies to monetary donations from the candidate's own political party.

⁸² Ms. Connolly's agent informed the ODIHR EAM that all donations, including anonymous donations under EUR 100 to her campaign, are recorded even though it is not an obligation according to the regulations.

⁸³ A third party is defined as any individual or group other than a registered political party or candidate who, in a particular calendar year, accepts a donation for political purposes exceeding EUR 100. Where a third party receives such a donation and before incurring any expenses for political purposes, it must notify SIPO of its credentials, the name of the responsible person, the estimated amount of donations and proposed expenses for the year, and indicate any connection with a candidate in an election. Third parties not connected to a candidate must still notify SIPO of their intent to incur election expenses.

⁸⁴ Paragraph 212 of the [2020 ODIHR and Venice Commission Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) (Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation) provides that "[a]nonymous donations should be strictly regulated, including through a limit on the aggregate allowable amount of all anonymous donations. (...) Another means to avoid undue influence from unknown sources is to state in relevant legislation that donations above a certain (low) amount shall be made through bank transfer, bank check or bank credit card, to ensure their traceability in terms of amount and sources."

⁸⁵ The expenditure limit remains the same as in the 2018 presidential election. ODIHR EAM interlocutors indicated that change was unnecessary, as the highest recorded election expenses in the 2018 election did not exceed EUR 400,000.

⁸⁶ The ODIHR EAM learned that certain institutions, such as the parliament, maintain a price list for this purpose.

⁸⁷ Prior notification to SIPO is required before a third party incurs any election expenses if it intends to campaign.

⁸⁸ Among the indicated ones were the [Spoil The Vote](#) campaign that called on voters to spoil their votes on election day and the [Life Institute](#) which allegedly was linked to the former. The ODIHR EAM was informed by the oversight authority that *Spoil the Vote* had completed an application with SIPO as an "Other Person" for the presidential election, and that the *Life Institute* had been contacted by SIPO in this regard. Definitions of "third party" and "other person" are somewhat overlapping, however, the latter definition is used in the context when such persons are not connected to a candidate or a political party.

⁸⁹ Candidates may act as their own agents. The agent should be appointed before any election expenses are incurred.

period.⁹⁰ While election expenses are generally defined by reference to the formal “election period”, certain expenditures incurred or planned outside this window are intentionally excluded from accounting and spending limits, contrary to international good practice.⁹¹ Some ODIHR EAM interlocutors indicated that considerable expenses are incurred by political parties, intending to nominate a candidate, before the official start of the official election period and that such expenses are typically accounted for in the political party’s annual returns. Lax regulation and interpretation of pre-electoral expenses may weaken accountability and undermine the effective enforcement of expenditure limits and overall transparency.⁹²

To ensure due accountability, clarity, and proper enforcement of expenditure limits, regulations governing pre-electoral campaign spending should be reviewed and clarified to cover all election-related expenses.

B. DISCLOSURE AND OVERSIGHT

Candidates who receive monetary donations exceeding EUR 100 in a calendar year are required to open and maintain a dedicated political donations account.⁹³ This account is not public and may be disclosed by a court order or in a course of investigation by SIPO. Candidates are required to disclose any individual donation exceeding EUR 600 or the aggregated donations from the same donor exceeding that amount. While post-election financial disclosure mechanisms are in place, there is no requirement for interim campaign finance reporting prior to election day. The absence of interim reporting limits voters’ access to official information on campaign income and expenditure, at odds with international good practice.⁹⁴

To enhance transparency, consideration should be given to introducing interim campaign finance reporting requirements to ensure that voters have access to timely and comprehensive information prior to election day.

⁹⁰ Items excluded from the definition of election expenses include minor expenses incurred by paid campaign workers, not exceeding EUR 126.97, provided these are covered from their resources and not reimbursed by the election agent; the use of office owned by a political party that are made available to a candidate during the election, etc.

⁹¹ The election period ran from 3 September to 24 October, inclusive. Expenses outside the election period that do not need to be accounted for include: promotional material circulated by candidates or political parties before 3 September; rent costs for campaign premises incurred before 3 September; ‘thank you’ notices circulated after the election; the removal of posters. Paragraph 262 of the [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that “(a) party may attempt to circumvent campaign finance regulations by conducting activities during a “pre-electoral” period or by utilizing other entities or persons as conduits for funds or services. To limit this abuse, strong systems for financial reporting by political parties outside of elections must be enacted. Legislation should provide clear rules and guidelines regarding which activities are not allowed during the pre-election campaign, and what income and expenditures for such activities during this time should be regarded as campaign resources subject to proper review and sanction.”

⁹² Article 10 of [Recommendation Rec\(2003\)4 of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers on common rules against corruption in the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns](#) states that “States should require particular records to be kept of all expenditure, direct and indirect, on electoral campaigns in respect of each political party, each list of candidates and each candidate.”

⁹³ The account must be opened in a financial institution in the State. The candidate is required to deposit any subsequent monetary donations, regardless of their value, into that account. A bank statement detailing all account transactions made from the date of opening until polling day must be submitted to SIPO post-election financial report.

⁹⁴ Article 7.3 of the [UNCAC](#) provides that states take measures “to enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public office”. Part I. 2.3d of the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission [2002 Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) (Code of Good Practice) recommends: “Political party, candidates and election campaign funding must be transparent.” Paragraph 261 of the [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that “It is good practice to require the following reports: [...] Reports providing oversight bodies and the public with preliminary information on campaign incomes and expenses of parties and candidates several days before election day”. See also paragraph 247.

Each candidate must submit a campaign finance report to SIPO within 56 days after the election, including statements on donations and expenses.⁹⁵ The paper-based reporting forms are approved by the oversight authority and sent to candidates; many are completed by hand and submitted by post.⁹⁶ All reports, regardless of the quality of completion, are published as scanned documents in machine-non-readable formats, limiting data comparability and falling short of international good practice.⁹⁷ Many ODIHR EAM interlocutors strongly supported the need for the digitalization of financial reporting.

To enhance the comprehensiveness, comparability, and transparency of campaign finance reporting, consideration could be given to introducing online reporting.

By law, independent third parties that incur election expenses are subject to adhere to the same post-election reporting deadline and must submit a statement detailing all such expenses. All third parties are required to submit a bank statement regarding their donations account specifying all transactions by 31 March each year.⁹⁸ There is no requirement to make these reports public, which undermines the overall transparency.⁹⁹

To strengthen transparency and accountability, the legislation should require that third-party financing disclosures be made publicly available online in a timely and accessible manner.

SIPO oversees campaign finances and has extensive investigative and consultative powers, including the authority to issue legally binding guidelines to candidates, third parties, and other stakeholders.¹⁰⁰ It reviews campaign finance reports and examines donation and election expenditure statements and supporting documentation, and allows for corrections in cases of minor errors or omissions.¹⁰¹ The law does not specify deadlines for the review or publication of these reports, nor does it require an independent audit.¹⁰² Some ODIHR EAM interlocutors noted that oversight focuses primarily on minor infringements, resulting in requests by SIPO to amend the reports rather than investigations of serious irregularities, which they attributed to a lack of resources.

Regardless of the institutional arrangements for campaign finance oversight, the competent authority should be provided with sufficient financial, technical, and human resources to ensure effective, comprehensive, and timely oversight of all aspects of campaign finance.

⁹⁵ These statements must be accompanied by a statutory declaration made by the election agent, affirming their accuracy and correctness. The election expenses statement must be submitted along with invoices, receipts, and vouchers for every payment exceeding EUR 126.97. SIPO also has the right to request supporting documents for any item of expenditure under EUR 126.97, referred to as 'minor expenses'.

⁹⁶ ODIHR EAM interlocutors reported that, at times, these reports are lost when sent as hard copies by post.

⁹⁷ Paragraph 258 of the [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that “Digitalizing information and submitting it to the regulatory body in its digitalized, easily searchable and reusable form can facilitate oversight and therefore minimize the need for paper-based procedures.” See also Paragraph 259.

⁹⁸ A third party is exempted from this requirement if it has not received a donation for political purposes in the preceding year and/or has not made any debits from its political donations account during that year.

⁹⁹ Article 6 of [Recommendation Rec\(2003\)4 of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers on common rules against corruption in the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns](#) provides that, “rules concerning donations to political parties [...] should also apply, as appropriate, to all entities which are related directly or indirectly to a political party or are otherwise under the control of a political party.” Paragraph 256 of the [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that “[...] comparable obligations and restrictions as apply to parties and party candidates, be extended to third parties that are involved in the campaign, to ensure transparency and accountability.”

¹⁰⁰ SIPO consists of six members: a Chair (who must be a judge or former judge of the Supreme Court or the High Court), four ex officio members (the Ombudsman, the Clerk of the House of Representatives, the Clerk of the Senate and the Comptroller and Auditor General), and one ordinary member appointed by the Government. Only the Chair and the ordinary member are appointed for a six-year term and may be reappointed.

¹⁰¹ If SIPO identifies a minor error or omission in a statement, it will notify the person who submitted it and allow 14 days from the date of notification to make the correction.

¹⁰² According to SIPO, reviewing the reports could take up to six months; however, they aim to upload the reports to their website as soon as they are received. The reports must concurrently be submitted to parliament.

The law provides for a range of gradual sanctions for financial offences, including monetary fines and imprisonment for up to three years. SIPO may directly apply fixed payment notice of EUR 200 and fines up to EUR 2,500 to candidates, election agents and third parties, typically for failure to submit financial reports by the deadline.¹⁰³ More serious offences, such as submitting knowingly false or misleading reporting, especially those punishable by imprisonment, are referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions. The combination of gradual administrative fines and criminal sanctions provides sufficient deterrence against financial violations. However, the ODIHR EAM did not observe any cases of their application, as no complaints were filed and no investigations were initiated in relation to campaign financing during the presidential election.¹⁰⁴

X. MEDIA

A. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Ireland's media landscape is diverse, yet its pluralism faces increasing challenges due to growing concentration of media ownership, which particularly affects radio and regional media sectors.¹⁰⁵ Current legislation sets no quantitative ceiling on the overall market share that a single owner may control, nor does it include safeguards to protect editorial independence.¹⁰⁶ Information on media ownership is freely available in databases supported by the media regulator, *Coimisiún na Meán* (CnaM).

To protect media plurality, legislators could consider introducing ceilings for media ownership or alternative safeguards against ownership concentration.

Positively, trust in news in Ireland is higher than average for the European Union (51 per cent vs 39 per cent).¹⁰⁷ Internet penetration is high, at 97 per cent. Online media, including social networking platforms, have become the main source of political information, followed by television. Radio and local newspapers continue to play a significant role, particularly outside the capital. Irish broadsheets continue to perform reasonably well, including in attracting digital subscriptions. At the same time, local newspapers are increasingly consolidated into national media groups, and their websites act as secondary vehicles for national news of the same outlet.

In response to declining advertising revenues that affect media sustainability, the state has launched targeted funding to strengthen public interest journalism.¹⁰⁸ These initiatives are due to be consolidated into a broader, platform-neutral media support fund in the future.

Television broadcasting is dominated by three organisations. The public service broadcasters (PSB) are *Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ)* and *Teilifís na Gaeilge (TG4)*, which provide Irish-language

¹⁰³ SIPO explained to the ODIHR EAM that if a fixed payment notice is not paid, it may initiate summary proceedings against the offender that will result in higher sanctions.

¹⁰⁴ SIPO informed the ODIHR EAM that the only case concerned a notification from a political party regarding the *Spoil The Vote* campaign, and that the proceedings were ongoing.

¹⁰⁵ Paragraph 3.4 of [the Recommendation CM/Rec\(2018\)1](#) of the of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership reads that "ownership regulation can include restrictions on horizontal, vertical and cross-media ownership, including by determining thresholds".

¹⁰⁶ The only restriction is the number of licences one can own in the radio sector which is set at 25 percent of titles. *Bauer Media Audio Ireland* has reached this limit. Apart from its own stations, *Bauer's* "Newstalk" radio correspondent provides political reporting to 29 regional radio stations around the country.

¹⁰⁷ The statistical information is sourced from ["Digital News Report Ireland, 2025"](#).

¹⁰⁸ In 2025, the State awarded EUR 5.7 million in open competition to local democracy and court reporting schemes. The funds were supposed to create or maintain more than 100 journalistic roles. New funding schemes, expected in 2026, are aimed at digital transformation and other issues.

programming. *TG4* depends on *RTE* for its news service and does not control its own editorial output.¹⁰⁹ In addition to the nationwide commercial broadcaster *Virgin Media Television*, audiences also have access to a wide range of UK-based television channels.

RTE is funded by the television licence fee and by commercial activities. Due to the changing media consumption habits and controversies over *RTE*'s financial accountability, the broadcasters' revenues regularly fall short of the projected income.¹¹⁰ Successive governments have failed to establish a sustainable funding mechanism, resulting in periodic funding crises and several rounds of redundancies. Most recently, the government provided direct three-year state funding to bridge the gap and is preparing a reform of its funding of public service broadcasting, aimed at introducing multi-year financing and giving the media regulator a greater role in proposing the broadcaster's budget. However, unless the reformed funding level is tied to objective criteria (such as GDP growth or inflation) and unless the annual licence fee collection mechanisms are strengthened, the *RTE* will continue to depend on political decisions.

The authorities should establish a funding mechanism for public service media that provides adequate and predictable multi-year financing that is sufficiently remove from government and protects the editorial independence of the public service broadcasters.

Threats against journalists, both online and offline, are taken seriously and prosecuted. Journalists have reported increased threats during demonstrations as well as online. The *Media Engagement Group*, which consists of representatives from the media industry and police, meets regularly to address safety concerns, and it provides a focal point for channelling emerging threats to media professionals.

B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Constitution requires the state to guarantee freedom of expression and the press. Access to information is regulated under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), but several ODIHR EAM interlocutors characterised it as outdated and unfit for the digital media environment. The exemption of the *Áras* (the office of the president) from the FOIA was pointed out as problematic and incompatible with transparency and accountability.¹¹¹

To strengthen accountability, the authorities could consider extending freedom of information legislation to cover all public bodies.

At the time of writing this report, several legislative proposals were being developed, including on market concentration, transparency of state advertising, and governance of the public service media. The reform of the defamation regime remains under consideration in the Senate.

The current system is widely recognised as problematic because it provides no safeguards against abusive litigation and sets no statutory limits or criteria for jury-awarded damages. Media organisations routinely retain lawyers to examine potential defamation cases against them and assess the costs before such cases are filed. Taken together, these factors may threaten the financial viability, and even the existence, of media organisations. Consequently, the media resort to precautionary out-of-court settlements and are occasionally unable to fully report on certain subjects, an example of which during this election campaign was brought to the attention of the ODIHR EAM.

¹⁰⁹ *RTE* has two main TV channels and numerous specialized ones, *Radio 1*, *2FM*, Irish language radio station *Raidió na Gaeltachta*, classic music station *Lyric FM*, online portal www.rte.ie, and several apps for content distribution.

¹¹⁰ The annual licence fee is payable by all households in possession of a TV set. It has remained at the same rate of EUR 160 for the last 17 years. In 2023, the evasion rate was listed as 13 per cent.

¹¹¹ Freedom of Information Act provides a blanket ban on "a record related to the President". Information about the expenditure of the office of the president can be audited by relevant state bodies and examined by the parliamentary Committee of Public Accounts, i.e. there is some degree of transparency.

The draft Defamation (Amendment) bill introduces some safeguards countering strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) and foresees the abolition of juries in High Court defamation cases. However, it would not entirely solve the issue of disproportionate legal costs for such lawsuits.

Consideration should be given to establishing proportionate caps on damages in defamation cases and introducing mechanisms to limit litigation costs, ensuring that compensation for reputational harm remains fair while preventing the financial burden of defamation proceedings from threatening media viability.

The broadcasting sector is governed by the 2009 Broadcasting Act, which determines fairness, objectivity, and impartiality as guiding principles. These principles are elaborated into standards set out in a code prepared by the media regulator.¹¹² Before each election, the CnaM issues specific coverage guidelines that media representatives described to the ODIHR EAM as being clear and informed by media industry feedback and past experience. For this election, the CnaM replaced the 24-hour reporting moratorium before elections with a mandatory period of “additional care,” requiring heightened precautions to prevent sudden or unverified information from unduly influencing voters.

The CnaM guidelines allow reasonable discretion in implementation. Broadcasters are for example allowed to choose whether to allocate airtime on a strictly equal or proportionate basis. The stations monitor the airtime allocation themselves. Political advertising is forbidden in broadcast media but allowed in print media, online and outdoors (subject to clear labelling). Registered political parties can request free airtime for party political broadcasts (PPBs), but no one did so because no presidential candidate was nominated exclusively by a single political party. Broadcasters told the ODIHR EAM that political parties prefer to spend money on social-media videos, as they are perceived as a better return on their investment.

The CnaM informed the ODIHR EAM that it had received 3 complaints about coverage of this presidential campaign and said the initial assessment on whether they are admissible would take at least two months. In a case of persistent and serious breaches, such timeline does not offer timely redress.

Consideration could be given to establishing a temporary fast-track mechanism during electoral periods to swiftly handle media complaints and ensure timely remedies.

Online and print media are self-regulated, including during a campaign.¹¹³ Complaints about their conduct would be reviewed by the Press Ombudsman, and, on appeal, the Press Council.

C. MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE CAMPAIGN

Presidential candidates had ample opportunity to present their platforms in several debates in which they were being vigorously questioned by journalists. However, the cosy relationship between news and public relation industries, with constant migration of professionals between them, was pointed out as a potential trust issue towards political reporting, as manifested also in this campaign.¹¹⁴

Most media attention focused on key policy concerns – such as the housing shortage or Ireland’s neutrality and foreign policy – as well as candidates’ past actions that spoke to character and judgment. Several interlocutors described the intensely personal and often negative focus of the coverage as

¹¹² CnaM adopted [Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs](#) in December 2024. It was followed by [Guidelines in Respect of Coverage of Electoral Events](#) in September, 2025. They do not apply to print, social media, audio-visual on-demand media services or online print/audiovisual content.

¹¹³ Draft legislation suggests applying the same principles to broadcasters as to public service media online output.

¹¹⁴ Shortly after election day it was revealed that Ivan Yates, an ex-politician working as political commentator during the campaign, had provided media training to Mr. Gavin and never disclosed it neither to the Newstalk management, nor to audience.

inevitable, noting that since the president is exempt from FOIA requests, the campaign represents the only period during which a candidate's views, conduct, and finances can be subject to public scrutiny. Two fact-checking outlets – *RTE's Clarity* and privately-owned *The Journal* – published explainers on the most pressing issues of the campaign or refuted disinformation related to the electoral process.

RTE convened a working group to establish the principles for election coverage and met regularly to check compliance.¹¹⁵ In addition, it issued guidance to all staff and external collaborators, instructing them to refrain from expressing views about the candidates, their supporters, or campaign issues on social media for the duration of the campaign.

Since there were only two candidates remaining in the campaign after 5 October, broadcasters divided airtime equally and balanced it across all news and current affairs programmes. However, the combination of numerous debates and one-to-one interviews on the one hand, and only two participants on the other, resulted in repetitive coverage, with the similar questions and responses recurring. *RTE's* debates were subtitled in real time to ensure accessibility for viewers with hearing impairments.

The Irish-language public broadcaster *TG4* broadcast political coverage prepared by *RTE* because it does not yet have an editorially independent news service or online news portal. It chose not to host debates, as only one candidate was a fluent Irish speaker; an Irish-language debate would have disadvantaged the other candidate. According to the channel, past attempts at subtitling or providing real-time translation had drawn negative viewer feedback.

XI. ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The Constitution guarantees the independence of the judiciary. The court system includes district courts, circuit courts, the High Court, the Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court.¹¹⁶ There is no constitutional court; constitutional matters are dealt with by the High Court with possible appeals to the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court.

Election dispute resolution is administered exclusively through the court system. The 1992 Presidential Elections Act establishes jurisdiction of the High Court to adjudicate electoral petitions on the validity of an election. High Court decisions can be appealed directly to the Supreme Court as final instance. No deadline is provided for filing and adjudicating cases in front of the Supreme Court.

The law provides that a presidential election may be challenged on the ground of specific offences related to voter and candidate registration, campaigning, voting and counting, and the election outcome.¹¹⁷ Grounds for challenge include obstruction, interference with or hindrance of the electoral process, as well as mistakes or other irregularities which, if established, could have affected the result of an election.¹¹⁸ The latter notion puts a high burden of proof on the petitioner.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ *RTE* Policies and Guidelines outline the editorial and campaign coverage principles that *RTE* applies across its election reporting, including arrangements to co-ordinate overall electoral coverage in accordance with regulatory guidance on fairness, objectivity and impartiality.

¹¹⁶ The High Court, the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court are sitting in Dublin. However, the High Court can travel around the country to hear cases. Judges are appointed by the President upon advice of the Government.

¹¹⁷ Section 59 of the 1993 Presidential Elections Act makes reference to various electoral offences including personation, bribery; undue influence; breach of the secrecy; offences relating to nomination and ballot papers; disorderly conduct at election meetings; campaign materials disclosure violations; officials acting as agent of candidate or furthering a candidature; violent obstruction of nomination or polling; interference with or destruction of postal ballot papers; unlawful voting; and unlawful marking of ballot papers by persons acting as companions.

¹¹⁸ Penalties for those electoral offences range from EUR 1,000 to EUR 2,500 or, at the discretion of the court, to imprisonment for a period from six months to two years, or both a fine and imprisonment.

¹¹⁹ See *Hanafin v. Minister for the Environment* [1996] 2 IR 321 “Consistent with civil law principles, the burden rested on the petitioner to establish, on the balance of probabilities, that the governmental interference materially affected the referendum's outcome.”

A presidential electoral petition can only be lodged by the Director of Public Prosecutions, candidates, or their agents. Such limitation on legal standing is not in line with international standards and good practice.¹²⁰

In line with international standards and good electoral practice, consideration should be given to broadening the legal standing for lodging election petitions in courts.

A petition must be filed within seven days from the declaration of the election results. While the law sets no deadlines for hearing and adjudicating petitions, it requires the High Court to prioritize those cases.¹²¹ The election dispute resolution system is widely accepted and generally regarded as functional by stakeholders. However, it does not legally guarantee prompt redress according to the electoral timeline and might therefore infringe on voters' rights.¹²²

To fully comply with international good practice, consideration could be given to legislate deadlines for adjudication of petitions in order to guarantee the timely review of election-related disputes, including those related to the candidate nominations.

Filing a petition requires a monetary deposit of EUR 6,250; the sum is intended to cover any costs of court proceedings. The High Court may lower the amount under specific circumstances.¹²³ While a substantive monetary deposit might prevent frivolous and spurious litigation, it is not entirely consistent with international standards, as a high financial threshold may discourage legitimate challenges and limit the right of legal redress.¹²⁴ A prior ODIHR recommendation to review this practice remained unaddressed.

Consideration could be given to revising the size of the monetary deposit for filing election petitions to ensure that legitimate rights could be defended in court while discouraging spurious appeals.

Prior to election day, the High Court heard two cases brought forward by individuals alleging that Deputy Prime Minister and *Fine Gael* party leader Simon Harris had given unlawful instructions to the party's local councillors to block the nomination of independent candidates, thereby rendering the entire presidential candidate nomination process unconstitutional. On 20 October, the Court heard and dismissed the first motion against the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and the Attorney General.¹²⁵ A similar claim was dismissed on 23 October.¹²⁶ In both cases, the Court held that Article 12.4 of the Constitution clearly sets out the

¹²⁰ The 1990 OSCE Conference on the Human Document (Copenhagen Document), para. 5.10 states that "everyone will have an effective means of redress against administrative decisions, so as to guarantee respect for fundamental rights and ensure legal integrity." The Paragraph 99 of the Explanatory Report to the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that: "Standing in (...) appeals must be granted as widely as possible. It must be open to every elector in the constituency and to every candidate standing for election there to lodge an appeal." See also Art. 2 (3) of the ICCPR, and Article 14 of the ECHR.

¹²¹ The Department of Housing informed the ODIHR EAM that courts are mindful of the inauguration date of 11 November 2025 and would aim to adjudicate any post-election petition before that date.

¹²² See Explanatory Report to the [Code of Good Practice](#), paragraph 93 "Appeal proceedings should be as brief as possible, in any case concerning decisions to be taken before the elections. (...) This means both that the time limits for appeals must be very short and that the appeal body must make its ruling as quickly as possible. Time limits must, however, be long enough to make an appeal possible, to guarantee the exercise of rights of defence and a reflected decision."

¹²³ The High Court may lower this amount if it is satisfied that the sum is too high for the petitioner or could cause him or her serious hardship, and it may release the petitioner from any costs of proceedings in relation to the petition.

¹²⁴ See the Venice Commission's 2010 [Study on Individual Access to Constitutional Justice](#), paragraph 117, "The Venice Commission recommends that in view of more comprehensive human rights protection, court fees for individuals ought to be set relatively low and that it should be possible to reduce them according to the financial situation of the applicant. Their primary aim should be to deter obvious abuse."

¹²⁵ High Court of Ireland: [Byrne vs. The Tánaiste and Ors](#). See also a [commentary](#) on the court ruling.

¹²⁶ [High Court rejects challenge to presidential election nomination process.](#)

nomination criteria and that any intra-party instructions were a political matter and not unlawful or against the Constitution.

XII. ELECTION OBSERVATION

Presidential candidates and their agents have the right to be present in polling stations during the processing of postal ballots, and the counting of votes. They do not have the right to be present during special voting at nursery homes, hospitals and care institutions.¹²⁷

The legislation does not have provisions for election observation, neither citizen nor international, contrary to OSCE commitments.¹²⁸ Still in fulfilment of its OSCE commitment to invite international observers, the authorities invited ODIHR to observe the election and provided the mission with unimpeded access to all stages of the electoral process, including on election day.¹²⁹ In practice, access of observers to polling stations and counting centres is at the discretion of the presiding officer of the polling station or the RO.

The election legislation should be amended to explicitly guarantee the access of citizen and international observers to all aspects of the electoral process, in line with Ireland's international commitments.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) engaged in general advocacy, rather than electoral campaigning, may be required to register with SIPO and become subject to donation limits and restrictions on foreign funding under the Electoral Act. ODIHR recommended narrowing the definition of “political purposes” in 2007, yet the Electoral Act has not been amended in this respect. Several ODIHR EAM interlocutors noted that requiring non-electoral CSOs to register with SIPO constitutes a limitation on freedom of association.¹³⁰

There are no legal regulations governing media access to follow the preparations and conduct of elections or the counting process. Returning officers, however, informed that media may be present in polling stations and counting centres including in the national counting centre, but filming and recording require permission from the local returning officers.¹³¹ Nonetheless, the absence of formal regulation on media access may hamper media's ability to cover the elections.

¹²⁷ Returning officers in Galway, Dublin city and Dublin County informed the ODIHR EAM that they had denied requests from Electoral Commission observers and candidate agents for access to observe the special voting procedures, explaining that the law does not give them discretion to grant such access.

¹²⁸ Paragraph 8 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that “[t]he participating States consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place”.

¹²⁹ Paragraphs II.3.2.a-b of the [Code of Good Practice](#) recommend that “observers should be given the widest possible opportunity to participate in an election observation exercise” and that “observation must not be confined to the election day itself [...]. It must make it possible to determine whether irregularities occurred before, during or after the elections.”

¹³⁰ The issue is well known to state bodies and has been discussed in documents of international organizations. The Electoral Commission included this question in its [Research Programme 2024- 2026](#) (p.16). See also European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [2017 Report on Challenges facing civil society organizations working on human rights in the EU](#) (p.22) and the [2019 Report on Funding of Associations](#) (p.17) by the Venice Commission.

¹³¹ The Memorandum for Local Returning Officers at the Presidential Election 24 October 2025 addresses the access of media to counting centres and mentions photo-taking by media at polling stations.

XIII. ELECTION DAY AND COUNTING

A. OPENING, VOTING, AND CLOSING

In line with the ODIHR methodology, the ODIHR EAM did not conduct a comprehensive and systematic observation of election-day proceedings but visited a limited number of polling stations in Dublin city and county on election day. ODIHR EAM observers were granted full access throughout the process. Nearly all polling premises visited were accessible to persons with physical disabilities for independent access.

In the polling stations, visited by the ODIHR EAM procedures were generally followed. Polling station staff generally performed their duties in a professional and efficient manner. Voters with disabilities requiring assistance were, as a rule, supported in a respectful and appropriate manner. All polling stations visited were equipped with booths with a lower surface for wheelchair users and ballot paper templates for vision-impaired voters. After the closing, the sealed ballot boxes were collected and transferred to the local counting centre for overnight safekeeping.

B. COUNTING

The ODIHR EAM was present during the opening of the ballot boxes and the counting of votes in five counting centres in Dublin city and county on 25 October. The counting was conducted in a transparent and professional manner by approximately 25-30 two-person counting teams under the supervision of the local RO or a designated deputy or assistant RO.

There was a notable presence of candidate agents ('tallymen') representing candidates Connolly and Humphreys, as well as media representatives and members of the public. Their presence added to the transparency of the counting process. Ballots were counted with the marked preference facing upward, which allowed the candidate agents to gauge levels of support for their candidate. Agents were invited to review the disputed ballot papers before they were stamped "Rejected".

The number of invalid votes was unusually high, 12.9 per cent. This was largely attributed to the late withdrawal of candidate Gavin from the race, which led some to spoil their ballots intentionally or inadvertently.¹³² The number of ballots invalidated due to the absence of the official stamp – attributable to errors by presiding officers when issuing ballots – was 816, compared to 1,956 in the 2024 general election. Despite the lower figure, this still highlights the need to strengthen training and reinforce adherence to prescribed procedures.

C. TABULATION AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS

Results from the 43 constituencies were transmitted electronically to the national counting centre at Dublin Castle. Once verified and accepted, constituency results were announced by the PRO and made publicly available.¹³³ Results were not available disaggregated by polling station within the constituency, which detracted from the overall transparency. The PRO explained that, as in other national elections, ballots from all polling stations in a constituency are mixed before counting begins. According to ODIHR EAM interlocutors, candidates and their agents are used to a uniform counting process irrespective of the election type, and that there is a high level of trust in the counting and tabulation process.

¹³² Local returning officers [reported](#) that 125,732 or 58.8 percent of the invalid ballots were rejected for containing writing or marks by which the voter could be identified, 55,539 or 26.0 percent – for first preference not being clearly marked, including unmarked ballot papers, 31,651 or 14.8 percent – for containing a first preference clearly indicated for more than one candidate, and 816 votes or 0.4 percent rejected for lack of the official mark.

¹³³ See the [website](#) of Ireland's Presidential Returning Officer for more details.

On 25 October, the PRO announced the final election results and declared Catherine Martina Ann Connolly the winner of the presidential election. Voter turnout was reported at 45.83 per cent. Published voter participation figures were not disaggregated by gender as recommended under CEDAW.¹³⁴

XIV. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations as contained throughout the text are offered with a view to further enhance the conduct of elections in Ireland and to support efforts to bring them fully in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities of Ireland to further improve the electoral process and to address the recommendations contained in this report.¹³⁵

A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To enhance accessibility and facilitate uniform implementation of the electoral legal framework, consideration should be given to formally consolidating the current electoral legislation.
2. To ensure equal suffrage, voter registration and voting procedures for out of country voters should be made uniform for all citizens abroad.
3. Authorities should prioritize completing and operationalizing the digital regulatory arrangements relevant to elections by reviewing, updating and, as appropriate, commencing outstanding provisions of the Electoral Reforms Act in a manner consistent with the EU Digital Services and Digital Single Market rules. This should ensure that the Electoral Commission is vested with effective statutory powers to monitor and address risks related to online content during electoral periods.
4. To enhance transparency, consideration should be given to introducing interim campaign finance reporting requirements to ensure that voters have access to timely and comprehensive information prior to election day.
5. Regardless of the institutional arrangements for campaign finance oversight, the competent authority should be provided with sufficient financial, technical, and human resources to ensure effective, comprehensive, and timely oversight of all aspects of campaign finance.
6. The authorities should establish a funding mechanism for public service media that provides adequate and predictable multi-year financing that is sufficiently remove from government and protects the editorial independence of the public service broadcasters.
7. To fully comply with international good practice, consideration could be given to legislate deadlines for adjudication of petitions in order to guarantee the timely review of election-related disputes, including those related to the candidate nominations.
8. The election legislation should be amended to explicitly guarantee the access of citizen and international observers to all aspects of the electoral process, in line with Ireland's international commitments.

¹³⁴ Article 48(d) of the [CEDAW Committee General Recommendation No 23](#) calls for collection of gender disaggregated data on participation in elections and public referendums.

¹³⁵ In paragraph 25 of the [1999 OSCE Istanbul Document](#), OSCE participating States committed themselves "to follow up promptly the ODIHR's election assessment and recommendations".

B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Political Background

9. Political parties should identify barriers to women's participation through gender audits, review internal practices and implement measures to address gaps.

Legal Framework

10. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage could for every electoral event consolidate the relevant statutory instruments into a single document and publish them on its website to avoid uncertainty about the applicable regulatory framework.

Election Administration

11. To promote the participation of women in election administration, the presidential returning officer should collect and publish disaggregated data on gender representation of polling and counting staff.
12. To ensure the effective exercise of the right to vote and to strengthen the effectiveness of the accommodation measure, voters should be provided with a reasonable period to request alternative voting arrangements.
13. Training of polling and counting staff could be provided in a more engaging and interactive manner, and training materials should be tailored specifically to the type of election they are intended to cover.
14. The provision for assisted voting should be reconsidered to exclude that the same person including the presiding officer assists multiple voters. The right of voters to be assisted by a person of their choice should be extended to special voting and on election day should not be limited in the final two hours before the closing of the polls.

Voter Registration

15. Consideration should be given to waiving all charges associated with medical certification imposed on persons applying for postal voting due to illness or disability.

Candidate Registration

16. The legislation should be amended to afford prospective candidates the explicit right to correct mistakes or omissions in their nomination papers prior to the ruling on nominations.

Electoral Campaign

17. To ensure a clear separation between campaigning and public functions, the legal framework should clearly define the scope of permissible activities by public officials during campaigns. The development of practical guidelines for candidates, parties, and public officials tackling these aspects could facilitate compliance.
18. Relevant authorities, in co-operation with parliament, parties, and civil society, could consider developing and operationalizing a framework to prevent and address harassment, intimidation, and abuse targeting individuals engaged in political life. This could involve incident monitoring and reporting mechanisms, strengthened institutional co-ordination, and support measures to ensure

safe participation in public affairs – both offline and online – while providing adequate protections for free speech.

19. Authorities should strengthen the legislation on inciteful speech, including by expanding the list of protected characteristics to align with national equality laws and international standards. Institutional responsibilities for monitoring and enforcement, including during electoral periods, could be clarified and better co-ordinated.

Campaign Finance

20. To ensure due accountability, clarity, and proper enforcement of expenditure limits, regulations governing pre-electoral campaign spending should be reviewed and clarified to cover all election-related expenses.
21. To enhance the comprehensiveness, comparability, and transparency of campaign finance reporting, consideration could be given to introducing online reporting.
22. To strengthen transparency and accountability, the legislation should require that third-party financing disclosures be made publicly available online in a timely and accessible manner.

Media

23. To protect media plurality, legislators could consider introducing ceilings for media ownership or alternative safeguards against ownership concentration.
24. To strengthen accountability, the authorities could consider extending freedom of information legislation to cover all public bodies.
25. Consideration should be given to establishing proportionate caps on damages in defamation cases and introducing mechanisms to limit litigation costs, ensuring that compensation for reputational harm remains fair while preventing the financial burden of defamation proceedings from threatening media viability.
26. Consideration could be given to establishing a temporary fast-track mechanism during electoral periods to swiftly handle media complaints and ensure timely remedies.

Election Dispute Resolution

27. In line with international standards and good electoral practice, consideration should be given to broadening the legal standing for lodging election petitions in courts.
28. Consideration could be given to revising the size of the monetary deposit for filing election petitions to ensure that legitimate rights could be defended in court while discouraging spurious appeals.

ANNEX: FINAL ELECTION RESULTS¹³⁶

	Candidates	First Preference Votes	Percentage
1	Catherine Martina Ann Connolly (Independent)	914,143	63.36
2	Jim Gavin (<i>Fianna Fáil</i>)	103,568	7.18
3	Heather Humphreys (<i>Fine Gael</i>)	424,987	29.46
	Total	1,442,698	100.00

Total number of voters on voter lists	3,614,450	100.00
Number of voters who voted (turnout)	1,656,436	45.83
Number of valid cast votes	1,442,698	87.10
The electoral quota (50 percent of valid votes +1)	721,350	
Number of invalid cast votes	213,738	12.90

¹³⁶

<https://www.presidentialelection.ie/>. See the official gazette, [Iris Oifigiúil](#) on October 28.

ABOUT ODIHR

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is OSCE's principal institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (...) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society" (1992 Helsinki Summit Document). This is referred to as the OSCE human dimension.

ODIHR, based in Warsaw (Poland) was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and began operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 150 staff.

ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. Every year, it co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers to assess whether elections in the OSCE region are conducted in line with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into the electoral process in its entirety. Through assistance projects, ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office's **democratization** activities include: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programmes annually, seeking to develop democratic structures.

ODIHR also assists participating States' in fulfilling their obligations to promote and protect **human rights and fundamental freedoms** consistent with OSCE human dimension commitments. This is achieved by working with a variety of partners to foster collaboration, build capacity and provide expertise in thematic areas, including human rights in the fight against terrorism, enhancing the human rights protection of trafficked people, human rights education and training, human rights monitoring and reporting, and women's human rights and security.

Within the field of **tolerance and non-discrimination**, ODIHR provides support to the participating States in strengthening their response to hate crimes and incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. ODIHR's activities related to tolerance and non-discrimination are focused on the following areas: legislation; law enforcement training; monitoring, reporting on, and following up on responses to hate-motivated crimes and incidents; as well as educational activities to promote tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

ODIHR provides advice to participating States on their policies on **Roma and Sinti**. It promotes capacity-building and networking among Roma and Sinti communities, and encourages the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives in policy-making bodies.

All ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR website (www.osce.org/odihr).