**Questionnaire: The right to sexual and reproductive health rights of girls with disabilities**

**Submission of Ireland**

**July 2017**

1. **Please provide any information and statistics related to the exercise of sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls with disabilities, including`in the following areas:**
* **Harmful stereotypes, norms, values, taboos, attitudes and behaviours related to the sexual and reproductive health rights of girls with disabilities;**

Health and personal social services in Ireland are delivered by the Health Service Executive (HSE) which coordinates sexual health communications work with relevant organisations. Sexual health promotion, education and prevention strategies address a range of issues such as challenging stigma and discrimination, promoting healthy attitudes and values, and challenging perceptions of risk.

* **Sex education (in formal and non-formal settings)and access to sexual and reproductive health information;**

***Sex Education***

The HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health support schools to improve implementation and quality of relationship and sexuality education (RSE) programmes. In schools, the RSE programme has been integrated into the broader Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme. Schools are expected to plan for students with special educational needs in RSE the same way that they do in other subjects.

The HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, with support from the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health, commissionned an in-depth study in 2015 to provide a better understanding of how RSE is experienced from the perspectives of different stakeholders in post-primary schools. This project is scheduled to be completed by December 2017.

***Provision of information and resources***

The HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme is continuing to work on developing a range of age-appropriate information materials for children and young people. The Programme runs and funds a range of sexual health information and education campaigns. The campaigns are targeted to groups identified by research as having particular sexual health information needs, such as children and adolescents, 18-24 year olds, women aged 35-55 and parents, as well as early school leavers, young people who have experienced first sex before 17 years, and other minority groups.

The Foundation Programme in Sexual Health, established in 2015, provides training for teachers and other educational service professionals, as well as community and voluntary workers, health promotion staff, sexual health clinicians and allied health professionals. National public health campaigns, such as Think Contraception, facilitate access to information for sexually active people of all ages, but particularly young people.

* **Access to child and youth friendly quality sexual and reproductive health services;**

The National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020 was launched in 2015. The Strategy aims to ensure everyone in Ireland will receive comprehensive and age-appropriate sexual health education/information and will have access to appropriate prevention and promotion services. The Strategy is being delivered in partnership between the Department of Health, the HSE and the Department of Education and Skills. Services include contraception and family planning, as well as clinical services for the diagnosis and management of STIs; counselling, information and support services; community outreach services for sexual health promotion; education/information and support; and crisis pregnancy management.

The Strategy recognises that legislative and ethical issues compound the problems of responding to individual sexual health needs. The legislative framework for the provision of sexual health services to particular groups, such as young people with intellectual disabilities and people in care, can be complex. All relevant organisations and individuals should have an awareness of the legislation and regulations relating to sexual health particularly those relating to issues of consent, child protection, sexual abuse and intellectual disability.

The Strategy contains a specific action recommending that supports are provided for children and young people in addressing issues that impact on sexual wellbeing such as stigma, homophobia, gender, ability/disability, mental health, alcohol and drugs.

The Strategy was published in the context of major reforms in the Irish health service in its approach to the health and wellbeing of the population. Healthy Ireland – a Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013 – 2025 recognises that many factors outside of the healthcare sector influence health. The Framework aims to address these factors and support the aims of the National Sexual Health Strategy in a wider context.

* **Prevention, care and treatment of sexually transmitted infections;**

The National Sexual Health Strategy contains a commitment to incorporate sexual health indicators into relevant national health and wellbeing surveys. The annual Healthy Ireland Survey gives an up to date picture of the health of the population. The Survey contains questions relating to sexual health. However these questions were aimed at persons aged 17 and upwards and who were capable of providing informed consent.

Sexual health services in Ireland are provided in community (including community outreach) and hospital-based clinical and non-clinical settings, by a mix of public, private and NGO services. Access for young people to public health services such as contraception is provided in line with the National Sexual Health Strategy and in accordance with the national legal requirements applying.

Under the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme, qualifying patients are entitled to free General Practitioner services including contraceptive advice and prescriptions for contraceptive drugs and devices. Where patients do not qualify for a medical card under the Scheme, the costs of contraceptives may be included in the subsidy arrangements for prescribed drugs and medicines.

* **Violence against girls with disabilities impacting their enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health rights;**

n/a

* **Harmful practices, such as forced sterilization and child, early and forced marriage**

The Domestic Violence Bill 2017 was published on 3 February 2017 and it provides for the creation of a new criminal offence of forced marriage. A person commits an offence if they use violence, threats, undue influence or any form of coercion or duress for the purpose of causing another person to enter into a marriage. It is also an offence to remove another person from the State with the intention that they will be forced into a ceremony of marriage. The Domestic Violence Bill will be enacted as soon as possible in 2017.

The Domestic Violence Bill 2017 provides for the amendment of the Civil Registration Act 2004 to make it an absolute impediment to marriage that a party to the intended marriage is under 18, and the repeal of section 33 of the Family Law Act 1995, thereby removing age as one of the criteria from which a party to a marriage can obtain an exemption. Removing the underage exemption should also help to protect minors against forced marriage, as requiring both intended spouses to be at least 18 should assist in ensuring that potential spouses have the maturity to withstand parental or other pressure to marry a particular person. The Domestic Violence Bill will be enacted as soon as possible in 2017.

1. **Please provide information in relation to any innovative initiatives that have been taken at the local, regional, or national level to promote and ensure the exercise of sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls with disabilities, and isentify lessons learned from these.**

See above