



Making a Difference:

Capturing the Learning from The Atlantic Philanthropies Human Rights Programme in Ireland

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Executive Summary

Between 2004 and 2014, the Atlantic Philanthropies (Atlantic) supported a range of grantees to protect and promote human rights in Ireland – a total of €30m in grants were made across 14 organizations. When this programme of grants started, the human rights environment in Ireland was problematic, with a limited infrastructure on both the governmental and non-governmental side. Atlantic's overall aim was to build the capacity and infrastructure to protect and promote human rights.

A review of the work found that it is possible for a philanthropic funding programme in human rights to make progress, achieve distinct gains and contribute substantially to the 'good society' where human rights are valued. This programme left a permanent legacy in its contribution to the new human rights infrastructure and other instruments of accountability, from which there should be no going back.

The grantees secured significant gains on many fronts. Those achievements included:

- **New rights for the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community.** Work by grantees helped pave the way for the passage of the Civil Partnership Act 2011 and the successful holding of a constitutional referendum on marriage equality, which passed in 2015.
- **Improved police accountability.** An independent police watchdog was created to investigate complaints of police misconduct.
- **New rights for children.** Efforts by grantees helped lead to the passage of a referendum on children's rights in 2012. This amended Ireland's Constitution to give children rights and comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A coalition persuaded the courts that the deportation of 17,000 Irish-born children of migrants should not proceed unless it was in the best interests of the child, halting the plan.
- **Better conditions for prisoners.** Grantee advocacy led to several changes and improvements for prisoners and penal policy. For example, in 2012 an independent prisoner complaints mechanism was introduced.
- **Improved treatment of rape victims in the criminal justice system.** A grantee research project examined how rape victims experienced the criminal justice system. It is estimated that nearly 80% of the research project's recommendations were accepted and became part of the Garda (police) and national strategies against sexual violence.

There were also areas of gradual or mixed progress and others where 'holding the line' proved demanding in and of itself. Some existing human rights values and institutions were successfully defended against intense state pressure.

For more information

To learn more about Atlantic's work in human rights in Ireland, read the full report at www.atlanticphilanthropies.org