

## Chapter 1:

### Terminology

**Summary:**

*In light of the mandate given to the Committee, the institutions covered by this Report are collectively referred to as “Magdalen Laundries”. The names of individual institutions are also used, as appropriate. This is not meant to obscure the fact that these institutions consisted of living quarters and attached laundry premises and that girls and women lived in these living quarters, not in the laundry premises where they worked.*

*In referring to the girls and women who were admitted to and worked in the Magdalen Laundries and following consultation with them, historical terms, such as “inmate” or “penitent”, as well as some modern terms such as “victim” or “survivor”, were avoided, so as not to cause any offence or distress. Accordingly, the Report uses the collective term “the women who were admitted to the Magdalen Laundries”, throughout, as required by the context.*

*This Chapter also explains some other terms used in the Report, namely “consecrate” and “auxiliary”.*

1. The subject of the Magdalen Laundries is a very sensitive one. Even the terminology used has the potential to result in personal upset to the women and groups concerned, or even to stigmatise. The Committee was very conscious of this sensitivity and gave careful consideration to what terminology should be used in its work in order to avoid any possible hurt or distress.

2. Two terms in particular were critically important - the words used when referring to the relevant institutions; and the words used to refer to the women who were admitted to these institutions.
3. There were a number of general imperatives in the choice of terminology. As set out above, the Committee sought to avoid language which might in any way label, stigmatise or demonise those concerned. And second, the Committee, to preserve its independence, was determined to avoid any terminology which might prejudice its findings or suggest a bias in any particular direction.
4. All of the 10 institutions within the scope of this Report pre-date the foundation of the State, some by a considerable period. A variety of names and titles have been attached to these institutions over that long history. In many cases, their titles altered over time, as the societal context developed and early terminology came, in some cases, to be considered inappropriate. Some, but not all, of the institutions at some point had the word "Magdalen" in their formal titles (e.g. "St Mary Magdalen's"). The institutions, while in operation, were known by terms as varied as "Asylum", "Refuge", "Penitentiary" or, in later decades, "Homes".
5. The Religious Congregations point out that these institutions were in general established as refuges and that the laundry operations attached to the refuges provided their means of financial support. They also state that women who were admitted to the Magdalen Laundries never lived in the laundry premises, but rather in attached living quarters.
6. However the generic term "Magdalen Laundry" has in more recent times come to be used to distinguish these 10 institutions from any of the convents, schools, hospitals or other such institutional and residential laundries which formerly existed throughout Ireland. This term was also used by Government in setting up the Committee.

7. As a result, the terms “Magdalen Laundry” and “Magdalen Laundries” are used throughout this Report when referring collectively to the 10 institutions within the Committee’s mandate. The formal names of individual institutions are used where the Report refers to that particular institution.
8. The language used in relation to the women who were admitted to the Magdalen Laundries has also varied considerably over time. Historic terminology included “penitent” and “inmate” (a term which was historically also used in other institutions such as City and County Homes). During some periods, terms such “child” or “girls” were also used, regardless of the age of the women concerned. And in recent years, some public commentary has referred to these women using terminology such as “victims” or “survivors”.
9. The Committee is aware that the women who were admitted to the Magdalen Laundries find some or all of these historic titles distressing and offensive. It is also the case that some of these women told the Committee that they object to terms which they felt would continue to label them in their current lives, including by referring to them as victim or survivor.
10. To avoid distress to any party and to avoid labelling these women against their wishes, this Report uses the terms “the women admitted to the Magdalen Laundries” and “the women of the Magdalen Laundries” throughout, as required by the context. This terminology is not intended to obscure historically used terms, to convey a sense of voluntary residence to all cases, or indeed to convey any particular meaning other than to identify in a respectful way the women to whom this Report refers.
11. The terms “consecrate” and “auxiliary” are also used in parts of this Report. These terms refer to women who, having entered a Magdalen Laundry, decided to remain there for life. This practice did not apply in all Magdalen Laundries, but in some of the Magdalen Laundries, “consecrates” or “auxiliaries” were given additional responsibilities, including supervision of other women.