

STRATEGY STATEMENT

2016–2018



**Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas**

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission



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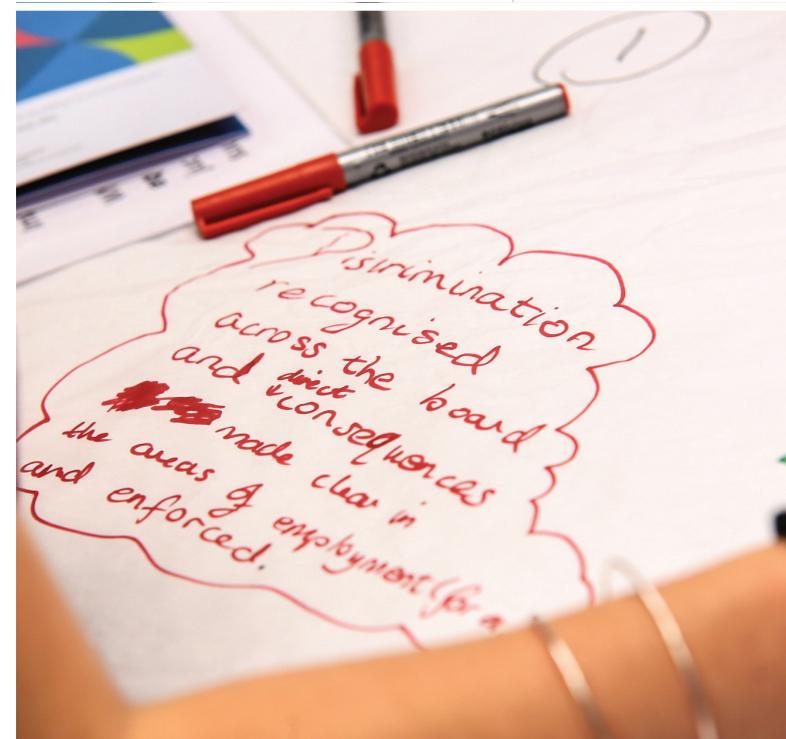
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The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) was established under statute on 1 November 2014 to protect and promote human rights and equality in Ireland, to promote a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding, to promote understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights and equality, and to work towards the elimination of human rights abuses and discrimination.

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FOREWORD



On behalf of the Commission I am delighted to introduce you to the first Strategy Statement of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

The statement is informed by our mandate, set out in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, by the UN Paris Principles which set the international standards for national human rights institutions through consultation with similar institutions, including merged institutions and by the many people who participated in our nationwide public consultation throughout 2015.

In this, our first Strategy Statement, we seek to respect the work undertaken by the two legacy bodies: the Equality Authority and the Irish Human Rights Commission and to build on and advance those efforts.

The legislation that guides our work obliges the Commission to prepare a strategy statement every three years. This plan covers the period 2016 – 2018.

As a Commission, we have agreed five key strategic goals to guide our work over the next three years:

- Leadership
- Pro-active implementation of our legal powers, in particular public duty
- Promoting understanding of the indivisibility of equality and human rights
- Making equality and human rights real
- Intercultural understanding and diversity

“The Commission needs to be the standard-bearer for equality and human rights and that gives a parity of focus to the dual agendas. In order to promote a culture of respect for human rights and equality in Ireland, it must make rights real in a very concrete manner, enumerating and addressing those situations where there is a human rights violation. It must be dynamic, progressive, challenging.”

Quote from public consultation, June 2015

Ultimately, the purpose of this Strategy Statement is to contribute to an inclusive Ireland where human rights and equality are respected, protected and fulfilled for everyone, everywhere.

Emily Logan

Chief Commissioner

[Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission](#)

January 2016



Above from left to right: Chief Commissioner Emily Logan, Teresa Blake SC, Frank Conaty, Heydi Foster-Breslin, Liam Herrick, David Joyce BL, Mark Kelly, Sunniva McDonagh SC, Professor Siobhán Mullally, Dr Mary Murphy, Professor Ray Murphy, Dr Fidèle Mutwarasibo, Orlagh O'Farrell, Betty Purcell and Kieran Rose.

Below: Chief Commissioner and Members of the Commission receiving their seals of office from President Michael D. Higgins at Áras an Uachtaráin.



WHO WE ARE

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is Ireland's national human rights and equality institution.

We are an independent public body that accounts to the Oireachtas, with a mandate established under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 (IHREC Act 2014). The IHREC Act includes and further enhances the functions of the former Irish Human Rights Commission and the former Equality Authority.

Our purpose is to protect and promote human rights and equality in Ireland and build a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding across Irish society.

Our work is determined independently by the fifteen members of the Commission who were appointed by our Head of State, President Michael D. Higgins, in 2014. The diverse membership of the Commission broadly reflects the nature of Irish society.

We work in a variety of ways to protect and promote human rights and equality in Ireland.

The work of the Commission ranges from working at the policy level to review the effectiveness of human rights and equality law, policy and practice in the State and within public bodies, to working with communities and civil society to monitor and report on people's real life experiences of human rights and equality on the ground.

Our legal powers include giving practical help, including legal assistance to help people defend their rights, and contributing to legal cases (amicus curiae) that deal with someone's equality or human rights.

Whether we are addressing individual concerns, engaging with government or public bodies on policy and practice issues or raising awareness with public audiences on human rights and equality, our task is to build a fair and inclusive society that protects and promotes human rights and equality.

Our vision is of an inclusive Ireland where human rights and equality are respected, protected and fulfilled for **everyone, everywhere.**

VISION

An inclusive Ireland where human rights and equality are respected, protected and fulfilled for everyone, everywhere.

MISSION

To build a fair and inclusive society that protects and promotes human rights and equality in Ireland.

MANDATE

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission was established on 1 November 2014, under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. In undertaking its mandate the Commission is obliged by section 10(3) of the Act to exercise its functions with a view to encouraging and supporting the development of a society in which:

A

There is respect for, and protection of, each person's human rights

B

There is respect for the dignity and worth of each person

C

A person's ability to achieve his or her potential is not limited by prejudice, discrimination, neglect or prohibited conduct

D

Each person has a fair and equal opportunity to participate in the economic, political, social or cultural life of the State, and

E

There is mutual respect between persons, including classes of persons¹, based on a shared understanding of the value of diversity within society and on a shared respect for equality and human rights

¹ Section 10(3)(e) of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014

VALUES

Independence	The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is an independent body in the performance of its functions and pursues its mandate with courage, rigour and fairness.
Accountability	The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is fully committed to the values of openness, transparency and accountability to the people and to the Oireachtas.
Participation	We will ensure the highest standards of access and support to rights holders, creating an environment that enables active participation, especially by those least advantaged, in order to empower them to realise their human rights and secure their equality.
Human Rights, Equality and Non-Discrimination	We operate on the basis of the IHREC 2014 Act – the Commission commits to the fundamental principles of equality, non-discrimination and the indivisibility of human rights.
Rights and Standards	We will place Ireland at the leading edge of human rights and equality best practice by applying the highest standards of human rights and equality protection.
Dignity and Respect	As a Commission we will always treat the public, stakeholders, our staff and each other with empathy, dignity and respect in all of our work and interactions.

STRATEGIC GOALS

GOAL 1	GOAL 2	GOAL 3	GOAL 4	GOAL 5
Leadership	Proactive implementation of our legal powers, in particular public duty	Promoting understanding of the indivisibility of equality and human rights	Making equality and human rights real	Intercultural understanding and diversity

GOAL 1 Leadership

By 2019 we will be recognised as an authoritative organisation driving and enabling excellence in human rights and equality. We will be seen as an organisation with a strong values-based culture aligned to an ambitious and courageous approach to human rights and equality.

To deliver this vision we will have in place:

- A proactive and challenging approach, supporting excellence in the protection of human rights and equality in Ireland;
- A strong, authoritative reputation as influencers of real change creating a deeper culture of human rights and equality.

GOAL 2 Pro-active implementation of our legal powers, in particular public duty

By 2019 there will be a measurable change in the practice of key duty bearers due to their awareness of equality and human rights law and best practice.

We will:

- Proactively implement our legal and regulatory powers;
- Effectively monitor equality and human rights compliance in employment and service delivery;
- Ensure robust implementation of human rights and equality standards—in particular CRPD, OPCAT ²;
- Ensure that duty bearers are measurably more aware of their obligations to rights holders and more effectively held to account;
- Employ a strategic approach to use of data analytics and research that drives and supports effective decision-making on issues of human rights and equality.

GOAL 3 Promoting understanding of the indivisibility of equality and human rights

By 2019 the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission will have advanced and built support for a holistic view of human rights with a particular focus on socio-economic rights.

We will deliver:

- A strategy which will engage with and impact on major human rights and equality issues;
- An active evidence-based research strategy that improves and enhances decision making on issues of human rights and equality;
- Human rights and equality proofing of key legislation and budgetary processes;
- Enhanced support for expanded protection measures for socio-economic rights.

² UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT)

GOAL 4 Making equality and human rights real

By 2019 the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission will have achieved strategic progress in critical areas of human rights and equality by fighting discrimination and vindicating rights, especially those of the least advantaged.

We will achieve this by:

- Being proactive in providing support to people and vindicating their rights;
- Promoting best practice and highest standards of human rights and equality education;
- Having a strong collaboration with workers and employer groups to drive equality and human rights;
- Having in place effective working partnerships that empower civil society to advance human rights and equality;
- Promoting the creation of an environment of respect for human rights and equality in Ireland through efficient implementation and monitoring of human rights and equality standards.

GOAL 5 Intercultural understanding and diversity

To promote and contribute to effective, positive intercultural relations in Ireland.

By 2019 the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission will, through a series of positive interventions, have enhanced public recognition of diversity and intercultural relationships as a positive factor in Irish life.

We will achieve this by:

- Delivering and articulating an understanding of interculturalism based on human rights and equality;
- Active engagement with different groups in society;
- Promoting good practice in interculturalism, including by promoting intercultural and inter-faith dialogue;
- Opposing racism and related forms of intolerance;
- Promoting pluralism and acceptance of differences, encouraging a culture of respect for freedom and dignity and understanding of human rights and equality in the State.

MONITORING OUR STRATEGIC OUTCOMES 2016 - 2018

The following will help us monitor the success of these goals across our first strategic cycle.

1

- Increased public confidence in the ability of IHREC to protect and promote human rights and equality in Ireland
- Increased awareness of IHREC and understanding of its core mandate among the general public and other key stakeholders

2

- Increased awareness amongst duty bearers in relation to human rights and equality law and practice
- Increased positive action amongst duty bearers in relation to human rights and equality law and practice
- Human rights and equality law has been further developed or clarified, including progress in the area of treaty ratification

3

- A measured development in public awareness, understanding and support for socio-economic rights
- Recognition of the value of human rights and equality considerations as part of the budgetary process
- Improved human rights and equality data, which contributes to more evidence-based decision making

4

- A measured increase in the understanding of human rights and equality, and how those rights are vindicated, among the general public, including people less advantaged
- Progressive movement in national policy or practice in relation to relevant human rights and equality issues
- Greater knowledge sharing and coordinated impact between stakeholders in the protection and promotion of human rights and equality

5

- A measured increase in public understanding of diversity and interculturalism
- A measured increase in public acceptance of diversity and interculturalism as a positive factor in Irish life
- Progressive movement in national policy in relation to key areas of interculturalism and diversity

PREPARING THIS STRATEGY STATEMENT

Survey

In March 2015, the Commission undertook a national survey with over a thousand people to measure awareness and attitudes towards human rights and equality in the general population as a baseline to inform its work.

The survey addressed levels of awareness and understanding of human rights and equality, attitudes towards human rights and equality, and individuals' knowledge of their rights and of the principal avenues available to them for the protection of their rights. The survey report was published in July 2015, and some of the key findings are as follows:

- Shortly before the referendum in May 2015 to amend the Constitution of Ireland to provide for marriage equality, 41 per cent viewed Ireland as a leader in Europe in matters of human rights and equality for its people; after the referendum this figure increased to 54 per cent.
- A large majority of those polled – 79 per cent – believe Ireland still has more to do when it comes to protecting human rights and equality.
- A total of 96 per cent believe that laws protecting human rights and equality are important in order to create a fairer, more equal society, while 93 per cent care deeply about making Ireland a fairer place in which to live.

Public consultation on the strategy statement

The Commission launched a public consultation on the Strategy Statement in June 2015. 'Have Your Say' was a nationwide public consultation carried out over a five-month period to inform the development of the Commission's first Strategy Statement.

The different strands of the consultation included written submissions, public meetings and outreach activity, aimed at encouraging participation from a diversity of groups and organisations concerned with human rights and equality.

The Commission held a series of eight public consultative meetings, starting in Cork and Waterford, and followed by meetings in Limerick, Galway, Longford, Letterkenny, Sligo and Dublin. A total of 290 people attended these public meetings.

In addition to country-wide meetings, the Commission hosted a stand at the National Ploughing Championships in September 2015, Europe's largest outdoor exhibition which was attended by 281,000 people. The Chief Commissioner and the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, attended on the first day of the exhibition.



Members of the public and civil society were also invited to make written submissions or undertake an online survey. A total of 61 written submissions was received and 58 online survey forms were completed. The public consultation was promoted in national and local print media, on local radio, and through social media.

The Commission wrote to a large number of organisations in civil society, the state sector, the education sector, and the economic and social sectors inviting them to contribute to the consultation process.

The Commission also consulted young people and with individuals and groups who have direct experiences of discrimination and human rights issues, including undocumented migrant workers, methadone service users, older people living in institutional care and the people directly affected by poverty.

As part of the public consultation participants were asked their views on 5 draft goals to guide the Commission's work. They were also asked to identify what changes they would like to see occurring in the human rights and equality landscape, what strategies might be put in place to bring those changes about and what barriers might exist to impede the realisation of those changes.

Our approach to the consultation was informed by the human rights and equality principles of participation and direct engagement. This extensive process provided the Commission with large amounts of rich information that was then processed and analysed using a results-based approach to strategic planning. The analysis was thorough and involved breaking down and organising the feedback in a number of ways such as themes under each of the goals, suggested ideas to achieve change or success (longer term impacts) and strategies to achieve the change (shorter term outputs). The analysis also highlighted barriers or challenges that were identified. The feedback from the public consultation played a significant role in informing the strategic planning process and along with other elements - such as considerations on our legislative mandate and functions, input and expertise of Commission members and staff and feedback from key stakeholders - has informed the first Strategy Statement of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

IHREC Director's Section 42 Declaration



Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act (2014) provides that:

A public body shall, in the performance of its functions have regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate discrimination,
- b) promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and
- c) protect, promote and fulfil the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.

(Section 42(1))

A public body is required to set out in its Strategy Statement, an assessment of the human rights and equality issues it believes to be relevant to the functions and purpose of the body, and the policies, plans and actions in place or proposed to be put in place to address these issues. Public bodies are also required to report to the public on developments and achievements in that regard in their annual reports.

As with any other public body, this duty applies to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. Unlike other public bodies our express statutory mandate is to address equality and human rights. In our case, therefore, this Strategy Statement as a whole presents our assessment of the human rights and equality issues we believe to be relevant to our functions and purpose, and the policies, plans and actions in place or proposed to be put in place to address these issues.

As with any other public sector body, we must also apply a human rights and equality lens to how we implement our functions and how we go about our daily work. We have specific functions, which fall under the categories of legal, policy, research and public engagement work. Key areas include employment and procurement within our internal operations; legal assistance, inquiries and own name proceedings within our legal operations; assistance and reporting within our research operations; information provision and training within our public engagement function; and finally legislative observations and consultation within our policy operations.

Within the exercise of our powers and functions, we will place strong emphasis on the right to fair procedure, the right to privacy, equal access and equal treatment. Within our internal operations, we will ensure that the dignity and welfare of our staff is protected and that

we build a culture of participation and respect; and that in our procurement and hiring practices, we are fair, inclusive and transparent. We commit to recruitment practices which seek to achieve a diverse workforce.

As a new organisation, one of our highest priorities to date has been building a staff and putting in place processes and structures that create a positive and enjoyable working environment. Across the staff, we are implementing a consistent management experience that not only respects the structures of the civil service but also strives to create an environment which will enable staff to flourish. We are consulting with staff on the development of our staff policy handbook and on business planning. We have in operation a Human Rights and Equality Policy Working Group, which represents staff from across the organisation and which assists in the incorporation of human rights and equality principles into everything we do.

Key activities that we plan include conducting equality and human rights impact assessments, exploring and implementing reasonable accommodation and positive action measures, developing guidelines for specific functions and codes of practice. For example, we have carried out an equality and human rights proofing of our employee handbook and in 2016 we are developing policies and practices to ensure that accessibility and reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities are taken into account when carrying out the work of the organisation and engaging with the public and other organisations. We will continue to monitor and report on these activities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sinéad Gibney', written over a horizontal line.

Sinéad Gibney
Director

APPENDIX

Print media titles which published IHREC Public Consultation notice during September / October 2015:

- Irish Independent
- Irish Times
- Irish Examiner
- Evening Echo
- Metro Éireann
- Seachtain
- Corkman
- Waterford News and Star
- Limerick Leader
- Connaught Tribune
- Longford Leader
- Sligo Champion
- Donegal News



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

Public Consultation on the IHREC Strategy Statement 2016-2018

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is developing its first Strategy Statement (2016-2018) which will be informed by a public consultation. During September and October eight public meetings will be held in the following locations:

- Cork - 16 Sept, Millennium Hall, Cork City Council
- Waterford - 17 Sept, Edmund Rice Heritage Centre
- Limerick - 23 Sept, Limerick City & County Council
- Galway - 24 Sept, Centre for Lifecourse & Society, NUIG
- Longford - 29 Sept, The Family Centre, St Mel's Cathedral
- Dublin - 1 Oct, Woodquay Venue, Dublin City Council
- Sligo - 07 Oct, Northside Community Centre, Holborn Hill
- Donegal - 08 Oct, Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny

To register for a public meeting please visit www.ihrec.ie or email rspv@ihrec.ie

HAVE YOUR SAY!

How do you believe human rights and equality can be protected and promoted?

By **EMILY LOGAN**
Chief Commissioner
Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission

This autumn brings an exciting new phase for the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission as we travel throughout the country engaging with a diversity of individuals, groups and organisations in our nationwide public consultation.

Our aim in the coming weeks is to provide people with an opportunity to have a say on the future strategy and work of the Commission. The Commission is holding a series of eight public consultation meetings, including Waterford, Limerick, Galway, Longford, Letterkenny, Sligo and Dublin.

We hosted a stand for the first time at the National Ploughing Championships.

By taking this consultation to regional centres across the country, our aim is to take a pro-active approach, to seek out the views of a wide variety of people as we prepare our first strategy over the coming years. The Commission is asking how you believe human rights and equality can be protected and promoted, and your responses will help inform our



Emily Logan
first Strategic Statement 2016-2018.

We know from a Red C survey conducted earlier this summer by the Commission that Irish people have a strong engagement with human rights and equality. The poll showed that almost everyone cares deeply about making Ireland a fairer place to live. But a majority also believe that more needs to be done to achieve this aim.

There is broad support for the principles of human rights and equality, and for the protection of minorities. For example, a total of 96 per cent believe that no matter who you are or where you come from, you should be treated equally. Half of the respondents, in particular younger people, believe that minority rights are not respected. Just over a quarter of those polled believe

that members of immigrant communities and the Traveller community are respected in Ireland, compared to 51 per cent who believe they are not. We see this consultation as a welcome opportunity to engage with members of the public about the Commission's goals to protect human rights and create a fairer, more equal society.

The Commission was established as an independent statutory authority less than a year ago, in November 2014. Our independence is established by the appointment of the members of the Commission by our head of state, President Michael D Higgins. The Commission is accountable to the Oireachtas for its statutory functions and we aim to build a welcoming organisation that nurtures a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding.

We have five key goals developed in the context of our mandate and functions as set out in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014. Those goals centre on playing a leadership role: the proactive monitoring of and compliance with human rights and equality principles; respecting the interdependence of all rights -- civil, political,

economic, social and cultural; making rights real for everyone, and promoting intercultural understanding.

We are having rewarding engagements with members of the public, community groups, organisations and NGOs at our public meetings. A variety of groups and individuals came together to give their views on how to work towards the elimination of human rights abuses and discrimination.

Our 'Café Dialogue' format for this public consultation is proving popular and positive way for everyone to engage. Similar to a café where friends gather for a cup of coffee, we believe this format encourages participation by everyone so that all voices are heard. But we also recognise that not everyone can attend the meetings. So if you cannot attend any of the regional meetings or meet us at the Ploughing Championships, there is also an opportunity to participate in a written submission or by filling in an online survey, both of which are available on our website www.ihrec.ie

The Letterkenny meeting takes place on Thursday 8 October at the Regional Cultural Centre, 46 Port Road, from 11am to 1pm, with registration from 10.30am.

Radio advertising promoting IHREC Public Consultation was broadcast during September / October 2015 on:

- WLR - Waterford
- Live 95 - Limerick
- Ocean FM - Sligo
- Highland Radio - Donegal
- Cork 96 & 103 - Cork
- Galway Bay - Galway
- Shannonside - Longford

Along with many members of the public, the following organisations made a written submission to the IHREC Public Consultation:

- Age Action
- All Together in Dignity
- Alzheimer Society of Ireland
- Amnesty International
- Atheist Ireland
- Blanchardstown IT
- Centre for Disability Law & Policy NUIG
- Children's Rights Alliance
- Citizens Information Board
- Clare County Council
- Clondalkin Travellers Development Group
- Community Law and Mediation
- Cork Institute of Technology
- Culture of Peace
- Deaf Hear Society
- Donegal Action for Cancer Care
- ESC Rights Initiative
- ESRI
- FLAC
- Focus Ireland
- Human Rights and Older Persons Working Group
- ICTU
- Irish Deaf Society
- Irish Refugee Council
- Irish Traveller Movement
- ISPCC
- Longford Community Resources
- Meas
- Mental Health Reform
- Mid-West Humanists
- Monaghan County Council
- MRCI
- NALA
- National Collective of Community Based Womens Network
- One Family
- Pavee Point
- Pobal
- Royal College of Surgeons
- Shell to Sea
- Sign Language Interpreting Service
- South Dublin Community Platform
- St Anthony's Park Community Development Initiative
- Tallaght Travellers
- The Humanist Association of Ireland
- Trinity College Dublin
- Walk