

Strategy Statement 2016-2018

Plain English version

This document was reworked by the National Adult Literacy Agency to ensure that it conforms to adult literacy and accessibility standards.

The original text is available at:

<http://www.ihrec.ie/news/latest/2016/01/25/launch-of-strategy-statement-2016-2018/>



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

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

Foreword

On behalf of the Commission I am delighted to introduce the first Strategic Plan of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

The plan is based on:

- our mandate, set out in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014;
- the UN Paris Principles which set the international standards for national human rights institutions; and
- the contribution of the many people who took part in our nationwide public consultation throughout 2015.

The plan respects the work undertaken by the two legacy bodies, the Equality Authority and the Irish Human Rights Commission, and seeks to build on and advance their efforts.

The legislation that guides our work says we must prepare a strategic statement every three years. This plan covers the period 2016 to 2018.

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

- promote leadership in human rights and equality;
- pro-actively carry out our legal powers, in particular positive public duty;
- promote understanding of the strong link between equality and human rights, that is, that equality and human rights cannot be watered down;
- make equality and human rights meaningful for people;
- promote 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 strategic plan 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



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Who are we?

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

We are an independent public body with a mandate under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) Act 2014. The IHREC Act includes 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 to build a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding across Irish society.

The Commission has 15 members who were appointed by President Michael D. Higgins in 2014. They broadly reflect the diverse nature of Irish society. The Commission operates independently of the Government.

Our role is to protect and promote human rights and equality and to make sure that institutions and society uphold Irish equality and human rights law. We also make sure that international and European human rights and equality law is put into effect in Ireland.

We work in a variety of ways to protect and promote human rights and equality in Ireland. For example, we review the effectiveness of human rights and equality law, policy and practice in the State and within public bodies. We also work with communities and civil society to monitor and report on people's real-life experiences of human rights and equality.

In addition, we give practical help. This includes legal assistance to help people defend their rights and expert opinions in legal cases dealing with someone's equality or human rights.

We work in partnership with various groups and public bodies to enable change that will improve people's lives and to encourage the development of a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding.

Whether we are addressing individual complaints, engaging with government or public bodies on policy and practice, or raising public awareness of 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.**



Our vision:

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

Our mission:

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

Our mandate:

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission was set up on 1 November 2014, under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. The Act says the Commission must encourage and support the development of a society in which:

- there is respect for, and protection of, everyone's human rights;
- there is respect for everyone's dignity and worth;
- someone's ability to achieve their potential is not limited by prejudice, discrimination, neglect or conduct which is forbidden by law;
- everyone has a fair and equal opportunity to take part in the economic, political, social and cultural life of the State; and
- people and groups respect each other based on a shared understanding of the value of diversity within society and a shared respect for equality and human rights.

Our values:

Independence	We are an independent body and carry out our work with courage, rigour and fairness.
Accountability	We are committed to openness, transparency and accountability to the people and to the Oireachtas.
Participation	We will make sure that everyone has the support and access they need to empower them to take part in society, attain their human rights and secure their equality.
Human Rights, Equality and Non-Discrimination	We are committed to the fundamental principles of equality, non-discrimination and human rights.
Rights and Standards	We will make Ireland a beacon for human rights and equality by applying the highest standards of human rights and equality protection.



Dignity and Respect We will treat the public, stakeholders, our staff and each other with empathy, dignity and respect in our work and interactions.

Strategic Goals



Goal 1: Promote leadership in human rights and equality

By 2019 we will be recognised as the leading authority in Ireland promoting and enabling human rights and equality. We will be seen as an organisation with a strong, values-based culture and an ambitious and courageous approach to human rights and equality.

To achieve this, we will:

- take a proactive and challenging approach to supporting the protection of human rights and equality in Ireland;
- develop a reputation as an influencer of change, creating a deeper culture of human rights and equality.



Goal 2: Pro-actively fulfil our legal powers

By 2019 there will be a measurable change in the way employers, services, organisations, retailers and others carry out their duty in relation to equality and human rights law.

To achieve this, we will:

- fulfil our legal and regulatory powers;
- monitor equality and human rights compliance in employment and service delivery;
- make sure human rights and equality standards are in place, particularly CRPD and OPCAT;
- make sure employers, services, organisations, retailers and others know their obligations in relation to equality and human rights and are held to account;
- use data analytics and research to support effective decision-making on human rights and equality issues.

Goal 3: Promote an understanding of the link between equality and human rights

By 2019 we will have put forward and achieved support for a holistic view of human rights, especially socio-economic rights.

To achieve this, we will:

- develop a strategy which will engage with and affect major human rights and equality issues;
- develop an active evidence-based research strategy that improves decision-making on issues of human rights and equality;
- make sure that legislation and budgetary processes takes account of human rights and equality;
- promote support for expanded protection measures for socio-economic rights.



Goal 4: Make equality and human rights meaningful for people

By 2019 we will have achieved significant progress in critical areas of human rights and equality as a result of fighting discrimination and supporting rights, especially those of the least advantaged.

To achieve this, we will:

- proactively support people and help them achieve their rights;
- promote high standards of human rights and equality education;
- work closely with workers and employer groups to attain equality and human rights;
- develop effective working partnerships that empower civil society to advance human rights and equality;
- promote respect for human rights and equality in Ireland by effectively monitoring and implementing human rights and equality standards.

Goal 5: Promote intercultural understanding and diversity

By 2019 we will have increased public recognition of diversity and intercultural relationships as a positive factor in Irish life.

To achieve this, we will:

- develop and express an understanding of interculturalism based on human rights and equality;
- actively engage with different groups in society;
- promote good practice in interculturalism, including intercultural and inter-faith dialogue;
- oppose racism and related forms of intolerance;
- promote pluralism and acceptance of differences by encouraging a culture of respect for freedom and dignity and an understanding of human rights and equality.



How did we prepare this strategy statement?

1. National survey

In March 2015, we carried out a national survey to measure people's awareness and attitudes towards human rights and equality. We wanted to use this to help inform our work.

The survey looked at:

- levels of awareness and understanding of human rights and equality;
- attitudes towards human rights and equality; and
- people's knowledge of their rights and how to protect them.

The survey report was published in July 2015. Here are some of the main findings.

- Shortly before the referendum in May 2014 to amend the Constitution to provide for marriage equality, four in 10 people (41%) saw Ireland as a European leader in human rights. After the referendum, this increased to more than half (54%).
- Most of those polled (79%) believe Ireland still has work to do when it comes to protecting human rights and equality.
- Nearly everyone (96%) believes that laws protecting human rights are important to create a fairer, more equal society. Almost the same number (93%) care deeply about making Ireland a fairer place in which to live.

2. Public consultation

From June to October 2015 we carried out a **nationwide public consultation** to help us develop our Strategy Statement. This was promoted in national and local newspapers, on local radio, and through social media. The consultation included



written submissions, public meetings and discussions with a wide variety of groups and organisations concerned with human rights and equality.

We held **eight public meetings** in Cork, Waterford, Limerick, Galway, Longford, Letterkenny, Sligo and Dublin. A total of 290 people attended these public meetings. We also hosted a stand at the National Ploughing Championships in September 2015, an event which attracted some 281,000 people. President Michael D. Higgins visited our stand on the first day.

In addition, we invited the public and civil society groups to make **written submissions** or complete an online survey. From this, we received 61 written submissions and 58 online survey forms. We also invited organisations in civil society, the state sector, academia, and the economic and social sectors to contribute to the consultation process.

We **consulted** with young people and those with direct experiences of discrimination and human rights issues, including undocumented migrant workers, methadone service users, older people living in institutional care and people living in poverty.

As part of the public consultation, we asked people about:

- their views on five draft goals which would guide the Commission's work;
- the changes they would like to see in the area of human rights and equality;
- the strategies that might bring about those changes; and
- the barriers that might hamper or prevent those changes taking place.

We have used the feedback from the public consultation together with input from Commission members and staff as the basis for the first Strategic Plan of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

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