

# Strategy Statement 2019–2021



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



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The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission 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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## **OUR FOUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2019 TO 2021**

- 1. Protect the rights of individual persons who face the greatest barriers to justice**
- 2. Influence legislation, policy and practice**
- 3. Engage with key organisations to address discrimination and human rights abuses**
- 4. Raise the quality and broaden the extent of the dialogue on human rights and equality issues**



## FOREWORD

I am very pleased to hereby submit the second Strategy Statement on behalf of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, to the Houses of the Oireachtas, pursuant to section 25 (1) of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014.

The legislation requires the Commission to prepare a Strategy Statement every three years and lay it before both Houses of the Oireachtas.

This second Strategy Statement covers the period 2019 to 2021.

The statement is informed by our statutory mandate, set out in our founding legislation, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, by the UN Paris Principles which set the international standards for national human rights institutions and by standards developed for national equality bodies by the European Commission and Council of Europe.

In preparing this strategy statement, and in accordance with section 25 (3) of the Act, we have consulted with organisations concerned with the promotion or protection of human rights or equality. In addition, we continue to keep abreast of international best practice through regional and international networks with colleagues in similar institutions in other jurisdictions.

As a Commission, we have agreed four strategic priorities over the next three years:

- Protect the rights of individual persons who face the greatest barriers to justice
- Influence legislation, policy and practice
- Engage with key organisations to address discrimination and human rights abuses
- Raise the quality and broaden the extent of the dialogue on human rights and equality issues

We are very appreciative of the participation of the many people interested in the promotion and protection of human rights and equality in Ireland. In publishing this statement, we share our mission to build a just and inclusive society that protects and promotes human rights and equality in Ireland.

**Emily Logan**

*Chief Commissioner*

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

## WHO WE ARE

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

Our work is determined independently by the fifteen members of the Commission who were appointed by our Head of State, President Michael D. Higgins and account directly to the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Our founding legislation, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014 sets out our mandate to protect and promote human rights and equality. In addition, we are required to encourage the development of a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding in the State.

We are supported by the Director and staff of the Commission.

Our work ranges from operating 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 in practice.

Our legal powers include giving practical help, including legal assistance, to give people an understanding of the means by which to vindicate their rights. We also intervene as *amicus curiae* in the Superior Courts in cases relevant to human rights or equality rights.

Whether 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 mission is to build a just and inclusive society that protects and promotes human rights and equality in Ireland.

## MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION



Emily Logan  
Chief Commissioner



Teresa Blake SC



Frank Conaty



Patrick Connolly



Prof. Caroline Fennell



Heydi Foster Breslin



Tony Geoghegan



David Joyce



Salome Mbugua



Sunniva McDonagh SC



Prof. Siobhán Mullally



Prof. Ray Murphy



Dr. Fidèle Mutwarasibo



Colm O' Dwyer SC



Orlagh O' Farrell

## OUR VISION

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

## OUR MISSION

Our mission is to build a just and inclusive society that protects and promotes human rights and equality in Ireland.





## VALUES

Our values define how we approach our work, how we work as a Commission and how we engage with people living in this state. We believe that our values are key to our culture, and critical to our performance as an organisation.

### **Non-Discrimination and Equality**

We commit to supporting people who face the greatest barriers to justice as part of human rights and equality protection for all.

### **Respect**

We build respect and trust by valuing the contribution and initiative of everyone within our organisation and those we work with. Respecting the trust placed in us, we conduct our work to the highest professional standards.

### **Independence**

We value our independence and act, where others cannot always do so, in furtherance of human rights, equality and intercultural understanding. We take action based on the highest quality evidence and robust decision-making.

### **Accountability**

We are fully committed to the values of openness, transparency and accountability to the people and to the Oireachtas.

### **Participation**

We recognise the personal autonomy and self-determination of all rights holders and duty bearers. We are committed to hearing and learning from others' perspectives.

### **Responsive**

We are responsive to opportunities to advance our mission, and we ensure that our governance, resources, and ways of working support this approach.

### **Collaborative**

We collaborate across and beyond the organisation so that we act promptly and effectively.

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: Protect the rights of individual persons who face the greatest barriers to justice**

### **Objectives**

- Ensure through public information campaigns and digital engagement that the rights and equality of individuals and the means to vindicate them are widely understood.
- Provide people facing discrimination and human rights violations with the knowledge, skills and information necessary to vindicate their rights.
- Assist individuals in situations of particular concern to vindicate their rights through our enforcement powers.

### **Outcomes**

- Increased public awareness of rights and equality and an understanding of the means by which to vindicate them.
- Increased engagement with the staff of the Commission from people facing the greatest barriers to justice through Your Rights and other points of access.
- Effective strategic litigation, including through the use of our *amicus curiae* function before the Superior Courts.

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: Influence legislation, policy and practice**

### **Objectives**

- Hold government, public bodies, agencies and businesses to account.
- Continue to develop evidence-based decision-making through an active and ongoing research programme.
- Use our enforcement powers including conducting an inquiry as most appropriate and proportionate, and move to enforcement of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

### **Outcomes**

- Greater impact for our interventions across all functions.
- Increased awareness and enhanced implementation of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.
- Effective compliance with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty through enforcement.

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: Engage with key organisations to address discrimination and human rights abuses**

#### **Objectives**

- Increase community engagement in the work of the Commission.
- Strengthen relationships with civil society and foster an enabling environment for human rights development, including through formal advisory committee structures.
- Engage with any organisation relevant to advancing our mandate and strategic priorities.

#### **Outcomes**

- Civil society, other stakeholders and individuals regard the Commission as open, responsive and respectful.
- The Commission extends the knowledge of our work nationally and enhances the use of our legal assistance powers by members of the public.
- The Commission remains informed and anticipates emerging human rights and equality issues.

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: Raise the quality and broaden the extent of the dialogue on human rights and equality issues**

#### **Objectives**

- Facilitate a strong and shared culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding including through education, particularly of young people.
- Promote an understanding of human rights as inter-related and interdependent, with a particular emphasis on socio-economic rights.
- Anticipate, identify and highlight issues so as to enable the Commission to respond appropriately to human rights and equality issues in the State.

#### **Outcomes**

- Measures of public sentiment demonstrate improvements in understanding of the value of diversity and respect for human rights and equality.
- Positive impact on the perceptions of all people with regards to rights, equality and intercultural understanding.
- Impact positively on the extent and content of public debate to ensure that human rights are respected across all media platforms.

## SECTION 25(2) USE OF RESOURCES

In meeting the requirement of section 25(2) regarding the use of resources, the Commission has resolved to use a significant portion of its budget on pro-actively advancing four aspects of its work.

### ***Promoting access to justice***

Whatever our thematic choices, we are committed to supporting people who face the greatest barriers to justice as part of the human rights and equality protection for all.

### ***Socio-economic rights***

We believe that the adoption and application of economic, social and cultural rights play a fundamental role in the creation of a more just, inclusive and sustainable society.

We commit to advancing socio-economic rights and the social protection of all families and individuals. Among the thematic areas of socio-economic rights, we will prioritise:

- Housing
- Health
- Decent Work<sup>1</sup>

### ***Combatting racism and promoting intercultural understanding***

Countering racism and hate speech is imperative to the building of acceptance of diversity and respect for the dignity of all persons. We commit to playing a leadership role in combatting racism and promoting intercultural understanding.

### ***Disability***

Following the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability, we commit to establishing a Disability Advisory Committee to enhance our role as the independent monitor of the rights of people with disabilities in the State.

## IMPACT

As part of this strategy, we have also set objectives which relate to our impact. These objectives are to:

- Improve our ability to monitor and evaluate our work and its impact.
- Regularly engage with groups and individuals on the progress of our strategy and seek their feedback on the impact of our work and areas in which we can improve.

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<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organisation definition of Decent Work - 2019  
"Involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men."

## SECTION 42 STATEMENT

Section 42(1) 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.

As a public body, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is required to set out in its strategic plan an assessment of the human rights and equality issues it believes to be relevant to its functions and purpose, and the actions it is taking or proposes to take to address those issues.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is unique, in that the protection and promotion of human rights and equality, and the elimination of discrimination, are core to our functions and purpose. Therefore this strategy statement as a whole sets out how the Commission proposes to give effect to that mandate.

However, the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty not only applies to what a public body does, but also how it does it. The Commission has a number of operational functions, including the provision of legal services; the provision of information to the public about their rights; a strategic engagement function, which oversees external communication and engagement with stakeholders, including public bodies; a policy and research function; and a corporate services function, which includes procurement and human resources.

The Commission has undertaken an assessment of the human rights and equality issues it believes are material to the execution of its functions. The Commission has a significant role in engaging with the public, both directly as through our legal service and Your Rights information line, and indirectly through our role in raising public awareness. Progressively increasing the accessibility of our services will be a key priority for the Commission over this strategic cycle, as will positive action to engage minority groups who could benefit from our services. The Commission will also develop a customer charter which reflects our commitment to equality, diversity and the elimination of discrimination, and a complaints mechanism for users of our services which takes this into account.

The Commission will review its consultation processes to ensure that, where consultation is required, our process is consistent, inclusive, and evidence-based. The Commission will also consider where there may

be scope to reflect its Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty in its procurement processes, with due regard to both the scale of the Commission's procurement and its obligation to operate within public procurement rules.

As Ireland's national human rights institution and national equality body, it is important that our organisation is reflective of the diverse society we serve. As a public body, the Commission operates within the rules which govern recruitment, and the employment terms and conditions, of the wider civil and public service. However, the Commission will proactively consider how it can promote and develop greater diversity among our staff body over this strategic cycle.

In considering its obligation to eliminate discrimination, and to protect and promote the human rights and equality of its staff, the Commission has identified three thematic areas of focus. These are the accessibility of our working environment for people with disabilities; a consideration of work practices to take account of issues relating to family status and other equality grounds; and building capacity of management and staff to manage human rights and equality issues in the workplace.

The Commission will commence reporting on actions taken to address the issues identified in this assessment in its 2019 Annual Report. However, the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty is a permanent and ongoing obligation, and the Commission will continue to monitor and report on its activities in this regard.



