

# **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy**

**(Executive Summary in plain English)**

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# Contents

<u>Foreword by the Minister</u> .....	3
<u>Statement by the Secretary General</u> .....	4
<u>About this strategy</u> .....	6
<u>Our ethos and key documents</u> .....	7
<u>Our ethos</u> .....	7
<u>Statement of Strategy 2021 - 2023</u> .....	7
<u>Justice Plan 2021</u> .....	7
<u>Part 1: The case for equality, diversity and inclusion</u> .....	8
<u>Part 2: How we developed this strategy</u> .....	11
<u>Internal consultation</u> .....	11
<u>External engagement</u> .....	11
<u>Part 3: Our EDI ambition – desired outcomes and actions to achieve them</u>	13
<u>Outcome 1 and actions</u> .....	13
<u>Outcome 2 and actions</u> .....	14
<u>Outcome 3 and actions</u> .....	15
<u>Part 4: Putting this strategy in place and monitoring it</u> .....	16

## Foreword by the Minister

Equality, diversity and inclusion is first and foremost a matter of fairness. Everyone has the right to be respected in their place of work and to have equal opportunities to thrive and excel. Working to create this environment is simply the right thing to do. But we also know that equality, diversity and inclusion makes for a more dynamic and innovative workplace, where new ideas and new ways of thinking can flourish.

This is why I am delighted to present the Department's first Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy.

I believe this work on the EDI strategy will be central to our mission of working for a safe, fair and inclusive Ireland.

The COVID-19 pandemic has marked a very challenging time in Ireland and around the world. With our environment changing rapidly, and the needs and expectations of the people we serve becoming more dynamic and complex, equality, diversity and inclusion can be powerful levers to better understand and meet these needs.

Fostering and increasing equality, diversity and inclusion in our organisation is not only the right thing to do, it also improves service delivery. In addition, it ensures properly informed decision-making by benefiting from the talents and lived experiences of people of all backgrounds.

This strategy is the practical expression of our commitment to create a welcoming, inclusive organisation. It will help us to take a planned and systematic approach to realising our EDI ambition ensuring that we also deliver on the statutory commitments embodied in equality and human rights legislation and national strategies. Importantly, this EDI strategy is aligned and integrated with our mission and values.

I would like to thank and commend all those involved in the development of the EDI strategy, particularly the EDI and Public Sector Duty (PSD) Committee who oversaw the work. I would like to thank all internal and external stakeholders who engaged with this process in a range of ways to inform and challenge our thinking and encourage our ambition.

**Helen McEntee T.D.**

**Minister for Justice**



## Statement by the Secretary General



The principles and the practicalities of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are laced through all our work in the Department of Justice so they matter to everyone in our Department. There are human rights standards and legal requirements with which we must comply, but our ambitions, as set out in this – our first EDI strategy – go much further.

We all want to work in a positive and inclusive work environment where our contribution is valued and our personal differences and circumstances are cherished and respected.

One of the main reasons our work has meaning and purpose is because it has so much public impact. How we respond to the needs of the public must be informed by a deep understanding of the diversity of human circumstances and experiences. Achieving, nurturing and valuing a wider diversity in our own workforce will add hugely to our ability to produce more effective policies and services for the public.

Every one of us has a role to play in creating an inclusive culture and making the Department of Justice a truly great place to work. We can all sometimes say things, however inadvertently, that hurt or exclude our colleagues or make them feel different or excluded. We need to talk about this more to build our own understanding - through networks, team meetings, and in one-to-one conversations.

This is an ambitious strategy and invites all of us, at every level of the organisation – from national policy-makers to frontline service providers – to embrace, promote and embed the principles of EDI in our policies and everyday practice. Doing this involves an ongoing commitment, a continuous process of critically reflective practice with the aim of ensuring that all our colleagues and customers feel included, valued and respected.

To this end we have prioritised three areas of focus for strategic impact to:

- achieve better policy outcomes and improve the accessibility and quality of our services;
- support the development of a skilled and diverse workforce;
- create a workplace culture which facilitates, supports and seeks out contributions from all staff.

As an organisation, we are at the start of this journey and I look forward to working with all of you over the next few years to make EDI a consistent and actively lived value and a positive action – within our teams and in how we do all our work.

I am very grateful to everyone who played a part in the development of this strategy. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the invaluable leadership of the EDI and PSD Committee and the courage and commitment of colleagues who participated so openly in the survey and internal focus group, as well as contributions from external partners including non-governmental organisations representing a range of diverse groups who were very generous and honest with their feedback.

Given the wide impact of our work on so many people, we have a real responsibility to lead in this area and there are enormous benefits to be gained from building a sustainable positive culture based on inclusion and human rights. How we implement this strategy will help shape the country we all live in and support our vision of a safe, fair, inclusive Ireland.

**Oonagh McPhillips**

**Secretary General**

## About this strategy

We have set out our Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy in four parts:

**Part 1:** The case for EDI

**Part 2:** How we developed this strategy

**Part 3:** Our EDI Ambition – our three desired outcomes and actions to achieve them

**Part 4:** Putting this strategy in place and monitoring it

## Our ethos and key documents

This Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy is in line with:

- our ethos
- key documents: Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023, and The Justice Plan 2021.

### Our ethos

Our ethos is based on our mission and our values. Our mission is about working for a safe, fair and inclusive Ireland. Our values are to be open, collaborative and professional. Our mission and values underpin this EDI Strategy and we will act in line with them.



### Statement of Strategy 2021 - 2023

Both our Statement of Strategy and this EDI Strategy place equality and diversity at the heart of what we do and how we meet our strategy priorities.

The Statement of Strategy was developed after extensive consultation with bodies and partners across the wider justice sector; other government Departments, the Oireachtas Committee on Justice and several non-governmental organisations. The public made submissions through the Department's website and social media platforms.

### Justice Plan 2021

The Justice Plan 2021 outlines actions to build a justice system that works for everyone. These actions include:

- diversity measures identified under Action 16 of Our Public Service 2020
- the support and monitoring of diversity initiatives in the agencies we govern.

Our ethos and the key documents just described unpin our EDI strategy – a strategy that we will implement in the wider context of EDI.



# Part 1: The case for equality, diversity and inclusion

Our Department is responsible for public policy in respect of the security of the State and public safety.

This includes:

- the prevention and detection of crime;
- the administration of justice;
- the management of immigration and international protection processes;
- the provision of important regulatory services; and
- ongoing reform of civil and criminal law.

Our Department plays a central role in underpinning and sustaining a democratic and just society, and the manner in which we do so reflects our deep commitment to human rights and equality.

**The case for EDI has many aspects. We outline the main ones below.**

## **Our operating context is changing**

In recent years, we have all seen significant societal developments including a more diverse population and changes in how values, beliefs and cultural practices are expressed in relation to family, sexual orientation, disability, age, ethnicity, and gender roles.

We recognise that there are many forms of discrimination. These block people from either reaching their potential or accessing equal opportunities. We also understand that people can be disadvantaged across several areas and that this can lead to multiple discrimination.

In addition, an increasingly important aspect of our organisational culture and values is creating opportunities to listen to the people most affected by our work and working with them to solve problems.

Diversity and inclusion are a way of thinking and an approach to achieving better results. Through them, we gain the perspectives needed to tackle complex issues and to come up with innovative solutions.

Meaningful collaboration gives us valuable insight and leads to better informed and more sustainable outcomes.

The Department recognises that our workforce is diverse and is committed to ensuring that its employees feel safe and free to express their diversity within the workplace.

## **Need for a diverse inclusive workforce**

By openly promoting and demonstrating our commitment to EDI we will attract the top talent we want in our workplace. Providing an inclusive environment will ensure we keep this talent.

A key outcome of EDI is engagement. When our people feel like their voice is heard, they are more likely to feel empowered to perform their best work.

This new EDI strategy will support our core work and both demonstrate our values and help us achieve our strategic goals.



## **Need to promote public trust to further improve the justice system**

The Department is responsible for leading the strategic direction of the criminal justice system with the objective of protecting the public, upholding human rights and procedural fairness, and maintaining public safety, confidence and trust.

There is a strong link between a diverse workforce and inclusive culture, and public trust and confidence in the justice system.

As population diversity increases, support for integration and cohesion becomes even more important. The Department also has a key role to play in fostering integration by involving new communities in our work.

## **Protect people against crime – and support victims**

Protecting communities and supporting victims is at the core of what we do in the Department of Justice. Some crimes have a disproportionate impact on particular groups or communities.

Crimes are also becoming more complex and we increasingly live our lives online. Reports of certain crimes, including domestic abuse and hate crime, have increased in Ireland. International crime is also a growing challenge. Modern slavery, for example, often involves vulnerable victims being trafficked into the country.

It is essential that we understand how best to support all victims and witnesses through the justice process.

## **Reflect the communities we serve**

Some communities have low levels of trust in the justice system. This may be due to uneven representation and sentencing. We will continue working on a whole of Government basis to tackle the root causes which allow criminality to take hold in disadvantaged communities.

It is important that the Department and the justice sector as a whole increasingly reflects all of the communities we serve. As we develop policies and services, we must also keep in mind the wider issues which shape identity, including socioeconomic status.

## **Increase diversity, understanding and performance**

Increased diversity provides us with an opportunity to improve our own performance but also gain a better understanding of the people we serve.

Demand for our immigration services continues to increase, as we work with colleagues across government to respond to global migration challenges. Our move from a paper-based, labour intensive immigration service to an efficient, customer-centred frontline immigration service is challenging but welcome.

## **Widen access to justice**

One of our core goals is widening access, and identifying and removing barriers to the justice system so it meets the needs of the public, society and business.

Widening access to justice means many things. It means:

- that all our citizens can readily access the legal system and services when they need it;
- ensuring that people who need to access justice – for example, through the Family Courts or if they are victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence – feel comfortable engaging with the justice system.
- having a better understanding of how to identify and support people with learning disabilities, autism and mental health issues.
- ensuring that our justice system and the people working within it better represent – and understand – the diversity in Ireland today.

### **Innovation: new perspectives bring new ideas**

Diversity is central to innovation. It brings new and better ways of doing things and improves the efficiency and quality of our services.

Innovation features heavily in our current strategic direction. It underpins our desire to better serve the public across all of our work and services. Even though we have a dedicated team working on our innovation strategy, it is important that we all feel empowered and able to innovate in our own teams.

### **Where does EDI fit in?**

Placing EDI at the centre of how we work will develop our ability to interact with and understand our diverse customers. This in turn will help keep the user at the heart of every service we develop across the justice sector.

Innovation is fundamentally about people – using our creativity, skills and knowledge collectively to develop better ways of working and provide services to better meet the needs of our customers and the public.

Our mandate is to work for a safe, fair and inclusive Ireland. Our commitment to EDI and our values will play a key role in achieving this, even as we focus on sustainability, digital solutions and reducing our carbon footprint, introducing new ways of working and redesigning our services.

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## Part 2: How we developed this strategy

The Department established an Equality Diversity Inclusion (EDI) and Public Sector Duty (PSD) Committee in 2019. The Committee's membership includes senior management representation from across the organisation

In 2020, the EDI and PSD Committee held two workshops to develop draft our desired outcomes. Each outcome statement was underpinned by draft actions which came from an EDI Maturity Model self-assessment exercise. This exercise tested how developed our Department was in terms of continuous improvement. The draft actions also formed the basis for the internal consultation and external engagement process.

### Internal consultation

The internal consultation process on the EDI Strategy included:

#### An online survey

We sent a survey to all Department staff in July 2021 to get their views on:

- the proposed actions – if they thought the actions were the right ones to achieve our desired outcomes, and, if not to explain why;
- how they would prioritise the actions; and
- any gaps they may have noticed.

#### Focus group

The EDI Committee also hosted a focus group for Department staff (21 July 2021) so that staff could give their personal perspectives on, and experiences of, EDI. This opportunity allowed more detailed staff insights that helped shape the strategy.

#### Written submissions

We also gave colleagues the option of providing written submissions directly to the EDI mailbox for staff who could not go to the focus group or who wished to submit additional information or thoughts privately.

### External engagement

#### Discussions with civil society and public sector organisations

We consulted with civil society organisations using two round table discussions on 14 October 2021. Participants came from 14 organisations with an expertise in human rights and equality issues and groups representing the nine protected grounds of equality as well as socio-economic status.

In addition, we held consultations with other public sector organisations.

Participants reviewed each of the three EDI desired outcome statements and gave us feedback on what we were doing well and what else we should do. They also gave feedback on draft actions. The feedback from both internal and external consultations has played a significant role in informing and strengthening the development of our EDI strategy.

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## Part 3: Our EDI ambition – desired outcomes and actions to achieve them

In this part, we list each of the 3 desired outcomes of our EDI ambition, why they are important and the actions needed to achieve them.

### Outcome 1 and actions

#### Outcome and actions

“I feel the EDI strategy is important for all functions in the Department, however, Immigration Service Delivery has a unique responsibility due to the profile of our customers. This responsibility creates the need to have a strategy taking account the requirements of our diverse range of customers. An articulate and inclusive strategy can also highlight the need to focus on our colleagues and team members who may need the support such a strategy will also bring.”

– David Delaney, Chief International Protection Officer, Civil, ISD - International Protection Office

#### What do we want to achieve?

**Better policy outcomes and improved accessibility of all services for our diverse range of service users**

#### Why is this important?

We want to take action on equality and diversity to help us keep the public’s trust and confidence in our ability to shape policies and services that meet the needs of a diverse population. This will enable us to:

- fulfil our mission;
- protect peoples’ human rights and equality; and
- meet our statutory and public sector duty commitments.

#### How will we achieve it?

##### Policy and legislation

1. We will engage with a range of stakeholders to inform the drafting of policy and legislation (including piloting a collaborative process) to design and assess selected policy and legislation.
2. We will assess (audit) the preparation of policy and legislation to take account of their impacts on EDI.

##### Service quality

3. We will identify and implement innovations in how we design and deliver services to improve accessibility for service users.

4. We will follow Universal Design Principles and adopt the Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service to make all our information and communications more accessible. We will also make our information available in multiple languages.

## Outcome 2 and actions

### The importance of the EDI strategy

The EDI Strategy is "...so important as it provides us with greater opportunities to acquire talent from different backgrounds that reflects our society and shows our commitment to providing equal opportunities to all. Having a robust strategy in place helps us build and develop our reputation as an employer of choice enriching our values and supporting our behaviours. Most importantly a robust strategy shows that we recognise and value everyone connected to us. We are such a diverse Department and this is evident from the services we provide which touch so many parts of our communities and society and we should reflect this internally."

– **Head of Human Resources**

### What do we want to achieve?

**A diverse organisation with a skilled workforce that reflects the diversity within our population**

### Why is this important?

We want to be an inclusive employer with a diverse workforce that reflects all of Irish society as this:

- brings many perspectives and ideas to deliver the best outcomes for all people
- stimulates and supports positive staff – service user relationships that in turn contributes to enhanced staff morale and engagement.

### How will we achieve it?

5. We will do a staff census to understand the diversity profile of the Department.
6. We will collaborate with the Public Appointment Service (PAS) and other stakeholders on recruitment and retention initiatives that support our EDI agenda.
7. We will develop and implement internships and mentoring programmes focusing on underrepresented groups.
8. We will embed ED-related training into ongoing training programmes and inductions at all stages of the employee's career - from new starters to senior levels.
9. We will identify and provide specialised training to staff/teams such as access officer, DLO (Disability Liaison Officer), policy, legislation and customer-facing teams.

## Outcome 3 and actions

### Everyone is accountable

“Ultimately every individual in the Department is responsible and accountable for their own behaviour. When it comes down to it we are the system no matter what level we work at. Each one of us has a role to play in achieving a culture of equality diversity and inclusion.”

– **Written submission to EDI mailbox**

### What do we want to achieve?

**A workplace culture that supports and values contributions from all our colleagues and customers and strives to eliminate all forms of discrimination**

### Why is this important?

We recognise the compelling moral and business case for a diverse and inclusive workplace that values human dignity and diversity. Such a workplace creates a better work environment for all staff. It enhances:

- employee satisfaction and well-being
- creativity
- problem-solving abilities
- performance

These attributes makes organisations more resilient, effective and attractive workplaces.

### How will we achieve it?

- 10.** We will appoint EDI champions that are representative of all ages, grades, genders and diversities.
- 11.** We will show our commitment to EDI by living our values (Open, Collaborative, Professional) through our behaviours and challenging contrary behaviours.
- 12.** We will encourage and support staff networks and celebrate EDI-related initiatives and multicultural events.
- 13.** We will promote communication campaigns, championing and telling stories about diversity and inclusion.
- 14.** We will make sure that blended working helps promote a more diverse, flexible and inclusive work place culture.
- 15.** We will take part in networks of expertise to facilitate best practice in EDI within the Department.

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## Part 4: Putting this strategy in place and monitoring it

### A fair work environment

We have set out a vision to create a working environment in which all people are treated fairly and respectfully, have equality of opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the success of our Department.

### Clear agenda, outcomes and 15 priority actions

We want this strategy to become a 'living' document that lays new foundations to progress the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda. This document outlines our three desired outcomes and priority actions to achieve them. In addition, we have put together a detailed statement indicating who is taking a lead on the various actions and expected timelines. You can find this in the [Department of Justice - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy - The Department of Justice](#)

We will integrate the actions into our business plans.

### Guided by our values – and duty

In implementing this Strategy, we will be guided by:

- our values (Open, Collaborative, Professional)
- The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

### Supported by leadership, resources and staff

We will continue to put in place the leadership, infrastructure and resources to achieve the goals set out in this strategy.

However, this strategy alone is not enough. All staff must play their part in making our Department an equal, diverse and inclusive place to work.

### Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

We will monitor EDI actions along with our other organisational goals and strategic priorities. This will make sure there is a consistent review of progress and a process to report on how we are living up to our EDI ambitions.

The Department's EDI and PSD Committee will monitor how we implement this EDI strategy. This will involve setting up a way to engage with colleagues with lived experience to make sure we are living up to our EDI ambitions. There will also be ongoing engagement with relevant external groups and stakeholders.

We will commission an independent evaluation mid-way through implementation of this strategy to make sure we are meeting our commitments.