



An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna
Courts Service

Courts Service Assessment under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014

Public Sector Duty Action Plan 2024 - 2027

All public bodies in Ireland have responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This is a legal obligation, called the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, and it originated in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014. In particular, Section 42 states:

42. (1) a public body shall, in the performance of its functions, have regard to the need to:

1. Eliminate discrimination,
2. Promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and
3. Protect the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.

Section 42 of the Act also sets out three core steps to be taken by public bodies. These are:

1. In preparing strategic plans, public sector bodies must assess and identify the human rights and equality issues that are relevant to their functions. These issues must relate to all of its functions as policy maker, employer and service provider.
2. Public bodies must then identify the policies and practices that they have in place or that they plan to put in place to address these issues.

3. in their annual reports, or equivalent documents, public bodies must report in a manner accessible to the public on their developments and achievement in that regard.

In preparing this Action Plan the Courts Service is mindful of the definition of 'human rights' in S.29 Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 and of the rights, freedoms and equality provisions enshrined in various instruments including:

- The Constitution of Ireland
- The European Convention on Human Rights Act 2003
- The Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014
- The Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015
- The Equal Status Acts 2000 – 2015
- The Disability Act 2005
- The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015
- The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In 2020, the Courts Service formed an internal working group to coordinate our approach. The cross – functional Working Group was created to plan on how the public sector duty can be met by the Service, aiming to ensure that the Human Rights and Equality of all customers, staff and service users are considered and protected in all current processes and actions as well as in any future project planning. The work of this group led to the publication of Courts Service Public Sector Duty Action Plan 2020-2021.

In the meantime, the group has been expanded and evolved into a larger INCLUSION group, which has been established as part of the Courts Service's People and Organisation Strategy. The People and Organisation strategy is a key pillar of the Courts Service's modernisation programme, which has been mandated by the Department of Justice and wider Government.

The Inclusion Group is central to our ongoing efforts to assess and address human rights and equality issues relevant to the functions and purpose of the Courts Service.

To further assist and inform us in our modernisation programme, we established a Civil Society Group, to guide us in the provision of information and services to all courts

users. This group is comprised of a cross section of organisations including organisations who give a voice to those have been discriminated against on the grounds prohibited by the Equal Status Acts.

We continue to be committed to aligning and integrating the Duty with our strategic planning processes. We believe that equality, diversity and inclusion should be central to the culture of the Courts Service and form an integral part of our purpose and values, not just the subject of our planning processes. To that end, we are committed to ensuring that the Courts Service promotes, respects and upholds the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.

We continue to ensure organisational commitment with the senior management and leadership team continuing to work with, and encourage, staff in adhering to and, indeed going beyond, our Duty obligations.

This Public Sector Duty Action Plan covers the years 2024 to 2027 and provides information on the targets we are setting for ourselves over the coming years. The Action Plan is integrated into our annual Business Plans, our Statements of Strategy and progress will continue to be reported in our Annual Reports.

Public Sector Duty – Courts Service Action Plan 2024 to 2027

In relation to the way we treat each other in the Courts Service, we will...			
Action to Support the Duty	KPI	Responsible	Timeline
<p>1. Embed the culture underpinning this Public Sector Duty Action Plan in our culture, as part of the People and Organisation pillar of our Modernisation programme</p> <p>2. Promote awareness within the organisation of our core organisational policies that relate to equality and human rights</p>	<p>Inclusion Group continues to meet weekly to lead implementation of action plan</p> <p>Develop calendar of events to be marked</p> <p>Relevant Policies identified and available to staff through the staff intranet</p>	Inclusion group members	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Q1 2024</p> <p>Q1 2024 and as new policies are developed</p>
<p>3. Continue to support staff through the promotion & implementation of location independent working arrangements where appropriate</p>	<p>Apply the civil service blended work policy to all staff who complete their probation</p> <p>Explore opportunities for extending blended working in roles that traditionally were viewed as being unsuitable for blended working</p>	HR Unit	Ongoing
<p>4. Reflect our commitment to diversity and inclusion in recruitment campaigns.</p>	<p>Ensure all Interviewers on Courts Service interview boards have completed the eLearning training in diversity awareness</p> <p>Recruitment strategy to attract unrepresented groups for example at Ploughing championship</p>	HR Unit	Ongoing

5. Raise awareness and understanding of various forms of disabilities and to create a dialogue regarding meeting the needs of people with disabilities within the workplace	Continue to raise awareness of the role of the Disability Liaison Officer (DLO). – give cultural importance	HR Unit, supported by Inclusion Group	Ongoing
	Develop a recruitment strategy to enable the Courts Service deliver its commitment for 6% of the workforce to be from vulnerable and disabled communities	SMT members in respect of each directorate	Q4 2024
6. Developing a culture in Human Rights, Equality and diversity	Provide training on human rights and equality as part of professional development and as an organisational objective	Collaboration between inclusion group and L&D	Q4 2024
	Include human rights and equality issues in our next communications strategy.	CMU	Q4 2026
	Organise a calendar of events celebrating diversity & human rights, publishing same on the intranet	Inclusion Group	Ongoing

In relation to the services we provide to courts users, we will...

Action to Support the Duty	KPI	Responsible	Timeline
1. Continue to provide foreign language interpretation services to accused persons in criminal matters and extradition	An interpreter is available to every defendant, at each court hearing of substance	Operational Directorates	Ongoing
2. Continue to provide ISL interpretation services in criminal, civil and family law matters	An interpreter is available to every defendant, witness or litigant who identifies in advance of a hearing that they need an interpreter that one will be in attendance at a court hearing	Operational Directorates	Ongoing
3. Ensure that our buildings, courtrooms and court offices are accessible to all court users	Accessibility included in all proposed redevelopment/refurbishment plans for court buildings Accessibility included in the planning and development of new court buildings including the new Family Courts	EMU/ PPP / Inclusion Group	Included as part of architectural planning process

	<p>in line with our guiding principles of the management of the estate</p> <p>Investigate steps required to make 10 courthouses autism friendly spaces, accredited by AsIAm</p>		Q4 2027
4. Building accessibility	<p>Review of physical access, appropriate signage, implementation of pictograms in county town venues and the use of the Irish Language in signage as required under the Official Languages Act</p>	<p>EMU</p> <p>Inclusion Group and operational directorates</p>	<p>By end 2026</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
5. Review communications to the public and court users for accessibility	<p>Apply plain English principles in website and public communications to new static content on courts.ie</p> <p>Implement the provisions of the Official Languages Act 2021 in respect of the use of the Irish language and static text on courts.ie</p> <p>Review Internal signage for accessibility e.g pictogram, braille, audio, etc.</p> <p>Audit new courts.ie website for accessibility, after it is launched</p>	<p>CMU and all Directorates</p> <p>CMU and Superior Courts Operations Directorate</p> <p>EMU</p> <p>Led by ICT, supported by CMU</p>	<p>Ongoing, from Q2 2024</p> <p>Ongoing, from Q2 2024</p> <p>By end 2025</p> <p>Within 18 months of launch</p>
6. Continue roll-out of JAM card initiative	<p>Ongoing implementation of JAM Card including the provision of revision training for existing staff</p> <p>New staff to be briefed in JAM card initiative</p> <p>Court offices and staff engaging with JAM card to participate in update training</p>	<p>All court offices, led by Strategy & Reform Directorate</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>On recruitment, within 6 months</p>
7. Becoming a trauma informed organisation	<p>Continue with the roll-out of learning and development initiatives to continue the Courts Service's journey to becoming a trauma-informed organisation</p>	<p>L&D</p> <p>Strategy & Reform Directorate</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
8. Taking a User-centric service design approach to the rollout of new services	<p>Apply an evidence- based approach to provide to focus on users and improve access to justice for all.</p>	<p>All Reform programmes</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

	Alignment with the Service design principles in government	Strategy & Reform Directorate	
9. Seek to include human rights and equality issues in engagement with user groups	Human rights and equality issues incorporated into user group meetings	All court offices	From Q2 2024
10. Customer services	New customer charters and customer service initiatives have regard to needs of all courts users	Led by Strategy & Reform directorate with input from operational directorates	From Q3 2024
11. Clear accessible information on data protection policies for all court users, recognising the right to privacy as an important human right	Oversee the continued adherence to best practice in data protection	Office of the CEO	Ongoing
12. Domestic Violence support provisions through a human rights and equality lens (duty to provide information on services under DVA 2018)	Ensure that information on support groups is representative of gender spectrum (mensaid and womensaid, Safe Ire, etc) Engage with Cuan to seek opportunities for collaboration	Family Law Workstream, led by Strategy and Reform Directorate	Q4 2025
13. Website accessibility through a human rights and equality lens (in line with web accessibility directive)	Accessibility for users with disabilities, user need based designs Engagement with advocacy groups	Led by ICT directorate with input from operational directorates and Strategy and Reform	Q4 2025

In relation to our modernisation programme and the way we use our resources, we will...

Action to Support the Duty	KPI	Responsible	Timeline
14. Continue to review budgetary and procurement processes and procedures with a view to integrating equality and human rights considerations.	New requests for tender proposals include a requirement by tenderers to advise of social corporate initiatives in their organisations	Corporate Services Directorate	Ongoing
15. Continue to review every new project proposed as part of the Modernisation Programme, to consider the Human Rights and equality impact of the initiative	Each project continues to be assessed for adherence with 9 grounds at Enterprise Change Board	Each project manager and project sponsor for every reform programme	Ongoing