

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Draft Strategic Plan 2019-22

Consultation

Document

About this document

We will publish our new Strategic Plan for the period 2019 to 2022 by April 2019. This will set out our Strategic Goals, our Priority Aims and planned activities, and a timetable. We will review the Plan at least once every three years and consult on our proposals before finalising them. This document is our draft Strategic Plan for consultation and we particularly seek views on:

- the Priority Aims we should prioritise in our next plan, and
- our approach to achieving change.

We will take these views into account in finalising our new Strategic Plan. Please complete [our survey](#) and share your thoughts.

In Scotland, we share our human rights mandate with the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC). We collaborate and work closely with the SHRC in the consideration of any human rights work that we plan to take forward in Scotland, and will consult with them on the proposals set out in this draft Plan. In particular, we would require their agreement to undertake any human rights work on matters devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Our draft Strategic Plan

Our vision

Our purpose is to stand up for freedom, compassion and justice in changing times. We do it by promoting and upholding equality and human rights across England, Scotland and Wales.

Our work is driven by a simple belief; if everyone gets a fair chance in life, we all thrive.

Above all, we're here to ensure that equality and human rights work effectively in Britain to help people live well together, making life safer, happier and more prosperous for all of us.

What we do

As we face a future of faster and deeper change, we believe that human rights and equality are more important than ever. They are principles which have deep roots, built on values we can all recognise – like open-mindedness, respect for human dignity and being fair and decent to one another. And it's our job to put these important principles into effect, so that everyone in the country can make the most of their rights, everyone can be treated fairly, with dignity and respect, and everyone has the chance to lead a fulfilling life.

The relationship between our Strategic Plan and our Business Plans

Our Strategic Plan will identify the high-level Priority Aims we will work towards, together with our intended impact. This, in turn, will shape our annual Business Plans, which will set out the specific changes we seek to make through our work, the activities we will carry out to achieve those changes, and how we will measure our success in a given year.

The focus of our work

Equality and human rights touch almost every aspect of life - a person might experience discrimination or a human rights abuse anywhere from their workplace to their local shop, from their child's school to their GP's surgery. The list of issues that we could work on is long and prioritising these will not be easy, but it is essential. We will therefore have to make difficult decisions about our focus in order to achieve lasting change.

We have a broad range of stakeholders – including businesses, NGOs working on specific equality and human rights issues, and public bodies – and they have told us consistently that they want us to concentrate on a smaller number of issues over the longer-term. We are certain that we can achieve more impact if we do so. This will allow us to take a deeper look at each issue, using the full range of our compliance and enforcement powers to address all the factors that contribute to a particular problem. It will also allow us to devote more resources to each of our Priority Aims.

Within this draft Plan, we identify three overarching Strategic Goals that we believe underpin our vision and purpose, and will guide and shape our work over the coming years. These will form the basis of our work in the period of this Strategic Plan, ensuring that everything we do is focused on bringing about a Great Britain in which everyone gets a fair chance.

Our three Strategic Goals are:

1. To advance the conditions for a more equal and rights-respecting Britain

We want the principles of freedom, compassion and justice to be a reality in Great Britain. Our society can only realise this vision with the right jigsaw pieces in place – strong legal protections, the ability to enforce those protections, an understanding of where people's rights are being breached, a healthy democracy in which privacy and free speech are protected, and good relations between different groups of people.

We are at a crossroads for equality and human rights in Britain. The loss of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is the first big constitutional change emerging from Brexit, and there are crucial questions about how equality and human rights will be best protected in the months and years to come. Legal rights are of little value unless we are able to seek justice when they are breached, but our 'Is Britain Fairer? 2018' report concludes that it has been increasingly difficult to access representation and redress in British courts. We have a unique role to play in overseeing the adequacy

of both the legal framework protecting equality and human rights, and people's ability to take action when they have experienced discrimination or a human rights abuse.

While there is poor evidence on 'what works' to tackle prejudice in Britain, our research suggests that educational settings can help change young people's attitudes. We will focus on increasing our understanding of the best ways to change prejudiced attitudes, and push for more action to do so in the education system, given the impact this could have on people throughout their lives.

Technology is playing an increasingly important role in our lives, with many of our personal and political interactions taking place on social media, and many important services, such as banking, benefits and justice, now delivered online. While access to digital services has improved considerably, including for disabled and older people, it is still the case that one in five of those in these groups do not use the internet. New technology also poses questions about how to protect privacy, freedom of expression and freedom from harm. We are clear that the policy and legal framework will need to keep evolving if it is to address the significant human rights and equality implications of the digital age.

This Strategic Goal will ensure a strong system to protect equality and human rights.

2. To remove the barriers to opportunity, so that people's life chances are transformed

We believe that if everyone gets a fair chance, we all thrive. 'Is Britain Fairer? 2018' makes it clear that as a nation we face a defining moment: across many areas of life there are still too many people who are losing out and who feel forgotten or left behind.

Deepening poverty continues to drive poor outcomes in many areas of life, particularly affecting people's health, education and living standards, so we must take urgent action to prevent disadvantage becoming entrenched for generations to come. But services intended to help people in Britain overcome the impact of socio-economic disadvantage and provide routes out of poverty are not available equally to all.

There are significant barriers to some groups accessing appropriate healthcare, education and housing. Disabled people report a severe shortage of accessible housing, and disabled children are far more likely than non-disabled children to experience school exclusions. Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are more likely to be excluded from school, experience difficulties getting healthcare, and often have low

standards of housing. Across Britain lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people experience discrimination in using health services, with some transgender people in England and Wales unable to access specialist services. There are also concerns that migrants and asylum seekers face barriers to housing and health care.

When public transport is accessible and appropriate, it can allow people to participate in many areas of life. However, efforts in this area, particularly with regard to improving public transport for disabled people, are inconsistent. There are also still problems with the accessibility of infrastructure and information.

There is still significant inequality in the workplace. Disabled people and women are more likely to be in low-pay occupations than others, and there is evidence that sexual harassment and bullying at work are widespread. Insecure employment, with its adverse impact on job quality and living standards, has increased and is particularly likely to affect some groups, including disabled people, specific ethnic minorities and Muslims.

This Strategic Goal will provide support for groups of people facing disadvantage and discrimination in crucial areas of their lives.

3. To protect the rights of people in the most vulnerable situations

People in the most vulnerable situations are particularly exposed to potential human rights abuses, find it difficult to assert their rights in the legal system and lack power in political processes. We will focus on ensuring that the laws, policies and practices affecting them protect their human rights.

Our 'Is Britain Fairer? 2018' review has shown that in England and Wales, conditions in detention settings, including adult prisons and immigration detention, have deteriorated. The UK continues to be the only EU country with no time limit for detaining immigrants.

Sexual and domestic violence is also a growing concern, particularly given the reductions in the availability of specialist support services for domestic abuse survivors in England and Wales.

This Strategic Goal will defend the rights of people who are being failed by the system.

Our Priority Aims

In selecting Priority Aims, we have examined the evidence from our 'Is Britain Fairer? 2018' report, looking at what this tells us are the most significant equality and human rights issues affecting people in Britain, as well as the recommendations of UN human rights bodies. We have also looked at what might become more important in the near future, listening to organisations working on the ground and conducting horizon scanning activities.

We have prioritised issues that we can address most effectively by using our unique range of powers. We have also identified where we can strengthen others' work by contributing our particular expertise. We have assessed where we are most likely to achieve maximum impact. We have analysed the relevance of our Priority Aims to particular protected characteristics, including identifying intersectional disadvantages - for example, disabled women are more likely to experience rape or sexual assault and domestic abuse than non-disabled women.

The Priority Aims we have selected on this basis are reflected in the table in the Annex below. We know that, following the consultation period, we will need to reduce the number of these further if we are to achieve maximum impact in relation to any of them, given the resources available to us. We are therefore asking consultees to assess where and how they think we should focus our resources.

Responding to new developments

This draft Strategic Plan identifies the areas in which we propose to work. However, we must remain agile enough to act quickly in response to the major equality and human rights issues of the day. Without that ability, we could not have responded to the #MeToo movement or the potential impacts of Brexit on our legal framework. Our general principles for this kind of 'reactive' work will be to prioritise:

- new legal cases that are related to the Priority Aims we have specified in this Plan
- emerging themes that demand our response as a national equality and human rights body, such as the Grenfell tragedy, where our unique powers allow us to have an impact and add value to the work of others
- incidents that threaten to undermine the essence of the law and the principles that we stand up for

How we work

We have a unique set of tools to help us achieve our Strategic Goals; from using the existing human rights and equality laws and our legal powers to defend people from unfair or unequal treatment, to changing policy and practice through our specialist research and evidence base, our policy expertise and communications.

We have thought long and hard about how we can best use these tools to have the most impact and achieve our vision of a world where everyone gets a fair chance in life. Translating this vision into our day-to-day operations is a core part of our new Strategic Plan.

We will take a three-pronged approach to achieving change:

- We will use our influencing, compliance and enforcement powers to ensure **those who make decisions** about the laws, policies and practices that affect our everyday lives respect equality and human rights laws and principles. We can supply them with evidence, advice, guidance and support. We can encourage them through targeted communications and our progress reports to the UN. We can use our enforcement powers to require them to take action.
- We will **equip and support individuals** to seek redress when they experience discrimination, or a breach of their human rights. We will supply clear information to help them assert their rights, as well as offering direct support to people bringing cases. We will also support those providing legal advice to individuals, ensuring that they have the knowledge, advice and resources they need to help people in relation to equality and human rights.
- We will support existing oversight mechanisms, **such as regulators, inspectorates or ombudsmen** to incorporate equality and human rights in the standards that they set, in how they assess compliance and how they tackle problems in a particular sector. These bodies have an important role to play in driving change on many of the issues that are important to us because of the access to and influence they have over a sector. They can also advise decision-makers about the laws and policies that govern a sector. By encouraging these organisations to consider equality and human rights in the standards they set for their sector, we can have a far more widespread and longer-term impact.

What we will do differently in this new Strategic Plan period?

Some of what we will do in this Strategic Plan will be what we are already doing but with added focus, and some of it will be new and different. We set out what will be different below:

Using our unique powers

You will see a step change in our compliance and enforcement when we begin to implement our new Strategic Plan in 2019. We have selected Priority Aims that can best be addressed with our unique powers, so we will use these more frequently and devote appropriate resources and leadership to this work. We will take strong, strategic action aimed at achieving maximum impact. For there to be an effective deterrent, it is important that potential perpetrators face a realistic prospect of challenge. With this in mind, we have also identified within our Priority Aims those areas of life where individuals face such serious barriers in accessing justice that our role in standing up for them and in challenging perpetrators is particularly important. We will go out on the ground to hear about their experiences and proactively identify cases to support in order to make those areas of life feel like a regulated space.

Prioritising our work

We will focus on the issues set out in our Priority Aims. We want to prioritise those that act as a gateway to other opportunities (education, transport, technology), issues where there are particular barriers to an individual's ability to seek redress without our support (education, services, social security, transport), and issues which we know are likely to become increasingly important during the life of the Strategic Plan. For example, technology is transforming our lives and so features as a priority, and there is a prevalence of issues related to older and disabled people (transport, technology, housing, work, social security and treatment in institutions) due to our ageing population.

Measuring impact

We are putting impact at the heart of our planning process. In every area of work, we will specify at the outset the impact we propose to have, so that we can more easily be held to account for the achieving this. Our impact model will require us to identify what change we are trying to achieve, what we will do to get there and how we will know if we have been successful.

Working on issues over a longer period

Much of our work is about tackling entrenched inequalities, or longstanding attitudes. We know that fixing these problems will not be quick. Therefore, we have set out in our draft Plan an approach that we think will stand the test of time. While we will review our Plan every three years, we do not envisage significant changes to our Strategic Goals, our approach to achieving change or many of our Priority Aims.

Annex 1: Strategic Goals, Priority Aims and activities

Our consultation asks organisations and individuals to assess where they think we should focus our resources, bearing in mind where our unique powers can have most impact and the need to balance our work across equality and human rights, and to improve life for different protected characteristic groups.

In Scotland, we share our human rights mandate with the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC). We collaborate and work closely with the SHRC in the consideration of any human rights work that that we plan to take forward in Scotland and will consult with them on the Priority Aims set out in this draft Plan. In particular, we would require their agreement to undertake any human rights work on matters devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Below we have indicated the types of activities that we think will be effective in achieving our desired impact. We will develop our strategies further following the consultation.

Strategic Goal 1: To advance the conditions for a more equal and rights-respecting Britain

Priority Aim 1

People are better able to seek redress when they are wronged and people have a fair trial in the criminal justice system

What will we do? An indication of the type of activities we might pursue in relation to this Priority Aim

- Undertake compliance and enforcement activity to challenge rules regulating legal aid, court procedures and whistleblowing that undermine access to justice/accountability.
- Advise parliaments and governments how rules regulating legal aid, courts, whistleblowing and alternative dispute mechanisms (such as complaints services run by ombudsmen) should be changed to facilitate access to justice and accountability.
- Conduct an inquiry to expose disabled people's experiences of the criminal justice system and influencing, compliance and enforcement activity to challenge barriers to justice for disabled people.
- Support those providing advice in relation to areas of law in which there are significant barriers to accessing justice.
- Provide advice and tools to oversight/alternative dispute mechanisms to help them better address equality/human rights in their work.
- Equip and support individuals to seek redress when their rights are breached.

How we will know that our strategy is effective?¹

- Rules governing legal aid, courts, whistleblowing and/or oversight mechanisms more effectively facilitate access to justice.
- Barriers to justice affecting disabled people in the criminal justice system are successfully challenged.
- Oversight/alternative dispute mechanisms incorporate equality and human rights considerations in to the standards that they apply.
- Advice providers are better equipped to advise on cases, and more cases are successfully brought in relation to areas of life in which there is a lack of access to justice.

¹ We will specify impact measures for each activity in our Business Plan.

Priority Aim 2

Ways to tackle prejudice are better understood and good relations are promoted, particularly through the education system

What will we do? An indication of the type of activities we might pursue in relation to this Priority Aim

- Undertake compliance and enforcement activity to influence rules governing admissions and barriers to inclusion.
- Equip and support individuals to seek redress when they experience discrimination in exclusions/admissions/inclusion.
- Influence oversight and standard-setting mechanisms to promote practice in the education system that tackles prejudice, promotes good relations and advances inclusivity.
- Influence the curriculum to promote teaching and a whole-school approach that advance good relations.
- Conduct research to understand what works to tackle prejudice, and disseminate that learning.
- Conduct an inquiry into how available, accessible and effective routes of redress are to university staff and students who experience racial harassment.

How we will know that our strategy is effective?

- Rules governing admissions better promote diverse school populations, and barriers to inclusivity are removed.
- Practice in relation to exclusions/admissions/inclusion improves.
- Bodies setting standards in schools reflect equality and human rights standards in their work.
- The curriculum in schools better promotes good relations between different groups.
- There is a better understanding of how to tackle prejudice.
- Systems allowing students and staff who have experienced harassment to seek redress are enhanced.

Priority Aim 3

New technologies and digital services promote equality and human rights

What will we do? An indication of the type of activities we might pursue in relation to this Priority Aim

- Undertake compliance and enforcement activities to challenge laws, policy and practice in relation to new technologies that undermine human rights.
- Influence oversight and standard-setting mechanisms to incorporate equality and human rights considerations in their standards.
- Undertake compliance and enforcement activities to challenge digital services that create unjustified barriers to participation or undermine human rights.
- Advise providers of public functions on the equality and human rights implications of the proposed digitalisation of services.

How we will know that our strategy is effective?

- Laws, policy and practice regulating new technologies better reflect equality and human rights standards.
- Digital services are designed with a view to promoting the participation of all groups and promoting their equality and human rights.

Strategic Goal 2: To remove the barriers to opportunity, so that people's life chances are transformed

Priority Aim 4

Public transport and the built environment are accessible to disabled and older people so as to support their economic and social inclusion

What will we do? An indication of the type of activities we might pursue in relation to this Priority Aim

- Undertake compliance and enforcement activity where the commissioning, design, and delivery of public transport services and the built environment create barriers to participation.
- Influence laws and policies regulating public transport and the built environment.
- Influence transport and planning oversight and standard setting bodies to tackle barriers.
- Equip and support individuals who have faced barriers to seek redress.

How we will know that our strategy is effective?

- There are improvements to the way in which services and the built environment are designed, commissioned and delivered, so that they better protect and promote equality and human rights.

Priority Aim 5

Access to essential public services is improved for particularly disadvantaged groups

What will we do? An indication of the type of activities we might pursue in relation to this Priority Aim

- Conduct one or more inquiries to identify barriers to these groups' access to services
- Undertake compliance and enforcement activity to challenge barriers.
- Influence laws and policies to ensure that they do not create barriers and/or barriers are removed.
- Influence health, housing and education oversight and standard setting bodies.
- Equip and support individuals to seek redress.

How we will know that our strategy is effective?

- Meaningful/tangible reduction in barriers to Gypsies, Roma and Travellers accessing education, health and appropriate housing.
- Meaningful/tangible reduction in barriers to disabled people accessing appropriate education and housing.
- Meaningful/tangible reduction in barriers to people who have migrated to Britain and asylum seekers accessing appropriate health services and housing.
- Meaningful/tangible reduction in barriers to transgender people accessing appropriate health services.
- The reasons behind disproportionate number of ethnic minorities being detained in the mental health system in England and Wales are understood and addressed.

Priority Aim 6

People in Britain have equal access to the labour market and are treated fairly at work

What will we do? An indication of the type of activities we might pursue in relation to this Priority Aim

- Undertake compliance and enforcement activity to extend employment protections to new ways of working.
- Enforce the gender pay gap reporting requirement.
- Influence laws in relation to reporting on pay gaps.
- Influence introduction and implementation of mandatory duty to protect workers from harassment.
- Support development of mandatory code of practice on preventing/responding to sexual harassment.
- Conduct influencing, compliance and enforcement activity aimed at promoting measures to address barriers to entering the workplace (e.g. caring responsibilities, inflexible roles, unpaid work experience requirements).
- Undertake activity aimed at promoting fairness and diversity in recruitment practices.

How we will know that our strategy is effective?

- The rights of people engaged in new ways of working as the workplace changes are better protected and they are better able to seek redress if their rights are breached.
- Measures are taken to expose and tackle pay gaps.
- Laws and accountability mechanisms are put in place to tackle sexual harassment
- Measures are put in place to address barriers to entering the workplace (e.g. caring responsibilities, inflexible roles, unpaid work experience requirements).
- Measures are put in place to encourage greater diversity through the main routes into work (e.g. apprenticeships).

Priority Aim 7

The social security system is fair and operates without discrimination

What will we do? An indication of the type of activities we might pursue in relation to this Priority Aim

- Undertake compliance and enforcement activity to challenge discriminatory rules and individual decision-making.

How we will know that our strategy is effective?

- Rules governing eligibility for social security and processes for claiming social security that have a discriminatory impact or breach human rights are effectively challenged/changed.
- There is an effective deterrent to discrimination in individual decision-making.

Strategic Goal 3: To protect the rights of people in the most vulnerable situations

Priority Aim 8

Improved rules governing entry into detention and conditions in institutions

What will we do? An indication of the type of activities we might pursue in relation to this Priority Aim

- Undertake compliance and enforcement activity to challenge poor standards and practice.
- Influence standards applied by oversight and standard-setting bodies.
- Influence safeguards in legislation and policy.

How we will know that our strategy is effective?

- Rules governing entry into and conditions (such as use of force, safety, etc.) in institutions (including criminal justice, health and social care, immigration, etc.) reflect equality and human rights standards.

Priority Aim 9

Public bodies with responsibility for addressing violence against women and girls comply with equality and human rights requirements.

What will we do? An indication of the type of activities we might pursue in relation to this Priority Aim

- Conduct an inquiry to examine effectiveness of special support services.
- Undertake compliance and enforcement activities to challenge inappropriate decisions in relation to specialist support services.
- Undertake compliance and enforcement activity in relation to rules and practice that undermine access to justice for those who have experienced violence against women and girls.
- Influence standards applied by oversight and standard-setting bodies.

How we will know that our strategy is effective?

- Provision of appropriate specialist services better reflects needs.
- Rules and practice undermining access to justice (in civil and criminal proceedings) for those who have experienced violence against women and girls are effectively challenged.

Contacts

This publication and related equality and human rights resources are available from [our website](#).

We welcome your views on our draft Strategic Plan. Please complete [our survey](#).

For information on accessing one of our publications in an alternative format, please contact: correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com.

[Keep up to date with our latest news, events and publications by signing up to our e-newsletter.](#)

EASS

For advice, information or guidance on equality, discrimination or human rights issues, please contact the [Equality Advisory and Support Service](#), a free and independent service.

Telephone 0808 800 0082

Textphone 0808 800 0084

Hours 09:00 to 19:00 (Monday to Friday)
10:00 to 14:00 (Saturday)

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