

# Public sector equality and human rights duty

Action plan: January 2023 to December 2025



Human  
Rights

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Action plan 2023 to 2025

**safefood**'s mission is to improve public health and well-being, by promoting food safety and healthy eating on the island of Ireland.

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# 1. Background to the public sector duty

All public bodies in Ireland, including **safefood** have a duty to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans.

Since 2014, the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (also known as the Public Sector Duty) has been part of the legislative framework governing human rights and equality in Ireland. Section 42 (1) of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 states that:

42.1 A public body shall, in the performance of its functions, have regard to the need to:

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

Section 29 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 defines human rights, for the purposes of the Duty, as meaning those rights and freedoms of individuals which are protected by the Irish Constitution, by the European Convention on Human Rights Act 2003 and by provisions in other international treaties which have been given “the force of law” in Ireland. Many of the State’s equality and anti-discrimination protections are derived from EU law including the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights and the EU Equality Directives which underpin Ireland’s equality legislation.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) has a specified role in driving and overseeing compliance with Section 42 (1) of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. They also provide guidance and encourage public bodies in developing specific assessment tools, policies and human rights and equality proofing.

## 2. **safefood**'s origins and function

**safefood** is a North-South Body, responsible for the promotion of food safety and healthy eating on the island of Ireland. It was established in 1999 under the terms of the British-Irish Agreement Act 1999 and the North-South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) Northern Ireland Order 1999. The establishing legislation provides for:

- the promotion of food safety.
- research into food safety.
- the promotion of scientific cooperation and linkages between laboratories, and surveillance of food-borne diseases.
- development of cost-effective facilities for specialised laboratory testing.

There is also a requirement to provide nutritional advice and to provide an independent scientific assessment of the food supply.

Funding is provided by the Oireachtas in the Republic of Ireland and by the Northern Ireland Assembly. Seventy per cent of the funding is provided by the Department of Health (DOH) in the Republic of Ireland, and the balance (thirty per cent) is provided by the Department of Health in Northern Ireland (DOHNI).

The functions of the Body are carried out by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) under the policy direction of the North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC). There is a twelve-member Advisory Board and a twelve-member Advisory Committee (SAC) to assist and advise the CEO in the discharge of **safefood**'s functions. **safefood**'s role is to promote food safety and provide nutritional advice on the island of Ireland in accordance with its legislative remit. This is achieved by building an evidence base of sound and authoritative science which is used to influence policy and to promote behaviour change in the overall interests of improved public health. **safefood** has made it a priority to work in partnership with key stakeholders on the island of Ireland and to utilise innovative approaches to support it in:

- communicating clearly, in a direct and supportive manner.
- promoting a better understanding of food safety, nutrition and healthy eating, and,

- encouraging healthier, safer and sustainable food choices by consumers and those involved in the food chain.

People and the food environment on the island of Ireland are at the centre of both the vision and mission of **safefood** and it uses behaviour change theory and techniques to develop targeted messages to further educate, inform, and motivate people to put food safety and healthy eating at the core of their lifestyle choices. It seeks to systematically use behaviour change techniques, market research and message authentication techniques involving the target audience across the development and evaluation of its work to ensure that it brings relevant, practical, targeted, and timely information to the public. It strives to create messages and develop initiatives that are rooted in the everyday lives of its target audiences and communicate with people in the context of what matters to them regarding food and health.

### 3. **safefood** implementing the duty

The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty places a statutory obligation on public bodies to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of staff and those to whom they provide services, when carrying out their daily work.

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 requires **safefood**, as a public body, having regard to its functions, purpose, size, and resources available to it, to:

1. **Assess** - 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 its functions as policy maker, employer and service provider.
2. **Address** - 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. **Report** - In their annual reports, or equivalent documents, public bodies must report in a manner accessible to the public, on their developments and achievements in that regard.

**safefood** is committed to fulfilling its obligations under Section 42 of the Act by advancing equality and respect for human rights by pursuing a proactive approach to equality and human rights issues in all aspects of its work.

**safefood** recognises that the Equality and Human Rights Public Sector Duty is an ongoing obligation, which must be continually engaged with and is integral to operational and planning processes.

The remainder of this statement sets out safefood's approach to implementing the Duty and an action plan to address human rights and equality issues relevant to its objectives and staff

## A three-step approach

### Assess

Drawing on the available evidence, including the knowledge and experience of its staff and consumers to whom it provides services, **safefood** undertook an assessment to identify key equality and human rights issues which are relevant to its objectives. This included identifying structures and initiatives that are already in place to support human rights and equality.

### Address

**safefood** will put an action plan in place to address the equality and human rights issues identified in the assessment. An appropriate implementation structure will be put in place to drive the implementation of the plan as part of its strategic planning process.

Staff capacity in relation to equality and human rights will be considered and developed in order to ensure staff have the knowledge and training to implement **safefood's** obligations and commitments under Section 42.

### Report

**safefood** will continue to take steps to embed the Duty into all aspects of its work through the implementation of its Public Duty Action Plan 2023-2025. A system to review and monitor progress in relation to implementation of the s action plan will be put in place and progress on implementation of the action plan will be reported on annually.

Public sector equality and human rights duty action plan 2023-2025

	<b>Equality &amp; human rights priority</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Responsibility / timeframe</b>
<b>Employees</b>	Assess and review equality & human rights issues relevant to employment	Assess the equality & human rights issues relevant to the employment function.	Consult on, review and prioritise the equality & human rights issues relevant to employment in <b>safefood</b>	HR - by end of Q2 2023
	Examine current employment processes with respect to compliance with equality & human rights	Review key employment processes and practices with respect to human rights & equality standards	Rolling review of employment policies and procedures to ensure they comply with equality & human rights standards and reflect good practice in protecting human rights, accommodating diversity and promoting equality.	HR - by end of 2025
	Ensure the issues identified are addressed when introducing new or amending existing processes or procedures	Ensure a continuous focus on addressing equality & human rights is embedded in the employment function	Ensure actions to address key equality & human rights issues identified through assessment and review are applied to any new or amended human resources processes or procedures	HR - ongoing throughout period of Plan 2023-2025
	Consultation with staff covered under equal treatment legislation and supporting their participation in implementing key actions in this plan	Ensure the views of diverse workforce are sought to shape our approach to eliminating discrimination, promoting equality and protecting human rights	Participation process with staff.	HR - ongoing throughout period of Plan 2023-2025



	<b>Equality &amp; human rights priority</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Responsibility / timeframe</b>
	Monitor and understand the employee profile of the Body	To ensure workforce is reflective of the population	Use data systems to inform our strategy to ensure our staff reflect a diverse workforce representative of the population	HR - ongoing throughout period of Plan 2023-2025
	Assess and review equality & human rights issues relevant to employment.	Ensure commitment to diversity and inclusion in recruitment campaigns	Conduct research into unconscious bias and how to recognise it and how to avoid it – ensure interviewers are trained in diversity awareness	HR - ongoing throughout period of Plan 2023-2025
<b>Provision of Information Services</b>	Assess and review equality & human rights issues relevant to the Provision of Accessible Information Services	Ensure development in accessible formats of information, both written and web-based, to suit the needs of all equality groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance website accessibility and technology to suit needs of different groups. Ensure website continues to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 Checklist</li> <li>• Publish an Accessibility Statement</li> <li>• On request provide translation of documents into other languages</li> </ul>	Marketing & Communications Directorate – ongoing throughout period of Plan 2023-2025

	<b>Equality &amp; human rights priority</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Responsibility / timeframe</b>
<b>Plans and programmes</b>	Ensure plans and programmes comply with equality and human rights standards	Consider the equality and human rights issues relevant to our particular plans and programmes	Carry out an equality and human rights assessment when drafting or reviewing plans and programmes to ensure they adequately address identified equality and human rights issues	Individual Directorates - ongoing throughout period of Plan 2023-2025