

Section 75 Audit of Inequalities Equality Action Plan 2026 – 2028



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

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Safefood Equality Scheme.

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This document is available on the Safefood website at www.safefood.net and in paper format. The documentation is also available on request in alternative formats where reasonably practicable, such as large print, Braille, audio, disc, and other languages for those whose first language is not English.

If you require the document in an alternative format, please do not hesitate to contact us via the details above.

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1 Introduction

This document presents the outcome of the Audit of Inequalities undertaken by Safefood. The Audit of Inequalities has been used to inform the Section 75 Equality Action Plan 1 January 2026 - 31 December 2028 (referred to as the Equality Action Plan 2026-2028), which follows on from Safefood's Equality Action Plan 1 January 2023- 31 December 2025.

The Audit of Inequalities was conducted during the period November 2025 to January 2026. The purpose of the audit was to identify inequalities that exist for those affected by the functions and policies of Safefood.

Safefood is seeking the views and comments of all interested parties on its Equality Action Plan 2026-2028. Safefood welcomes comments on any aspects of its Equality Action Plan by post, email, phone or in person. Please forward any comments you wish to make on the document to:

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The final agreed Equality Action Plan will be sent to the Equality Commission of Northern Ireland (ECNI).

2 Purpose of the Audit of Inequalities

The Safefood Equality Scheme contains a commitment to carry out an Audit of Inequalities and to review this in line with its Equality Scheme schedules. The current Scheme was approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) on 14 September 2011 and last revised in September 2023

Section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 states that in carrying out functions relating to Northern Ireland, public bodies such as Safefood are required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation
- men and women generally
- persons with a disability and persons without
- persons with dependents and persons without.

Section 75(2) of the Act states that in addition and without prejudice to the obligations above, Safefood is required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group when carrying out its functions in relation to Northern Ireland.

Under these provisions Safefood is required to develop an Equality Scheme. This Scheme is reviewed on a five-year basis and as part of the review and, as recommended by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Safefood should take a systematic approach to examining its functions and how these relate to the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations by undertaking an Audit of Inequalities. The audit can be used by a public authority to inform its work in relation to the Section 75 equality and good relations duties. It can also enable public authorities to assess progress on the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties as it provides baseline information on existing inequalities relevant to a public authority's functions.

As part of this approach, it is recommended that Safefood, where inequalities have been identified, develop action plans to promote equality of opportunity and good relations which are based on the context of their functions, linked to achievable outcomes, and are implemented through the framework of the equality scheme. It is recommended that action plans to promote equality of opportunity and good relations should be informed by an analysis of the inequalities that exist for those Section 75 categories affected by the functions of Safefood.

In preparing the action plans Safefood undertook an audit of inequalities to identify the range of key inequalities which the implementation of Safefood's functions is likely to address, developed action plans based on functions and key inequalities identified, prioritised those actions which should have the most impact on inequalities and developed timescales for implementation of these action plans.

3 Safefood – its origins and functions

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.
- surveillance of food-borne diseases.
- the development of cost-effective facilities for specialised laboratory testing.

There is also a requirement to provide advice of the nutritional aspects of various foods.

Funding is provided by the Oireachtas in Ireland and by the Northern Ireland Assembly. Seventy per cent of the funding is provided by the Department of Health in Ireland (DOHI), 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 Safefood Advisory Committee (SAC) to assist and advise the CEO in the discharge of Safefood's functions. Members of the Advisory Board and the Advisory Committee are appointed by the NSMC. Members of the Advisory Committee include experts with a broad range of professional expertise, experience and backgrounds.

Background to Safefood

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 that 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 best practice, including 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.

Functions that do not apply to Safefood

Safefood is a small public body with headquarters in Cork and does not have employees in Northern Ireland. It is not a health provider, and it does not provide direct services to the public in Northern Ireland. Its primary role is to commission research, disseminate information and promote awareness of food safety and healthy eating throughout the island of Ireland. Therefore, the areas of inequality that have emerged from this audit do not closely match those which traditionally emerge from large health providers in Northern Ireland – i.e., they exclude concerns re employment or direct service provision

4 Equality action plan

An Equality Action plan sets out specific actions undertaken to promote equality and good relations. The last Audit of Inequalities was conducted in late 2022 to formulate the 2023- 2025 Equality Action Plan. This Action plan for the period 2026 - 2028 is available on Safefood's website at <https://safefood.net/equality>

The Equality Action Plan is reviewed by the Senior Management Team quarterly to monitor progress against actions. Safefood also submits an Annual Equality Progress Report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) every year.

In line with the commitment in its Equality Scheme, Safefood is seeking comments from its stakeholders on the Action Plan set out at Appendix A of this document.

Any actions that were not achieved in the previous Equality Action Plan have been carried forward into the Equality Action plan 2026-2028. Other actions that are still applicable in any reporting period, such as training, were still considered to be relevant and have also been carried over into the new action plan.

Some of the key actions delivered as part of the previous action plan are highlighted below:

a. Since 2023 the Safefood website has been regularly updated to meet the guidelines WCAG 2.1, with an action plan put in place to resolve outstanding issues. The Accessibility statement was updated and agreed in a new format required by the new regulations. New guidance was prepared and issued to authors on creating accessible reports.

b. Safefood continues to make information available in alternative formats where possible (braille, audio, large print etc.) including hard copy when requested, including information requested in alternative languages other than English or Irish. It is known from contact with relevant agencies and charities that people want to access information in several formats, and this includes those who have difficulties accessing information because of disabilities.

c. To aide staff in carrying out equality and human rights assessments when drafting or reviewing policies, plans or programmes, Safefood has developed a webinar to provide refresher training to those staff involved in the EQIA Screening of these policies and programmes. This refresher training was delivered to a core group of staff involved in policy screening during February 2024 with further cohorts of staff trained throughout the remainder of 2024-25.

d. Safefood utilises online learning as part of its induction process. Employees during their induction process undertake a series of training modules on equality and disability awareness. As part of this online learning methodology the participants are assessed at the end of each module to measure their learning. Results have shown high levels of assimilation of knowledge by participants who have undertaken these modules over the period 2023-25.

e. In respect of policies, the Recruitment and Selection policy was also reviewed to ensure the needs of disabled applicants are considered. Recruitment documentation is also available in an accessible format to those who require it. Applicants are also made aware at each stage of the recruitment process that reasonable adjustments can be made for those who require it.

f. A Recruitment & Selection training seminar, designed back in late 2022, has been delivered to panel members, both internal and external panel members, in advance of any recruitment exercises completed since 2023. The seminar includes training on how to recognize and avoid unconscious bias in the recruitment process.

g. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) have developed an eLearning module to support and encourage staff in public bodies to understand equality and human rights concepts, principles and legislation, and build a shared understanding of equality and human rights in the public service, supporting better quality of services and a better work environment. HR staff have undertaken this e-learning module as part of refresher training on equality and human rights during 2024-25 and consideration is now being given to incorporating the eLearning module into Safefood's online training as part of its future staff induction process.

5 The Audit of Inequalities – approach and constraints

To inform its Audit of Inequalities Safefood looked at the composition of the workforce from any Section 75 data that was available. Where possible, Safefood used relevant comparators against the limited datasets it had available. Safefood also reviewed internal and external research to help inform the Action Plan 2026-2028.

Gathering of Information

The Audit of Inequalities gathered and analysed information across a range of sources of statistical information, both internal and external, to identify any inequalities that exist for staff, service users and those affected by Safefood's policies. Sources of information included:

- 2025 Healthy Ireland Survey
- Health Survey Northern Ireland: First Results 2024/25
- Health Inequalities Annual Report 2025 (NI)
- Food poverty Government programmes, schemes, and supports
- Childhood obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI)
- Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2025
- Food security in Northern Ireland
- Safefood's Corporate Plan 2026-2028 and 2025 Business Plan
- Internal Reviews, Consultations, Screening Reports and Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments (including eLearning modules, the Community Food Initiatives Programme 2025-2028, Knowledge Networks Programme 2025-2028, Disability Action Plan 2026-2030 and the Safefood Digital Strategy 2022-2024)
- Safefood Staff Equality Monitoring Data
- Safefood Complaints File
- Safefood Section 75 Annual Progress Reports 2023, 2024, 2025

- Northern Ireland Census 2021
- Census of Ireland 2022
- NI Fair Employment Monitoring Report No.34, 2025

Data and key findings/observations were then analysed to identify any existing or potential inequalities. Opportunities to promote equal opportunities and/or good community relations were identified and recorded. Possible solutions or mitigation about any identified inequality were also identified and recorded.

6 Findings of the Audit of Inequalities

Staff monitoring data

The Audit of Inequalities included a review of the limited staff monitoring data undertaken by Safefood. In terms of gender, the male/female ratio of Safefood staff broadly reflects figures regarding the public sector workforces both in Northern Ireland and Ireland. In terms of the age profile of staff within Safefood there were no age-related inequalities identified. As there are no staff employed by Safefood in Northern Ireland the Body does not monitor the community background split of the workforce.

Limitations to the exercise

Safefood only had limited access to Section 75 categories of data from their records for the audit of inequalities exercise. Safefood only holds data on the gender, age and disability of staff members. The lack of data on the other Section 75 categories including religion, race, political opinion, and sexual orientation presents limitations in respect of determining whether a potential inequality exists.

There are publicly available sources which provide useful comparators for the wider Northern Ireland and Ireland populations.

Safefood has considered these limitations and carried them forward in the Equality Action Plan attached at Appendix A.

Current position and challenges for Safefood

Food safety and healthy eating continue to be of increasing national and international importance from a health perspective and underpin Safefood's approach to delivering targeted consumer supports. The current obesity epidemic on the island of Ireland poses a major public health challenge. People make healthier and safer food choices when living in an environment that supports these choices. Responding to these challenges, Safefood will strive to create messages and develop initiatives that are rooted in the everyday lives of our target audiences and communicate with people in the context of what matters to them regarding food and health.

Importance of Nutrition and Food Safety to Health

Obesity is a progressive, chronic, and complex disease affecting people of all ages, genders, race, with or without disabilities and with or without dependants. It is associated with other chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, several types of cancer, pain, and musculoskeletal disorders. Children who have overweight or obesity may also experience social consequences, such as bullying, stigmatization and exclusion. Many factors are involved in the development of obesity, whether in children or adults, including our wider food, physical activity and media environments, social determinants like education and income, as well as genetics. The vast majority of these are outside the control of individuals.

Research into health inequalities in Northern Ireland reveals certain equality groups are more inclined to predominate at the lower socio-economic levels, for example men, people with disabilities, young people, young mothers. Historically, Roman Catholics have been associated with greater social disadvantages than Protestants (for example, unemployment differentials). Whilst there has been a general convergence of employment activity levels between the two groups, other research looking at residential segregation, for example, shows that segregation still exists with different experiences felt by the two communities. There are many factors that increase the risk of falling into poverty, the main risks being childhood factors such as childhood poverty and parental qualifications and family factors such as family breakdown. In addition, disability, labour market factors such as worklessness, personal and parental drug and alcohol addiction, living in rural areas, debt and ethnicity were identified as factors.

Some examples of recent developments were: -

Inequalities in Access to Safe and Healthy Eating on the island of Ireland

Safefood research has shown that the most vulnerable groups, and where there is likely to be inequalities in access to safe and healthy eating, are single parent families, older people, low-income families with teenage children, young people, and people with disabilities. Safefood recognises that these groups are found in all the equality categories and that its communication messages must be inclusive.

Food poverty and safe eating is a reality for many people on the island of Ireland. Examples of how Safefood is working pro-actively to address these equality and access concerns is demonstrated through its Community Food Initiatives (CFIs), the Knowledge Network, the All-island Food Poverty Network and its Partnership Working which bring together NGO, community groups, government agencies and government departments on the island of Ireland.

Food Environment Campaign 2024-2028

A new Food Environment campaign to protect children's health was launched in June 2024 in partnership with the Departments of Health in Ireland and Northern Ireland, the Public Health Agency, the HSE, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the Food Standards Agency. The campaign aims to raise awareness of the unhealthy food environment, how this is harmful to children's health and why it needs to change. Communications continued across 2025 aimed at raising people's awareness of the issue.

Community Food Initiatives (CFIs)

Safefood is immensely proud of its role funding Community Food Initiatives (CFIs) since 2010. By supporting sustainable projects which have a focus on food, it is helping to develop lifelong food skills and influence healthier choices. This local approach can have a lasting impact on the health of children, adults and their wider communities across the island of Ireland. Safefood looks forward to the future work of CFIs and the transformative effect they can have.

Safefood's Community Food Initiatives Programme aims to positively influence the eating habits of families with children in low-income communities by focusing on the skills and knowledge around food and healthy eating, healthier shopping and enhanced cooking skills. All of these are tangible, transferable skills that can benefit an entire community. The CFI model demonstrates how collaborating with communities can influence healthier food choices and learning lifelong skills. Funding of the CFI's has helped over 40,000 people by offering real and practical help in local communities by funding forty-four projects.

The 2022-2024 programme was launched in March 2022. Thirteen leader community food programmes were selected for funding, each based in one of the health regions in Northern Ireland & Ireland. In alignment with these projects Safefood funded up to thirty-nine small projects (27 in Ireland and 12 in Northern Ireland) tailored to meet local needs related to healthy eating and food skills. The aim of the programme was to positively influence the eating habits of families with children in low-income communities.

An event was held in 2024 for the Community Food Initiatives Leaders and others working in the community and food poverty space. At this event contributions were heard from organisations participating in the 2022-2024 Community Food Initiatives programme. The Leaders shared insights into the projects and events they have delivered and the impact of their work in communities across the island of Ireland.

Two videos were launched in March 2025 to promote the impact of Community Food Initiative programme and the call out for applications to funding. The videos were created in Q4 2024 and showed initiatives in action in Galway and Belfast. Boosted on social media and YouTube, to date the videos have had 223,967 views and 338 interactions.

In February 2025, Safefood and SECAD began inviting applications for funding under the Community Food Initiatives Programme 2025-2028 (CFI core programme). The funding notice was shared widely with community networks and food poverty stakeholders. The call for applications closed in March 2025. Two information sessions on the programme and application process were held during this time. 41 applications were received, 29 from Ireland and 12 from Northern Ireland. The applications were evaluated during April 2025. Funding applications for the CFI cross-border partnership and CFI innovate opened in late in 2025.

Knowledge Network

Safefood's unique north/south position promotes cooperation linkages with stakeholders working in the food sector, public health and health promotion to strengthen the integrity of the food chain and improve public health. Members of

the Knowledge Network form a community of over 3600 professionals working in food businesses, environmental health, regulatory agencies, public health, food testing laboratories, research and education. The Knowledge Network aims to form a dynamic and rewarding environment for the exchange of food safety information for mutual benefit of its members. The Knowledge Network membership currently stands at over 3,900 members, whilst the number of Safefood for business users stands at approximately 5,800, of which over 5,000 are currently active.

The Safefood for Business (SFFB) eLearning platform continued to see strong engagement and growth. As of the end of March 2025, the platform hosted a total of approximately 10,250 registered users, with over 9,300 actively using the platform. A new three-year strategy for the Knowledge Network Programme was agreed and began in July 2025.

All-island Food Poverty Network

Food poverty, defined as the inability to access a nutritionally adequate diet, is a significant issue for many people on the island of Ireland. The Network was established in 2009 to provide a co-ordinated and strategic approach to tackling food poverty on the island of Ireland. It supports the development of consensus on related issues, collaboration, and shared learning. The Network is co-chaired by Safefood and The Food Standards Agency, Northern Ireland.

Eighteen organisations are represented on the forum from Government departments and agencies, academia and NGOs. Members meet on a regular basis to share experiences and knowledge to help address the issue of food poverty on the island.

The All-island Food Poverty Network hosted its annual event on 17 September 2024 in Belfast and online. This event explored the current conversation on food poverty on the island of Ireland. Speakers discussed effective ways to talk about food poverty and share interventions creating change in their communities. A total of 101 participants joined online and there were forty-seven in-person attendees. The All-island Food Poverty Network met twice in Q1 of 2025. The Ireland

subgroup met in February 2025, and the NI subgroup met in March 2025, with both subgroups continuing to meet throughout 2025.

Partnership Working

Working in partnership is at the heart of Safefood's role as a North/South body. Whether in our communication campaigns, scientific research or professional networks, our partnership approach brings many positive connections and long-lasting relationships on the island of Ireland.

An innovative partnership between Safefood and the Irish Football Association (IFA) in Northern Ireland called the 'On the Ball' programme used football to encourage children to adopt healthier eating and lifestyle habits. Safefood became the Irish FA's official safe and healthy eating partner back in June 2021. The two organisations came together to deliver a series of football-based programmes and events across Northern Ireland to teach young people the importance of creating healthy eating habits and being physically active from an early age.

The 'On the Ball' programme resumed in schools during September 2024. 800 school pupils were reached prior to the summer break and more during festivals. Social content was captured pre-summer with two Northern Ireland international women's players, speaking about healthy eating and sport. This content was posted on Safefood social media channels during October and November 2024 coinciding with Senior Men's and Women's fixtures to keep the partnership live. UEFA selected Safefood's 'On the Ball' programme to be featured in a new resource to be shared with national soccer associations across Europe in 2025. They also developed the 'Take Care' toolkit which is a comprehensive resource designed to enable national football associations, leagues and clubs to have a positive impact on the lives of young people by integrating these resources into daily football activities. An 8-minute video was produced on the topic of Nutrition for the toolkit, in which Safefood's 'On the Ball' resource was highlighted as an example of positive work being carried out in this area.

'Healthy eating for sport' was a new resource developed in partnership with the GAA. Hardcopies of the resources were provided to the U10s teams in each of

600 GAA healthy clubs in 2024 (for context, there are over 2,200 clubs across the island of Ireland – in 2024 28% of all clubs were involved). Hard copies of the resource were printed and distributed to clubs in Q4 of 2024. The resource pack was also made available digitally on 'Tobar,' the GAA's learning platform and resource hub for all coaches and teams. The resources have been shared with the Public Health Authority (PHA) to be adapted for distribution in partnership with Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby.

In 2023 Safefood launched its new partnership with Special Olympics Ireland called "Health@Play" which used fun interactive games to help teach healthy, lifelong habits to younger athletes and their parents. The "Health@Play" programme was a first as it offered health education through sport to children with intellectual disabilities aged 4-15 years within their community clubs and schools. Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) were agreed for 2024 including the participation of 5 clubs, a reach of 100 athletes and 100 parents. The first information session for prospective parents and coaches took place in April 2024 to encourage sign-ups to the "health@play" programme. Four clubs received training for delivery of the 'Health at Play' programme in April 2024 from locations including Athy, Galway, Waterford and Down with the first club having started delivery in May 2024. A further five groups participated in a 'Health@Play' training session for coaches held in February 2025.

Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty in Ireland

All public bodies in Ireland, including Safefood as a North South Body, have a statutory 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 "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.”

Implementing the Duty means public bodies address human rights and equality issues in a proactive way, rather than waiting until an issue or complaint arises, before addressing it. The Duty has a significant role to play in supporting Safefood to deliver efficient accessible services to citizens and communities, particularly those at risk of inequality and discrimination. It supports a public service-wide approach to equality, human rights, diversity and inclusion. The Duty applies across all functions of the Body and implementing it puts equality and human rights into the mainstream of how Safefood carries out its daily work.

Safefood is committed to fulfilling its obligations under 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. This commitment to the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty compliments seamlessly with Safefood’s fulfilment of its statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments, under Section 75 in Northern Ireland.

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.

In its day-to-day work and particularly in its dealings with stakeholders, Safefood ensures that no member of the public or other stakeholders suffer discrimination in interactions with the Body under any of the protected grounds; gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, disability, age, race, religion and membership of the Traveller community. Safefood extends the same equality of treatment to its staff.

Safefood has developed a Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty Action

Plan as a framework to give ongoing effect to both Section 42(1) and Section 42(2) of the Duty for the period 2023-2025 to address the equality and human rights issues identified in the assessment. This implementation plan sets out: the values that motivate Safefood's concern for equality and human rights and their implications for Safefood priorities and processes; the assessment of equality and human rights issues relevant to the functions and purpose of the Body; actions to enable ongoing implementation of the Duty; how the Address step of the Duty will be implemented in an ongoing manner through an equality and human rights impact assessment as part of the development or review of plans, policies, strategies and programmes, and in a strategic manner through targeted plans, policies and actions that directly address equality and human rights issues; and how the Report step of the Duty will be implemented each year.

Good Relations

Section 75 also requires public bodies to have regard to the desirability to promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion, and racial background. Safefood believes by working towards comprehensive evidence-based research which allows comparison and co-operation across the island of Ireland, as well as working in active co-operation through local initiatives in communities in Northern Ireland, that it is contributing to promoting greater respect between the Protestant and Catholic and ethnic minority populations in Northern Ireland. This co-operative, collaborative approach is a hallmark of how Safefood works. Safefood also believes that it has the potential to improve engagement with all the equality grouping categories and build better relationships with these groups and other key stakeholders. It also provides an opportunity to better foster good relations by focusing on ensuring that information is created to be accessible to all and where it is necessary suitable alternative formats are provided with clear advice on how to access them.

Other qualitative and quantitative data

A review of other relevant internal quantitative and qualitative data was carried out to identify any potential inequalities or opportunities to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. This included discussions with management and

review of previous equality screening templates and equality action plans.

The following were identified as potential areas where opportunities for further actions to promote equality of opportunity and good relations could be taken:

a. Safefood redesigned its website in line with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations that came into effect on 23 September 2018. Safefood has consistently responded to requests for alternative communications within the agreed timescales. Given the overall low number of requests, the measures from the previous Action Plan have been carried over with view to improving access to information for service users with alternative communication needs.

b. Maintaining the accessibility of documents on the website is an ongoing process and requires staff to have training on accessibility. Safefood has prioritised the documents that need to be made accessible for public use and continues to work on making all documents on the website accessible.

c. The Safefood Disability Action Plan (DAP) has also been revised and updated for the period 2026-2030 and was issued for consultation in November 2025.

d. Actions have been included for the subsequent review of Safefood's Equality Scheme and Audit of Inequalities to align these with the corporate planning cycle. It is envisioned that the next review of the Scheme due for 2028 can be completed alongside the next Audit of Inequalities exercise.

e. Given the lack of pertinent Section 75 category data available to Safefood, the action plan includes an action to undertake a scoping exercise to identify the possibility of gathering Section 75 datasets for the Safefood workforce and service users for future exercises.

Conclusion and Section 75 Action Plan

Safefood, in partnership with others, has a major role in communicating to influence change in order to achieve its aim of protecting and improving public health and wellbeing on the island of Ireland. The Equality Commission Northern

Ireland recommends that public authorities should review and update action plans over the lifetime of their equality scheme to ensure that they remain effective and relevant to their functions and work, and that effective monitoring should be considered at all stages of the implementation of action plans to allow for measurement and reporting of progress on their delivery. Reviewing the previous Audit of Inequalities, Section 75 Action Plans, Corporate strategies, business plans and key research has given Safefood a solid base to reflect and continue to build on its work as it affects the equality groups in the categories covered by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

7 Action plan

(NB: This Action Plan does not form part of the approved Equality Scheme. It is a 'living' document and can be added to as other inequalities are identified by Safefood. The review of the audit of inequalities on which the plan is based is thus an ongoing measure).

Safefood's over-arching aim is to influence and change consumer behaviour in relation to food safety and healthy eating on the island of Ireland. Our mission is:

**TO IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELL-BEING, BY
PROMOTING FOOD SAFETY AND HEALTHY EATING
ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND.**

Safefood has promoted food safety and healthy eating on the island of Ireland in accordance with its legislative remit since December 1999. We have made it a priority to communicate positively in a direct and clear manner to move consumers and those involved in the food chain towards a better understanding of food safety, nutrition and healthy eating and always supported by sound and authoritative science. Our goal is to influence behaviour in the overall interests of improved public health.

The consumer on the island of Ireland is at the centre of both our vision and mission and will continue to be so over the period of this Section 75 Action Plan. Safefood will build on our targeted and widely acclaimed consumer messages to further educate, inform, and motivate the consumer to put food safety and healthy eating at the centre stage of their lifestyle choices.

Safefood is conscious of the fact that economic, social, and cultural factors continue to change over time, influencing consumer concerns and their perceptions of food. The food industry continues to grow globally, and from time to time, there may be outbreaks of food-borne illness or incidents that will further alter consumer perceptions and occasionally dent confidence. We will continue to monitor these concerns and will utilise our resources to appropriately inform and, where necessary, reassure consumers so that they may continue to make healthy

and safe food choices.

Safefood is aware of the wider public health context in which we operate, and we will continue to work in partnership with Governments and professional partners across the island of Ireland to inform consumers of positive lifestyle choices to improve their health, particularly nutritional advice, and good food safety practice. We will continue to challenge obesity, to which the population of the island of Ireland in common with other western cultures is prone, to reduce risk of stroke, heart disease, diabetes and cancers. Our education initiatives will target the child, the parent and the teacher and our communication programmes will continue their aim to place the longer-term interests of the public at the forefront.

Safefood will continually evaluate our programmes to assess their impact and ensure that the most relevant and practical research supports our communication. We will conduct this research ourselves where we feel it supports a need, including targeting research to better understand consumer behaviour and psychology as well as to enhance the food safety capacity of the food chain. This will enable us to plan our communication programmes effectively to achieve positive outcomes for people.

Safefood is committed through all its actions to achieving an outcome where the eating practices of people in Northern Ireland and Ireland are safe and healthy. The overall aim of the action measures listed in the Northern Ireland s75 Action Plan is that they will contribute to this outcome.

In seeking to influence behavioural change for all, Safefood focuses on where it is most needed - specifically amongst the groups mentioned above. Evaluation of all projects and campaigns is on-going to ensure they are effective, reach disadvantaged groups and are inclusive. Safefood believes that its programmes and campaigns will only be successful if we consult with all relevant stakeholders on a constant basis and is currently developing a stakeholder strategy to consolidate and enhance our goals. As an element of our stakeholder engagement, we will engage with advisory groups in the areas of concern with a view to developing our campaigns in a targeted and focussed fashion for maximum impact.

Through the Audit of Inequalities, Safefood will continue to be conscious of those in or at risk of food poverty and will have a targeted programme of interventions specifically aimed to support and improve the overall health of people. We recognise that we need to communicate on an equal and inclusive platform so that socially disadvantaged groups can become involved. Our role is to communicate. Through our research and our evaluation of campaigns, we have recognised certain groups in society as being less able to access our messages. At times, we will specifically target these groups who are either disadvantaged or because of lifestyle or situational factors are less able to make informed and empowered choices.

Safefood has at its core an aim to communicate and empower. This is mainstreamed through the Corporate Plan 2023-2028. This document outlines the role that Safefood will have in empowering consumers to make the necessary improvements to their choices and behaviour. Its core values of dignity and respect inform our Action Plan herein.

The Safefood Action Plan 2026-2028 is set out at Appendix A. It has been developed using the findings set out at section 6 above. Taking into consideration the lack of available Section 75 datasets available as noted in this report, the focus of the action plan is on continuing to improve access to Safefood and its services via communications, as well as continuing to promote equality of opportunity, good relations and to fulfil Section 75 obligations. The actions from the 2023-2025 Action Plan that were not fully completed or still relevant have been carried forward into the Equality Action Plan 2026-2028.

The actions in respect of staff training, the audit of inequalities and review of the Equality Scheme are relevant to both equality duties under Section 75 (1) and (2).

Responsibility for the delivery of the action plan lies with the Senior Management Team.

8 Monitoring and review process

The Equality Action Plan 2026-2028 will be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Senior Management Team. The Senior Management Team will review the progress in implementing the agreed actions and will also consider any developments and the need for additional actions or monitoring data in the intervening period.

Safefood reports quarterly on its progress in implementing its Corporate Plan including the equality objectives.

In addition, Safefood will prepare an annual report on progress made over the previous year. This report will form part of the Annual Review of Progress on Section 75 implementation which is sent to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

The collation of information on progress will allow for regular and ongoing review of the action plan to ensure that it remains effective and relevant to Safefood's functions. Any significant changes or amendments to the action plan will be reported to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI).

Equality Action Plan 1 January 2026 – 31 December 2028

Appendix A

Identified Inequality/ Equality Area	Objective / Intended Impact	Actions	Performance Indicator	Responsibility and Timescale
Staff / Advisory Board Members	To improve staff awareness and skills of equality related issues Members of recruitment and selection panels have an awareness and understanding of the key equality related issues	Deliver Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training to all new and existing staff and Advisory Board members A bespoke Recruitment & Selection training webinar on equality delivered to panel members in advance of selection / interview process	100% of new and existing staff and Advisory Board members receive Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training. 100% of panel members involved in recruitment and selection receive equality training (HR maintains a database of suitably trained panel members)	Director Corporate Operations New staff – within 1 month of taking up post Existing staff – annually Advisory Board – within 3 months of taking up appointment
Staff / Advisory Board Members	To improve the skills of staff involved in screening policies for equality	Deliver training to policy owners and other staff who are responsible for screening policies	Number of policies screened in line with ECNI guidance	Director Corporate Operations Annually
Staff / Advisory Board Members	Ensure key equality issues identified through assessment and review are applied to any new or amended human resources policies	Rolling review of employment policies to ensure they comply with equality standards and reflect good practice in protecting human rights, accommodating diversity and promoting equality	Number of employment policies developed and/or reviewed that are compliant with equality and human rights standards/legislation	Director Corporate Operations Ongoing throughout period of Plan 2026-2028
Staff / Advisory Board Members	To increase emotional health and well-being awareness among staff	Provide advice and support to staff and Board members on well-being and promote well-being initiatives e.g. the Employee Assistance Programme	Well-being Programme and awareness of well-being issues enhanced within Safefood	Director Corporate Operations Annually

Identified Inequality/ Equality Area	Objective / Intended Impact	Actions	Performance Indicator	Responsibility and Timescale
<p>Provision of accessible information services including potential barriers to service users with alternative communication needs</p>	<p>Access to information improved for service users to ensure that information, both written and web-based, is accessible for all users including those with a disability</p>	<p>Assess and review equality issues relevant to the Provision of Accessible Information Services</p> <p>On request provide translation of documents into other languages.</p> <p>Alternative formats of key documents provided upon request to include easy-read, braille, large print and audio</p> <p>Website accessibility and technology enhanced to suit needs of different groups. Ensure website continues to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 Checklist (CCAG 2.1).</p>	<p>Number of requests received and successfully provided for information in an alternative/accessible format</p> <p>100% of requests received for key documents in alternative formats will be provided within 2-3 weeks</p> <p>Website continues to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 Checklist (WCAG 2.1) and compliance with other Public Guidelines.</p> <p>Website complies with the Public Sector Bodies (Website & Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018</p> <p>Number/% of accessible documents on website</p>	<p>Director Communications</p> <p>Ongoing throughout period of Action Plan 2026-2028</p>

Identified Inequality/ Equality Area	Objective / Intended Impact	Actions	Performance Indicator	Responsibility and Timescale
People with Disabilities	All Safefood events meet the accessibility needs of disabled people	When organizing events ensure that Safefood co-ordinated events are accessible for disabled people. Ensure event locations have disability access with venue rooms being accessible. Presentations and event literature to be made available in alternative formats upon request such as easy-read, braille, large print and audio. Signage at events to be visible and clear with venues to have suitable parking/public transport access. Consider the use of registered interpreters where appropriate at large-scale events.	100% of event locations have disability access with venue rooms being accessible. Presentations and event literature to be made available in alternative formats upon request such as easy-read, braille, large print and audio. Signage at events to be visible and clear with venues to have suitable parking/public transport access.	Director Communications Ongoing throughout period of Action Plan 2026-2028
People with Disabilities	Help to promote a positive image of disabled people and make promotional material more inclusive	Relevant articles, case studies and images of disabled people to be included in promotional material where appropriate. Aim to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people by improving the representation of disabled people on Safefood’s website and in publications.	Number of articles, case studies and images of disabled people included in promotional material	Director Communications Ongoing throughout period of Action Plan 2026-2028

Identified Inequality/ Equality Area	Objective / Intended Impact	Actions	Performance Indicator	Responsibility and Timescale
Safefood Programmes	Equality and human rights issues relevant to our programmes are fully considered to inform the development and implementation of these programmes	Carry out an equality and human rights assessment when drafting, reviewing and evaluating programmes to ensure they adequately address identified equality and human rights issues	Number of Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments carried out on Safefood Programmes	Individual Directorates ongoing throughout period of Action Plan 2023-2025
Working / Office Environment	Meet, where appropriate, reasonable work adjustments to allow disabled staff to fully participate in employment	Provide ongoing advice and support to staff in relation to reasonable work adjustment requirements	Record the number of reasonable work adjustment requests made by staff and any adjustments made to meet these requests	Director Corporate Operations Ongoing throughout period of Plan 2026-2028
Policy - Monitoring & Review	Access better quality section 75 data for making better informed decisions / actions on equality related matters	To scope how Safefood can gather s75 equality related data for both Safefood staff and service users. To identify or monitor any inequalities that may exist for our staff or service users and make better informed actions for equality related matters	Improved access to s75 data to help inform next Audit of Inequalities Exercise in late 2028	Director Corporate Operations By late 2028



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Eastgate, Little Island,
Co. Cork, T45 RX01

Safefood, Ascaill an Gheata
Thoir, An tOilean Beag,
Co. Chorcaí, T45 RX01

Safefood, Aistiyett Avenue,
Aistiyett, Wee Isle,
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