



**Equality and
Human Rights
Commission**

Strategic plan 2022–25



equalityhumanrights.com

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Strategic plan 2022–25

Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 4(4) of the Equality Act 2006.

Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed on 29 March 2022



© Crown copyright 2022

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit **nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3**.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at **www.gov.uk/official-documents**.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at **correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com**

ISBN 978-1-5286-3240-9

E02728491 03/22

Printed on paper containing 75% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Contents

Foreword	4
1 Our vision and purpose	7
2 The challenges to fairness facing post-COVID Britain	14
3 Working for all of society, as the regulator of equality and human rights	16
4 Building our organisation	28
Contacts	31

Foreword

from our Chairwoman

I am delighted to introduce this new strategy for the Equality and Human Rights Commission for the period from 2022 to 2025.

I am grateful to the hundreds of individuals and organisations who contributed thoughtfully when we consulted on the strategy in draft last year.

Our new priorities have been informed by their views, by our assessment of data and evidence, by an understanding of the equality and human rights challenges facing Britain as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, and by an analysis of how our statutory powers can have most impact to promote equality and human rights and enforce the law.

Our goal, through this strategy, is to focus our resources where we can make a real, lasting, positive difference to the lives of individuals across Britain.

Of our new strategic priorities, some, such as improving equality in the workplace, build on our longstanding expertise and active role enforcing equality rights. In other areas, such as our focus on digital services and artificial intelligence, we intend to intervene authoritatively to ensure that people's rights are protected online as much as they must be in real life.

We will deploy our powers to root out and tackle unlawful discrimination, improve equality outcomes, and protect and promote human rights. And we will retain capacity to respond effectively to any new challenges that emerge over the period, whether they result from global issues such as climate change, or from new events, concerns or policies that emerge within the three countries of Britain where our remit extends.

Central to our strategy is for the Equality and Human Rights Commission to be widely respected as an independent, authoritative, agile regulator of equality and human rights that has demonstrable impact across Britain.

Regulators must sometimes make difficult decisions, and the organisations we regulate, including the UK and devolved governments, may not always agree with us. When we do so, we will be rigorously impartial, with our decisions rooted in data, evidence, and an expert understanding of the law. We will communicate our positions actively to all our stakeholders, so that we can continue to promote equality and human rights and foster good relations between groups.

I look forward to working with you, and all our partners across Britain, as we deliver the priorities described in these pages.

Baroness Kishwer Falkner,
Chairwoman



1. Our vision and purpose

Our vision

A society built on the foundations of equality and human rights, **improving everyone's lives** and helping people in Britain to live well together

Our purpose

To promote and uphold equality and human rights laws and standards **so that everyone gets a fair chance in life**

How we work

In everything we do, we pride ourselves on being **independent, authoritative and agile**

Our vision

Our vision is for a society built on the foundations of equality and human rights, improving everyone's lives and helping people in Britain to live well together. These foundations are fairness, equality of opportunity, dignity and respect.

Our purpose

To promote and uphold equality and human rights laws and standards so that everyone gets a fair chance in life.

How we work

We uphold people's rights without fear or favour.

Regulation is about preventing and challenging unlawful acts and enabling sectors and organisations to understand and meet their legal duties.

We use the whole range of our regulatory tools to do this, choosing the right tool for the job.

In everything we do, we pride ourselves on being independent, authoritative and agile. Our independence is protected in law. But that does not mean that we act alone. We work with employers, governments, regulators, charities and a wide range of other organisations, to promote understanding of equality and human rights and compliance with the law. We support them to improve their practice too.

We identify injustice and inequality, and we influence progress by sharing our evidence, insights and expertise. We encourage innovation and change to improve all areas of people's lives.

Our work is relevant to every part of, and every person in, Britain.

How we regulate

Our regulatory model describes how we use our powers and statutory functions, including as a National Human Rights Institution, to improve equality and human rights and enforce the law. This model helps us to plan our work, and identify and measure the impact we achieve.

Our tools, powers and functions include:

- Using data and evidence to understand equality and human rights problems, including through inquiries and research.
 - Influencing decision-makers to ensure that laws and policies promote equality and meet human rights standards.
 - Bringing individuals and groups together to foster good relations and better understanding between them.
 - Intervening in legal cases to make the law clearer or set legal precedents.
 - Providing information, advice and guidance to improve compliance with the law. We also do this so that people understand their rights and know what to do if they are breached.
- Sharing good practice and learning so that all organisations can follow the law and eliminate unlawful discrimination.
 - Enforcing legal duties on public bodies to consider equality issues in all their work and services to the public. And enforcing legal duties on all large employers to report the pay gap between men and women.
 - Working in partnership with other regulators and expert organisations to understand barriers and develop solutions. We do this to promote and ensure compliance with equality and human rights laws in every sector.
 - Taking strong enforcement action to stop breaches of the law. This can include taking organisations to court to challenge discrimination and breaches of human rights.

Our regulatory model



Prevention

We provide evidence and advice early on so that action can be taken to prevent more serious issues developing.



Remedial action

When problems occur we work to change behaviours and take legal action if needed.

			
Evidencing the issues	Influencing standard setting	Ensuring compliance with standards	Enforcing the law
We inform the decisions and actions of governments, parliaments and others by providing data and evidence on equality and human rights.	We advise governments, regulators and others on how to improve systems and processes to promote equality and human rights through regulatory frameworks and standards.	We provide information, guidance and advice to support organisations to meet their duties under equality and human rights law. We help individuals to understand their rights.	We take action against organisations that break equality and human rights law. We hold them to account, secure justice for people whose rights have been breached, and aim to bring about wider compliance with the law.

Our legal duties

We are Britain's national equality body and a United Nations accredited 'A status' National Human Rights Institution. Our role, duties and powers are defined in the Equality Act 2006.

We advise governments on the effectiveness of equality and human rights laws. We also measure and report on progress towards equality and human rights outcomes over time.

We enforce the Equality Act 2010, which makes it unlawful to discriminate against or harass individuals based on the following protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

As a National Human Rights Institution, we promote awareness, understanding and protection of human rights, encouraging public bodies to follow the Human Rights Act. We protect those most at risk of human rights abuses and monitor human rights, reporting our findings to the UK Government and the United Nations.

Our powers

As a regulator, we have a range of powers that allow us to fulfil our duties.

We provide expert advice on equality and human rights to those who make policies and laws. We carry out research to improve understanding of particular issues and assess the effectiveness of work to progress equality and human rights. We also report to Parliament on progress made towards equality and human rights outcomes.

We help organisations to behave in line with the law and can give them advice and guidance. But we are also ready to hold them to account and take enforcement action if they fall short. We also conduct inquiries to uncover barriers to progress and make recommendations for improvement.

Our legal powers include:

- conducting investigations to find out whether an organisation has breached the Equality Act 2010, and then making legally binding recommendations
- entering into legal agreements with organisations on the actions they need to take, and
- assessing whether organisations are meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty and issuing compliance notices if they are not.

We can also provide legal support, including financial assistance, to victims of discrimination and we can intervene in legal cases or take our own legal action through the courts. We do this if we think it is the most effective way to enforce the law, to make the law clearer or to bring about broader change.

How we work across England, Scotland and Wales

We make sure that our action to improve equality and human rights is relevant to the devolved contexts of Scotland and Wales. We have a Scotland Commissioner and a Wales Commissioner who chair statutory committees to help us do this.

We plan our work and allocate resources to ensure, from the outset, that we consider how our work is relevant to Scotland and Wales, and to devolved decision-makers in England.

We are Britain's equality regulator and we have a human rights mandate in Scotland in relation to matters reserved to the UK Parliament. The Scottish Human Rights Commission has a mandate to promote and protect human rights in Scotland that fall within the competence of the Scottish Parliament.



2. The challenges to fairness facing post-COVID Britain

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected our economies, our families and almost every part of our society. It has disrupted schools, workplaces, communities and places of worship. Public services and businesses have had to respond to unprecedented challenges.

In some cases, the pandemic has accelerated social changes that were already underway, creating challenges and opportunities for equality and human rights. For example, changes to working patterns, more flexible working and the increased use of digital tools and online services have opened up opportunities for many. But the changes have presented challenges to others, including disabled people and those in low-paid or insecure work, who may be disproportionately younger or from an ethnic minority background.

Young people have faced huge disruption to their education. Many have experienced mental health conditions or lost employment opportunities. This has affected some groups more than others. It has often

widened existing inequalities for those who were already performing less well than their peers. For example, young people who need support for health or other reasons, and some ethnic groups such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.

The pandemic has also focused attention on the need to balance competing and conflicting rights. These choices have been especially difficult for older and disabled people, including those living in care homes. Restrictions and shielding have protected their right to life, but this has affected their ability to see loved ones and their right to a family life. Many of these groups, and their families, have suffered particularly badly during the pandemic.

Everyone has been affected by COVID-19 and the response to it, but it has affected some groups more severely. We will explore these effects and, where possible, redress them through this plan.

There are wider changes taking place that we will also focus on. The use of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, in all areas of life will provide significant benefits. But, if they are designed or implemented poorly, they could embed discriminatory decision-making and exclude some groups from information or services, particularly older and disabled people and those from ethnic minorities.

We will also make sure that we understand the risk that climate change might directly or indirectly threaten to reduce people's human rights. An environmentally sustainable future must enhance equality and human rights in Britain.

Whenever there is social change, there will be disagreements. Some want immediate change, others will be more cautious and a few may not want change at all. This can create divisions between individuals and groups, particularly when we think we are not being treated equally or fairly.

In Britain, we are seeing these divisions in practice on certain issues. For example, where trans people's rights are thought of as affecting the rights of groups with other protected characteristics. Or the right to freedom of expression, where debate has sometimes been called toxic. Disagreements expressed in divisive ways can reinforce prejudice and stop progress towards a cohesive and rights-respecting society.

In this plan for 2022 to 2025, we will help Britain to rebuild from the pandemic in a way that strengthens equality and human rights. By putting equality and human rights at the heart of decision-making, we can help build a fairer Britain, with equal access to opportunities and the conditions for everyone to lead a fulfilling life.



3. Working for all of society, as the regulator of equality and human rights

Given the challenges Britain is facing, we will focus on six priority areas from 2022 to 2025. These will inform our annual business planning and how we make decisions about our work. But we will also keep capacity to respond to any emerging or new challenges to equality and human rights.

The six areas are:

- equality in a changing workplace
- equality for children and young people
- upholding rights and equality in health and social care
- addressing the equality and human rights impact of digital services and artificial intelligence
- fostering good relations and promoting respect between groups, and
- ensuring an effective legal framework to protect equality and human rights.

Equality in a changing workplace

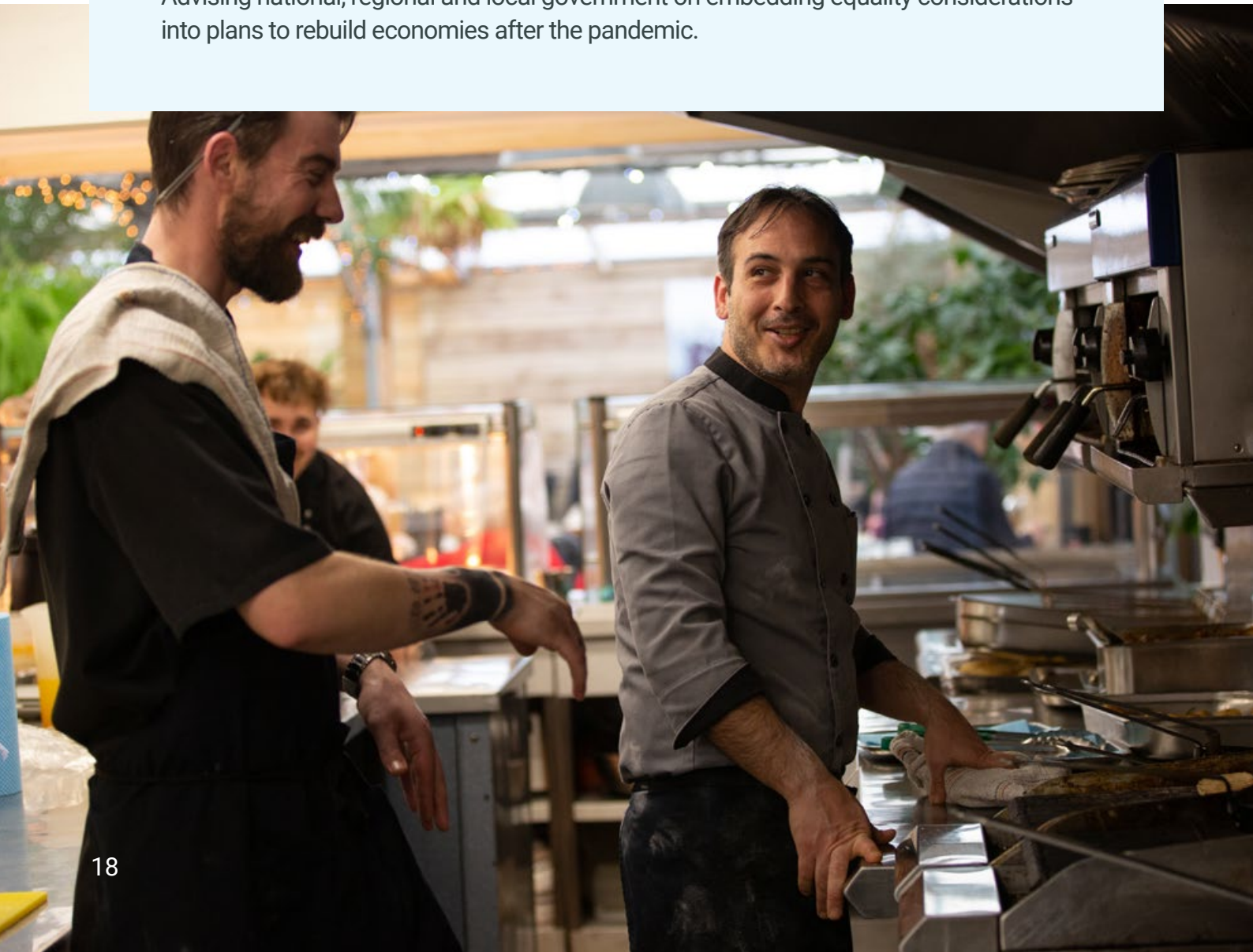
The economy and our workplaces have faced upheaval during the pandemic. Changes to the nature of work, including a sudden move to home working for many, and increasing automation, have created challenges for people in relation to conditions, pay and progression in the workplace.

We will ensure that:

- Employers are held to account for discrimination, harassment and victimisation so that all workers are treated fairly.
- Employers understand their legal duties and how to improve equality of opportunity. This includes addressing gaps in employment rates and pay for different groups.
- The legal and policy framework protects and strengthens the rights of employees and prospective employees most harmed by discrimination.
- As part of plans to rebuild national and local economies from the pandemic, measures are put in place to improve equality of opportunity for disadvantaged groups. Action is taken to improve access to work including through providing reasonable adjustments for disabled people.

We will achieve this by:

- Supporting employers so their practices follow the law, are not discriminatory and provide equal opportunities.
- Taking enforcement action to hold employers to account for breaking the law.
- Promoting flexible working to support equal opportunities and more inclusive workplaces.
- Providing expert advice and guidance on how the Equality Act applies, so people can access proper protection in a changing workplace, including people in insecure work.
- Enforcing gender pay gap regulations, exposing unfair ethnicity and disability pay gaps, and providing expert advice on how to deal with the factors that cause them.
- Promoting equal opportunities in the workplace. Working with employers and governments to provide adequate routes into work for disabled people, older people and unskilled younger people, including through apprenticeships.
- Advising national, regional and local government on embedding equality considerations into plans to rebuild economies after the pandemic.



Equality for children and young people

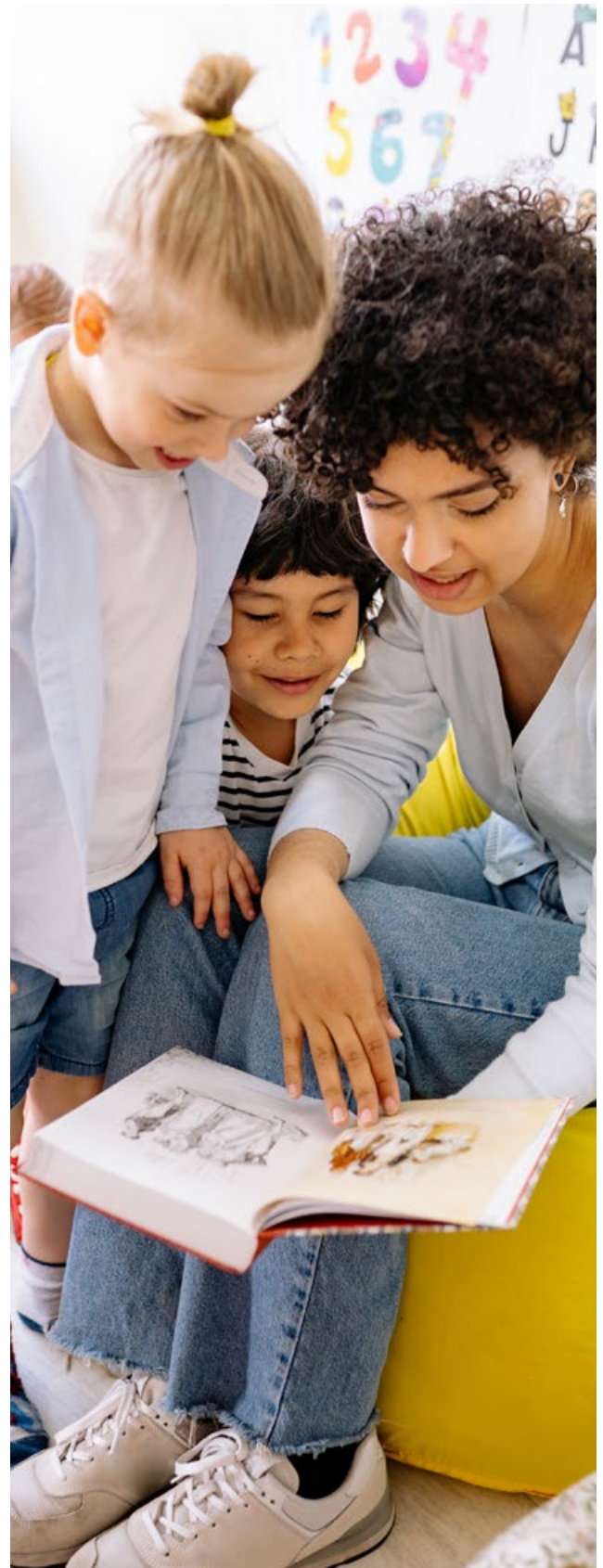
Too many children and young people in Britain face discrimination and barriers to opportunity, from prejudice or a lack of proper support in education settings to unequal access to work. The pandemic has made many of these issues worse.

We will ensure that:

- Children and young people have equal opportunities, with equal access to the support and resources they need to succeed in life.
- Schools are inclusive and support a rights-respecting society. All pupils learn about rights and the importance of respecting difference, to promote understanding between different groups.
- Laws and policies across Britain protect the rights and opportunities of children and young people with different protected characteristics to improve their life outcomes.

We will achieve this by:

- Taking on legal cases to challenge discrimination:
 - in education, where children and young people have been digitally excluded
 - through school admissions, exclusions or removals, particularly before having the opportunity to sit exams
 - in accessing work apprenticeships and training opportunities, and
 - in children's homes, detention centres, mental health detention and youth justice settings, to uphold the rights of children and young people in the most vulnerable situations and ensure they can challenge breaches of their rights.
- Working with public bodies to support good practice and compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty, to reduce discrimination and disadvantage for children and young people.
- Working collaboratively with other regulators and partners to show how schools can promote good relations, be inclusive and create a culture of respect between groups. Supporting the wider school community to do this too, including parents, carers and families.



Upholding rights and equality in health and social care

Health and social care systems are struggling to meet demands, which the pandemic has added to significantly. These challenges can result in unequal access to treatment and breaches of people's human rights and ability to live independently.

We will ensure that:

- Discriminatory barriers that stop people from accessing health and social care services are understood and addressed.
- Legal and policy frameworks across Britain provide safeguards, promote equal access to treatment, and protect the human rights of people at risk of or in mental health detention.
- Policy and practice reduces the inappropriate use of detention, restraint and isolation in mental health services, secure care and social care.
- Social care systems and services are free from discrimination and protect the rights of social care users and the people providing their care.
- The right to independent living is recognised in policies that support older and disabled people and is respected in practice.

We will achieve this by:

- Working with governments, service providers and regulators to identify ways to reduce barriers to accessing health and social care services.
- Using our legal powers to challenge breaches of people's rights in mental health detention, secure care and social care.
- Working with service providers and regulators to improve policy and practice to reduce the inappropriate use of detention, restraint and isolation.
- Providing expert advice on how proposals to reform health and social care services affect equality and human rights.
- Promoting and protecting older and disabled people's right to live independently, by giving expert advice and guidance and supporting providers to improve practice.



Addressing the equality and human rights impact of digital services and artificial intelligence

An increasing focus on digital services can risk discriminating against and excluding people who cannot access them. Systems based on machine learning and algorithms are changing how organisations recruit staff, make decisions and provide services. These technologies have the potential to bring benefits, but also pose risks to equality and human rights.

We will ensure that:

- Improvements in policy and practice reduce barriers to accessing digital services for people with protected characteristics.
- People understand how the Equality Act 2010 applies to the design and use of automated decision-making, and how discrimination that might arise through algorithmic biases can be identified and challenged.
- There is improved understanding of how the Human Rights Act applies to the use of new technology in terms of privacy, surveillance and the use of data.
- The law is updated in line with the development of new technologies to protect people from discrimination and breaches of their rights.

We will achieve this by:

- Supporting service providers to understand how digital exclusion affects people, and how to use technology to make services more inclusive.
- Working with expert organisations and regulators to identify and challenge discrimination in relation to artificial intelligence and emerging technology, and to embed fairness and equal treatment in the design and operation of systems and services.
- Providing guidance on how the Equality Act applies to the use of new technologies in automated decision-making. Working with employers to make sure that using artificial intelligence in recruitment does not embed biased decision-making in practice.
- Making rights and freedoms in the digital age clearer, including how the Human Rights Act applies to privacy, surveillance and the use of data.
- Identifying gaps in the law created by the development and use of new technologies. Advising on how the law can be updated to provide protection from discrimination and breaches of rights.



Fostering good relations and promoting respect between groups

The sense that people are not being treated equally or fairly can create division between individuals and communities. Divisive public discussion, amplified by the media and social media, can reinforce prejudice and divide communities.

We will ensure that:

- Education and community activities, such as sport, promote understanding, respect for difference, and more integrated and cohesive communities.
- The right to freedom of expression is upheld, so that individuals can take part in political and public discussion on complex and challenging topics.

We will achieve this by:

- Analysing the underlying factors that can lead to racial discrimination, harassment and prejudice and taking action to stop it.
- Supporting the education system to provide the foundations for mutual respect and understanding of rights.
- Dealing with discrimination so that community activities, such as sport, are inclusive and support respect for difference.
- Providing leadership to create the conditions for tolerant and respectful sharing of views online. This will include helping to develop regulatory frameworks for social media that promote respect for difference.
- Providing information and guidance on how the Equality Act informs and enables the balancing of competing rights.
- Facilitating and creating the conditions for constructive and respectful dialogue between people with different views.

Ensuring an effective legal framework to protect equality and human rights

Protecting and promoting equality and human rights law is central to our role, along with providing a strong and reliable evidence base on the most urgent equality and human rights issues.

We will ensure that:

- The equality and human rights legal framework is maintained and strengthened where needed, and serious or systemic breaches of equality and human rights law are challenged.
- People have access to justice when their rights have been breached.
- Governments and public bodies use our authoritative, independent evidence to inform their policies and decision-making.

We will achieve this by:

- Providing expert advice on legal and policy proposals that affect equality and human rights protections.
- Challenging serious or systemic breaches of the law.
- Improving compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty in England, Scotland and Wales, and the Socio-economic Duty in Scotland and Wales, to put equality at the heart of decision-making.
- Using our role as a National Human Rights Institution to track how well the UK and Welsh governments are meeting their human rights obligations, and offering advice and support to improve compliance.
- Fulfilling our legal duties and delivering our mandate effectively, in our role as a National Human Rights Institution and national equality body.
- Meeting our statutory duty to report to Parliament on progress towards equality and human rights outcomes.

How we will prioritise what we work on

We will use this plan to decide how to use our resources, which amounted to £17.1 million in 2021–22. We will be flexible too, so that we can respond to issues that emerge and develop over the period of this strategy.

In undertaking work, we will assess:

- whether the activity aligns with our strategic priorities
- the scale and severity of the problem, and
- the potential for achieving a successful and wide-reaching outcome through our regulatory powers.

We will also look to work with other organisations, particularly governments and regulators, to have the greatest possible impact.

We will strengthen the use of the Public Sector Equality Duty, which the Equality Act 2010 requires all public bodies to meet. To do so, they must take account of the need to:

- eliminate discrimination
- advance equality of opportunity, and
- foster good relations between people sharing different protected characteristics.

We regulate the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act, and we will meet its requirements ourselves. We will publish our equality objectives and our progress in achieving the goals of this strategy and of our annual business plans.

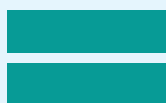
4. Building our organisation

To deliver this ambitious strategy, we will improve how we work as an organisation.

Like all organisations, we have a duty to support our staff and help them to learn new skills and meet our organisational goals. And, like all public bodies, we have a duty to use taxpayers' funds efficiently and effectively, and to be accountable to the public and Parliament. This comes with a responsibility to explain the importance of equality and human rights, and the importance of our role as an independent regulator and expert National Human Rights Institution.

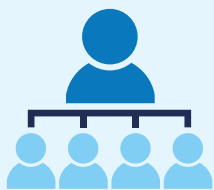
Our Board of Commissioners oversees our work and we set out our planned activity in our annual business plans. We report our progress to governments, parliaments and the public.

We have a proud record of achievement. To deliver our strategy from 2022 to 2025, we will put in place a programme of change and improvement in four areas.



Our role and remit

We will communicate our strategy clearly in a way that provides direction and inspires and motivates our staff and stakeholders, so we can make the best use of people's passion and expertise to achieve our goals. We will be clear about our role and how we make a difference. We will be agile in prioritising our work to meet equality and human rights challenges, and we will be open about the choices we make. We will deliver projects efficiently and effectively and show how our work benefits people's equality and human rights.



Culture and leadership

We will embed a culture of impartiality, accountability and delivery throughout the organisation. We will work as a team, internally and with partner organisations, and aim for excellence in everything we do. Our leaders will set an example, showing integrity, visibility and engagement, and creating a culture of high performance.



Future ways of working

We will improve our processes and systems to become more agile and efficient. We will work together in effective teams, delivering our shared objectives through high-quality planning. We will be outward-facing and put in place ways of working that prioritise real-world change, so that we take pride in working for a modern, professional regulator.



Developing our functions

We will recognise and value expertise and have clear development pathways for staff across the organisation. We will put in place a recruitment and retention approach that ensures we have a diverse team with the expertise we need now and in the future, and we will follow best practice in all our professional functions. We will support and guide our people to work with confidence and achieve our aims.

We will build a strong organisation, implement the priorities we have identified, and work effectively with partners in government, regulators and civil society. By doing this, we will contribute significantly to creating a society built on the foundations of equality and human rights, improving people's lives and helping people in Britain to live well together.



Contacts

This publication and related equality and human rights resources are available from **our website**.

Questions regarding this publication may be addressed to :
correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com.

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)

Post FREEPOST EASS HELPLINE FPN6521

@ 2022 Equality and Human Rights Commission

Published March 2022

ISBN: 978-1-5286-3240-9

Photo credits:

Centre for Ageing Better

Yan Krukov, RODNAE Productions, Mart Production and Rene Asmussen from Pexels

Mick De Paola, Good Faces, BBH Singapore from Unsplash





equalityhumanrights.com

E02728491
978-1-5286-3240-9