

Department of Children, Disability and Equality





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## Foreword

# Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, Norma Foley



I am very pleased to present the Statement of Strategy for the Department of Children, Disability and Equality 2025 – 2028.

The Programme for Government – Securing Ireland's Future

acknowledges the scale of challenges we face as a nation and as a society. It sets out how, as a Government, we will proactively address critical social, economic, demographic and environmental challenges.

The commitments within the Programme for Government, as they relate to the Department, are ambitious and intended to improve lives and make a positive difference. They inform this Statement of Strategy which sets out how this Department intends to meet the expectations of Government and the people we serve through delivering its programme of work for the benefit of all

The Vision we are committed to achieving is a fair and inclusive Ireland where people's rights are realised and where everyone is supported to reach their potential.

To do this we will deliver actions that

- Realise the rights of people in Ireland, particularly those of children, disabled people and those experiencing inequalities
- Support people to participate in society and reach their potential
- Make Ireland fairer, more equal and inclusive through the provision of relevant services
- Prioritise effective and genuine partnership to achieve better outcomes for those in society who need our support
- Develop our capacity and capability to deliver our objectives

My priority is delivery and securing a positive impact for those we serve – children, disabled people and those who need particular support, including people affected by Ireland's institutional past. We will act to:

- Improve the lives of disabled people by providing supports and services
- Invest in high quality, accessible and affordable early learning and childcare opportunities for all
- Enhance child welfare and protection provision and optimise outcomes for children, young people and their families
- Address Equality and Inclusion as whole of Government issues

The Department is committed to engaging widely in building a shared understanding of the challenges we face and developing evidence-based and rights-based approaches on how best to address these.

I look forward to working with Minister of State Naughton, the Secretary General, Kevin McCarthy, the staff of the Department, our Aegis Bodies and all stakeholders as we progress our shared agenda together.

**Norma Foley** 

Minister for Children, Disability and Equality

## Foreword

## Minister of State for Disability, Hildegarde Naughton



As Minister of State with responsibility for Disability, I welcome publication of the Department's Statement of Strategy 2025 -2028. I look forward to working with colleagues and stakeholders and

delivering on its commitments and making a positive difference to people's lives.

I am particularly pleased that Government's commitment to transform specialist disability services is reflected strongly in this Statement of Strategy. Supporting delivery of the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025 – 2030 is a whole-of-Government priority. This Strategy sets out a framework for the collaborative delivery of disability policy across Government, advancing the rights articulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We know that disabled people do not live their lives according to which Department is responsible for a given service, and they rightfully expect joined-up approaches to service delivery. For example, we know that a good education is vital to the pursuit of a fulfilling job, and that reliable transport is crucial in accessing education, healthcare, employment and community supports. We also know that most people with disabilities can and should be supported to access the services they need on a mainstream basis, safeguarding specialist services for those with most complex needs.

This Department will drive delivery of the Strategy, and work to embed joined-up approaches to the provision of disability services across Government, ensuring that disabled people can access the services they need to live full and autonomous lives on the same basis as all other citizens.

I support all efforts to ensure that the Department of Children, Disability and Equality continues to work in partnership and collaboration with disabled persons' organisations, Government departments, the HSE, service providers, advocates and other stakeholders to advance our shared disability priorities.

Hildegarde Naughter Hildegarde Naughton

Minister of State for Disability

# Introduction Secretary General **Kevin McCarthy**



I am delighted to introduce the Department's Statement of Strategy 2025 - 2028.

This Strategy sets out the high-level objectives and the actions that we, as a Department, will be taking to ensure that we

meet the ambitions outlined for the Department in the Programme for Government - Securing Ireland's future.

The Statement of Strategy was prepared following a consultation exercise with Departmental staff, other Government Departments and external stakeholders. It reflects our revised mandate as the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, following the recent transfers of functions for integration and youth.

The consultation exercise highlighted the understandable expectations on the Department to continue to deliver improvements across our range of responsibilities, and reflected the importance and potential for positive impacts of our work on the lives of so many people.

This Statement of Strategy outlines the values that will underpin our work as we commit to delivering on our vision and ambition for all those we serve.

We will engage with colleagues in the EU and across Government to ensure that we deliver on our responsibilities, spotlight the Department's remit and progress the EU's agenda during Ireland's forthcoming Presidency of the Council of the EU.

We will publish our Public Sector Duty Assessment and Implementation Plans annually detailing measures taken by the Department to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect human rights of staff, customers and service users.

We will continue to build our capability and capacity as an organisation.

I am confident that our steadfast commitment to achieving positive outcomes for those we serve will support us in effecting real improvements for children, disabled people and all those experiencing inequalities over the lifetime of this strategy.

I look forward to working with Minister Foley and Minister of State Naughton, the staff of the Department, and all of our partner bodies to deliver the actions set out in this Statement of Strategy.

**Kevin McCarthy** Secretary General in the Department of Children, Disability and Equality

# Vision, Mission, Values

## Vision

A fair and inclusive Ireland where people's rights are realised and where everyone is supported to reach their potential.

## **Mission**

Our Mission is to fund and deliver services supported by policy and legislation that realise people's rights, promote equality, celebrate diversity and that maximise opportunity to participate in society, particularly by children, disabled people and those experiencing inequalities.

## **Values**

In doing our work the following are the Values which guide us and influence our behaviours and actions:

People and **Society Centred** 

We are motivated to make a positive impact on society and keep the people we serve at the centre of our thinking and decision making.

Equality, **Fairness** 

We work to ensure that policy and services are underpinned by values of equality and fairness and that rights are advanced particularly for those who are least advantaged.

Listening, Hearing, **Engaging and** Responding

We reach out to those we serve and with whom we work, promote participation, build open and transparent partnerships and collaborate for solutions.

Impartiality, Integrity and Commitment

> We set high standards for ourselves and others, and we hold ourselves accountable to those standards.

# **Our work matters**





219,102

**Children on National Childcare Scheme and** legacy targeted schemes



155,159

**Centre-based respite** nights provided to people with disabilities



Personal assistance hours provided to people with a disability



87%

Children in care in a foster care placement



**Consultations** and participative events held, involving children and young people



€6.132m

Funding provided to 42 initiatives that benefit **Traveller and Roma** communities



Family resource Centres funded



6,649

People with a disability in receipt of home support services



**Initiatives to** support integration of LGBTI+ people



11,369

Representations received by Minister's Office



**New staff** recruited



4,781

Children and young people engaging in youth participation structures supported by the Department



Press Releases issued



2,446

**Queries from** members of the press answered



471

Freedom of Information Requests processed



**Parliamentary** Questions received



We will influence, develop and implement evidence-informed policies and legislation that realise the rights of people in Ireland, particularly those of children, disabled people and those experiencing inequalities.

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#### Actions

- Advance a comprehensive and effective programme of legislation<sup>1</sup> that reflects our Programme for Government commitments and underpins this Strategy including:
  - The Child Care Acts
  - **Equality and Family Leave legislation**
  - Reform of Disability legislation
- Progress people's rights, promote equality and remove barriers preventing individuals from full b participation in society by leading the implementation of national strategies and action plans<sup>2</sup> including:
  - The National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025 2030
  - Young Ireland the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028
  - Ireland's European Child Guarantee National Action Plan
  - First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028
  - Successor Strategy to the National Strategy for Women & Girls
  - The National LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028 and First 2-year Action Plan 2025/2026
  - National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024 2028 and First 2-year Action Plan 2025/2026
  - The Participation of Children and Young People in Decision Making Action Plan 2024-2028
  - The Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions
- Lead efforts to realise the rights of children and young people to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives by treating them as key stakeholders and consulting with them on matters of importance to them and on those which will impact their lives
- d Oversee the provision of adoption services which have the best interests of the child at their centre; and birth information and tracing services which vindicate people's right to identity in a respectful, sensitive and responsive manner

#### **Outcome:**

A stronger policy and legislative framework, supporting realisation of rights.

<sup>1</sup> See also appendix 1

<sup>2</sup> See also appendix 2



We will empower and support people in Ireland, particularly children, disabled people and those experiencing inequalities, to participate in society and reach their potential through the provision of accessible and quality services.

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#### Actions

- Deliver a range of schemes, action plans and initiatives to ensure that children and families can access high quality and affordable Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School -Age Childcare (SAC)
- Lead the implementation of Young Ireland: The National Policy Framework for Children and b Young People and its constituent strategies, and the National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee which will improve outcomes for children and young people across the following five spotlight areas:
  - Be active and healthy
  - Achieve their potential in all areas of learning and development
  - Be safe and protected from harm
  - Have economic security and opportunity
  - Be connected, respected and contributing to their world
- Support the Child and Family Agency, Tusla, as it seeks to improve service provision and optimise outcomes for children, young people and their families
- Continue investment in initiatives to promote play and recreation for all children and young people d
- Support the provision of high quality, sustainable, specialist disability services that meet the needs of disabled people and their families
- Deliver the right individual supports at the right time so that disabled people using disability services can maximise their opportunities to live independently and choose to be an active part of their local communities
- Improve access to supports and enable disabled people, particularly those with more complex g disabilities, to live a full life in the community
- Develop and implement initiatives to empower women and girls to enjoy full equality within Irish society and to support their access to decision-making opportunities
- Develop and implement initiatives to promote greater access by Travellers and Roma to employment and educational opportunities and support programmes recognising their cultural identities
- Develop and implement initiatives to support LGBTIQ+ persons and to enable their full and safe participation in Irish society
- k Develop a central Government portal to enable companies to report on their gender pay situation in a programme to tackle the gender pay gap
- Establish the Guardian ad Litem National Service to ensure the voice of children and the best interest of children on matters before public childcare proceedings are available to the Courts Services

#### **Outcome:**

Measurable improvements in the accessibility and quality of services across our remit.



We will design and deliver targeted initiatives that support an Ireland which is fairer, more equal and inclusive.

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#### **Actions**

- Commence development of a new Vision and Strategy for specialist disability supports and services for 2030 and ensure that services are progressively more person-centred, sustainable and cost effective
- b Work across Government to develop and drive delivery of the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030
- Further develop ELC and SAC programmes and schemes to ensure that children and families who need services most, including children at risk of disadvantage, children with additional needs and parents seeking to engage in or return to work, can access them by building on the National Childcare Scheme, Access and Inclusion Model and Equal Start model
- d Continue to strengthen the safeguarding and protection of children through leadership across Government, strong direction and support to Tusla and engagement with other stakeholders, including introducing of a new statutory duty on public sector partners to cooperate, to support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children, and support and encourage the effective functioning of families
- Further develop the policy and strategic approach to alternative care, including supporting foster е care, and developing a national plan for the care system
- f Oversee and support Tusla's plan to address the shortfall in special care beds and develop proposals with Tusla on how special care provision can be improved
- Support the essential role played by foster carers, and support Tusla's efforts to recruit and retain g them
- h Oversee Oberstown's safe and secure care for young people sentenced or remanded by the Courts in a way which meets their health and education needs, supports them to move away from offending and prepares them to return to their families and communities
- i Support Tusla's work in prevention and early intervention and champion innovations in this area to optimise outcomes for children, young people, their families and communities through
  - Implementation of the National Model of Parenting Support: Supporting Parents to strengthen and integrate parent supports
  - Tusla's Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) and early intervention work which will support vulnerable children, young people and their families
  - Expanding the capacity and network of Family Resource Centres
  - Developing a national policy on informal kinship care to better support kinship families
- Continue to drive implementation of the Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother j and Baby and County Home Institutions, including administration of the Payment Scheme and oversight of the work at Tuam
- k Lead the whole of Government initiative to build the National Centre for Remembrance

- Review policy to ensure that therapeutic services (a) align with international best practice, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and that (b) therapeutic supports from 0-18 years are integrated, including through early years, education, and health and social care systems
- Provide funding to tackle structural barriers to fairness, equality and inclusion and support m initiatives that address the needs of marginalised groups. These will include
  - The operation of LGBTIQ+ focussed funding to help improve the quality of life for LGBTIQ+ people and to ensure they are supported in realising their rights and
  - Funding for Traveller and Roma organisations and communities to reduce marginalisation, support inclusion and promote equal participation
  - Future funding arrangements under the successor strategy to the National Strategy for Women and Girls to ensure that women and girls are supported to participate fully in economic, social and public life and decision-making
  - The Disability Participation and Awareness Fund which provides funding to organisations to support disabled people to participate in community life
- Establish and embed the work of the Guardian ad Litem National Service to significantly enhance n governance across the child protection and family law systems and to support more informed decision-making and consistency in the representation of children's interests
- o Engage actively with civil society on the shared objectives of striving for a fairer, more equal and inclusive society
- Support Government Departments and public bodies to enhance their institutional capacity to p address equality-related challenges, including through support for gender mainstreaming and equality budgeting initiatives
- Create and enhance child and youth friendly living environments through the development and q implementation of new play and recreation strategies which underpin the right of all children and young people to play

#### Outcome:

Supports and services delivering on clearly stated objectives for fairness, inclusion and equality.



We will prioritise effective engagement with those people we serve and across Government Departments, public bodies and civil society in delivering a more equal, inclusive and fairer society.

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#### Actions

- Actively seek the opinions of those we serve so that we understand their needs and can design and deliver the services they require
- Progress focussed engagement with cross-Government structures and influential committees/fora including Cabinet Sub-committees, Senior Officials Groups and Oireachtas structures in advancing the range of DCDE-led strategies and actions plans<sup>3</sup> to include the provision of timely and regular updates on these key strategies and actions plans
- Establish dedicated stakeholder engagement structures under the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People and manage the stakeholder structures for the national strategies under the Department's remit
- Work collaboratively with partners including (but not limited to) the Department of Health, HSE, Tusla, DFHERIS and Oberstown Children Detention Campus in forecasting demand, establishing pathways to increase workforce supply and enhancing staff retention in organisations and services that support the work of the Department and its aegis bodies
- Support Tusla and work across Government to enhance outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in care or aftercare and support their access to services
- Support the HSE to ensure delivery of person-centred specialist disability services, that disabled people have a voice in relation to the services and supports that they receive, and that the sector is enabled to meet those needs
- Continue to prioritise effective and collaborative engagement with Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare stakeholders in the development, implementation and review of policies and schemes, through formal governance structures, consultative processes, and communications, which will include parents, providers, the workforce, sector representative groups, Pobal, and cross-Government partners
- Build support and counter misinformation through proactive dissemination of evidence-based analysis and information, a focus on building collaborative relationships and comprehensive and meaningful engagement with the Government Information Service
- Actively engage in relevant all-island, EU and International Forums including the North South Ministerial Council, EU, Council of Europe, OECD, G20 and the UN to influence international policy debate, inform national policy development and to fulfil our international obligations
- Support the enactment of EU legislation on areas under the Department's remit and manage the transposition of EU Directives
- Successfully deliver our part of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2026, in a way which progresses the EU agenda and appropriately showcases DCDE's policy areas
- Engage with survivors and amplify their voices through a range of representation and engagement structures, including support for the Special Advocate for Survivors

#### **Outcome:**



We will commit to being recognised as a high performing organisation where our people are valued, supported and motivated to deliver our Vision.

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#### **Actions**

- Build our resilience and readiness to meet current demands and future needs by evolving, a upskilling, innovating and improving how we serve the public through our organisational development programme
- b Implement the suite of strategies and actions designed to enable effective, motivated and supported staff including our:
  - a. People Strategy,
  - b. Communications Strategy,
  - c. Learning and Development Strategy and
  - d. Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
- Apply our Business Planning Framework in the management of strategic objectives including C promoting evidence-based (data-driven) decisions on the allocation of staff and finances to priority areas
- Deliver our Data Strategy and align with the National Equality Data Strategy to strengthen our ability to make informed decisions and drive effective services based on research, data and analytics
- е Maintain effective internal corporate governance and proactive financial management within the Department
- f Oversee and support continued improvements in service to optimise outcomes and ensure that Government investment is utilised to best effect through monitoring of performance and delivery, financial reporting, robust programmes of research and evaluation, and continuous quality improvement including feedback from service users
- Proactively engage with aegis bodies to ensure compliance with the Code of Practice for the g Governance of State Bodies and being clear on what is expected of them in this regard
- h Deliver on our statutory obligation under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 so that we eliminate discrimination, promote equality and protect human rights as it applies to our staff
- Implement the Department's Climate Action Roadmap
- Provide strong support to the Minister and Minister of State in fulfilling their duties of office

#### **Outcome:**

A high performing, forward looking and responsive organisation, where our people are valued and supported in delivering meaningful impact.



## Legislation being advanced to support this Strategy and the Department's Programme for Government Commitments

- a. The Child Care Acts
- b. Reform of Disability legislation
- c. Equality and Family Leave legislation
- d. Pay Transparency legislation
- e. Prohibition of Conversion Practices legislation
- f. Transposition of the two European Equality Bodies Directives

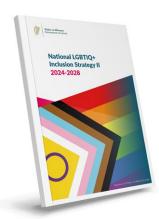
Lists of Strategies and Action plans that this Department pursues to realise the rights of people, particularly children and disabled people and those experiencing inequalities, to participate in society and reach their potential

- a. Young Ireland the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People
- b. Young Ireland Research Roadmap
- c. Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making Action Plan 2024-2028
- d. Ireland's European Child Guarantee National Action Plan
- e. Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services
- f. The National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025 2030
- g. The Action Plan for Disability Services 2024-2026
- h. The Autism Innovation Strategy
- The Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions
- National Equality Data Strategy
- k. Successor Strategy to the National Strategy for Women & Girls
- the National LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028 and First 2-year Action Plan 2025/2026
- m. National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024 2028 and First 2-year Action Plan 2025/2026
- n. First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028
- o. Together for Better funding model for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC)
- p. The Access and Inclusion Model
- q. National Action Plan for Childminding
- r. Equal Start: A model to support access and participation in Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare for all children
- s. Nurturing Skills, workforce plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare
- Action Plan for Administrative and Regulatory Simplification for the Early Learning and Care and School Age Care Sector
- u. Action Plan to build an affordable high quality Early Learning and Care and School Age Care System
- v. Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan









### Compliance with the Public Sector Duty in Statements of Strategy

The Department is committed to meeting its statutory obligations under Section 42 of the Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 (the Act). In line with the Public Sector Duty, we will work to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect human rights of our staff and all those who use our services.

The Duty is embedded throughout our Strategy. Our vision is of a fair and inclusive Ireland where people's rights are realised and where everyone is supported to reach their potential. The delivery of our objectives is guided by our values of:

- **People and Society Centred**
- **Equality, Fairness**
- Listening, Hearing, Engaging and Responding
- Impartiality, Integrity and Commitment

Through the implementation of national strategies on disability, Traveler and Roma inclusion, LGBTQI+, Child and Survivor Action plans we will continue to advance the rights of those who are least advantaged. We will prioritise access to high-quality and affordable early learning and care, ensure the provision of effective disability services and strengthen child protections and family supports.

Internally, we will build a skilled and inclusive workforce, apply strong governance and use evidence and data to inform decisions. In doing so, we will fulfil our duty to uphold equality, protect human rights and foster an inclusive public service.

### **Next Steps**

The Department will undertake a review of its existing Public Sector Duty and Human Rights Duty Action Plan to ensure full alignment with our changed remit since the transfer of function. This review will assess how the actions set out in this Statement of Strategy 2025- 2028 address our statutory obligations under Section 42 of the Act and will identify if any further measures are required to reflect our responsibilities across the Department.

The updated Action Plan will ensure the equality and human rights considerations are embedded in all areas of policy development, service delivery, governance, and workforce planning. It will also strengthen monitoring and reporting mechanisms so that progress can be tracked transparently. Engagement across a wide range of relevant stakeholders will inform the revised plan, ensuring it is both practical and responsive to the needs of those we serve.

### Bodies under the aegis of the Department



### **National Disability Authority**

25 Clyde Road Dublin 4 D04 E409

www.nda.ie



### The Adoption Authority of Ireland

Shelbourne House Ballsbridge Dublin 4 D04 H6F6

www.aai.gov.ie



#### Ombudsman for Children's Office<sup>5</sup>

Millennium House First Floor 52-56 Great Strand Street Dublin 1 D01 F5P8

www.oco.ie



#### Tusla, Child and Family Agency

The Brunel Building **Heuston South Quarter** St. John's Road West Kilmainham, Dublin 8, D08 X01F

www.tusla.ie



Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta an Duine agus Comhionannas Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

### Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission<sup>4</sup>

16-22 Green Street Dublin 7 D07 CR20

www.ihrec.ie



Oifig an Stiúrthóra um Idirghabháil Údaraithe, Tuaim Office of the Director of Authorised Intervention, Tuam

Office of the Director of Authorised Intervention, Tuam, Customs House, Flood Street, Galway, H91 XV2C

www.odait.ie



Oberstown Children Detention Campus, Oberstown, Lusk, Co. Dublin, K45 AY66

www.oberstown.com

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is independent in its functions and reports directly to the Oireachtas, in accordance with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014.

The Ombudsman for Children's Office is independent in its functions and reports directly to the Oireachtas, in accordance with the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002.







