



Assessment of Equality and Human Rights 2026 – 2028



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1. Introduction

This document is presented by Waterways Ireland to support our public consultation. It reports the outcome of the Assessment of Equality and Human Rights Issue conducted by Waterways Ireland.

AlternativeFormat

Copies of this document are available on Waterways Ireland website and in paper format. Documentation will be made available on request in formats such as Easy Read, Braille, audio formats, large print or minority languages to meet the needs of those for whom English is not their first language.

To request an alternative format, please contact us at:

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You can also read and / or download this document from our website. Go to www.waterwaysireland.org

Consultation on this document will commence on 1st September and close on 24th November 2025.

We intend to also use other consultation methods to seek views and it may be that you will receive further communication from us in due course. We value the contribution of our consultees and hope that you will find time to comment on this document.

2. Background

2.1. What is Section 42

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 requires that a public authority 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.

Under Section 29 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014, defines human rights for the purposes of the duty as meaning those rights and freedoms of individuals which are protected by the Irish Constitution, by the European Convention on Human Rights 2003.

All public bodies including Waterways Ireland have a duty to fulfil its statutory commitments and carry out an assessment of human rights and equality that the body believes to be relevant to its functions to protect human rights and promote equality. Implementation of the Duty needs to be coordinated and embedded across planning processes within an organisation.

The public authority is required to report in a manner that is accessible to the public on developments and achievements in that regard in its annual report.

2.1. Why is an Assessment necessary?

The assessment is an evidence-based identification and prioritisation of the equality and human rights issues relevant to the functions and purpose of Waterways Ireland. The focus for the assessment is the following identified groups:

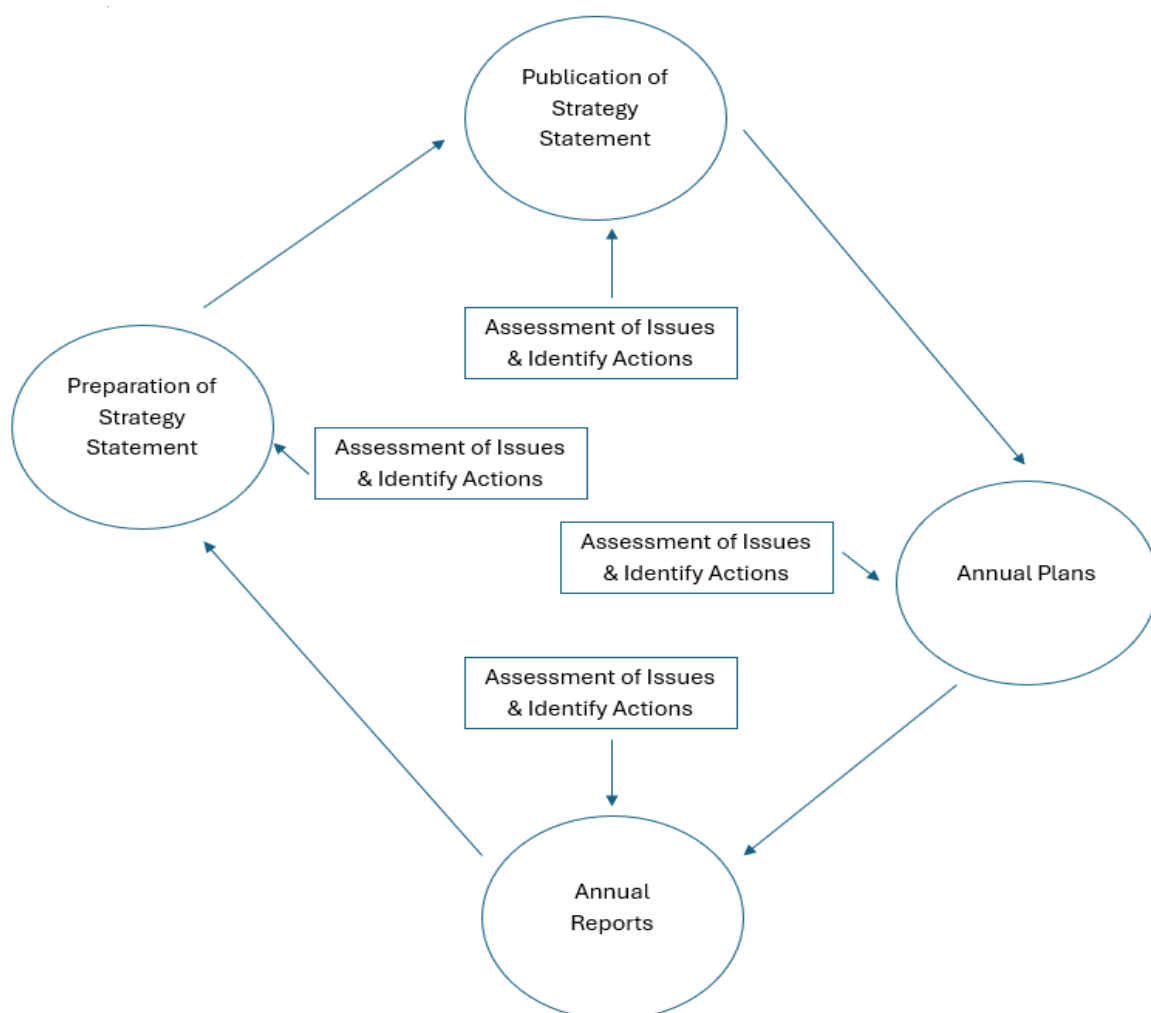
- people covered by the nine grounds under equality legislation: gender (including a transgender person or a person who is transitioning to another gender), civil status, family status (including lone parents and carers), age, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community,
- people at risk of poverty and social exclusion and
- rights-holders under the various human rights instruments relevant to the functions and purpose of Waterways Ireland.

The assessment of equality and human rights issues is required to be an integral part of the strategic planning cycle of the public authority.

The IHREC's guidance states: 'Drawing on the available evidence, including the knowledge and experience of the organisation's staff and people to whom it provides services, the assessment informs the strategic cycle of planning, implementation and evaluation'.¹

Waterways Ireland has undertaken an Assessment to establish whether any of the nine categories are or could be adversely affected or negatively impacted by the activities of Waterways Ireland and, where such inequalities were detected or suspected has developed an Action Plan to address them. While a lot of work has been done to promote equality and good relations, persistent inequalities will remain within our society.

The Strategic Planning Cycle



¹ Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2019. Page 15.

2.3. The Action Plan

The Commission recommends that public authorities should develop an action plan which details action measures relevant to a public authority's functions, to promote equality of opportunity and good relations and address inequalities for the Section 42 categories.

The commission emphasises the importance of linking equality actions into a public bodies planning and corporate planning cycle.

It advises that *“public authorities link the development of action plans to their corporate planning cycle, in order that equality of opportunity and good relations are incorporated and mainstreamed at a strategic level into the business of the public authority.*

Waterways Ireland has a Disability Action Plan and an Equality Action plan 2023 – 2025 which were developed following an audit of inequalities. The Action Plans aim to reduce these inequalities through the identification and implementation of key strategic actions with the target of outcomes improving over time.

The Disability Action Plan and the Equality Action Plan are linked to Waterways Irelands Corporate and Business Plans 2023 – 2025

Waterways Ireland are currently drafting new Disability and Equality Action Plans 2026 – 2028 which will be implemented in January 2026 and will be linked to the Corporate and Business plans 2026 – 2028.

3. Methodology

Given the highly specialised nature of Waterways Ireland functions the extent to which relevant research literature could be drawn upon to shed light on equality issues relating to our services was limited.

A three-stage approach was taken to developing this Assessment and the Equality Action Plan:

- 1) Review of Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014.
- 2) Review of evidence including:
 - statistical baseline data for nine protected groups in Ireland
 - Waterways Ireland strategies, plans, programmes, policies, complaints and research
 - Survey issued to consultees for feedback.
- 3) Review of previous audits, assessments and action plans produced by Waterways Ireland, local authorities and other statutory bodies.
- 4) Public Consultation.

The Assessment will continue to be reviewed to coincide with the Waterways Ireland Corporate Planning cycle.

4. About Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland is a cross-border Body, the largest of six North/South Implementation Bodies established under the British Irish Agreement of 10 April 1998. This Agreement was given domestic effect by means of the North/South Co-Operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order, 1999 and the British Irish Agreement Act, 1999 respectively.

We are the cross-border navigational authority responsible for the management, maintenance, development, and restoration of 1,100 km of inland navigational waterways and over 600 km of Greenways and Blueways, principally for recreational purposes.

Our Headquarters is in Enniskillen Co. Fermanagh, with regional offices in Dublin, Carrick on Shannon, Co. Leitrim, and Scariff, Co. Clare.

We employ c.360 permanent staff located at offices and sites close to the inland waterways who are assisted by a team of seasonally recruited staff reflecting the

seasonality of the organisations remit. Waterways Ireland generates significant annual value in social, economic, and environmental well-being.

WHAT WE DO

Waterways Ireland is the navigation authority for 1,100 km of navigable inland waterways, comprising:

- Lower Bann Navigation
- Shannon Navigation
- Barrow Navigation
- Erne System
- Royal Canal
- Ulster Canal
- Shannon-Erne Waterway
- Grand Canal

In July 2007, it was agreed by the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) to include responsibility for the reconstruction of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne to Clones, and following restoration, its management, maintenance, and development, principally for recreational purposes, to Waterways Ireland's remit.

At an operational level, Waterways Ireland is responsible for a vast range of infrastructure assets including navigation channels, embankments, towpaths, adjoining lands, harbours, jetties, fishing stands, bridges, culverts aqueducts, overflows, locks, sluices, and lock houses along with buildings and archives. The current valuation of the rebuild costs of this infrastructure is estimated in excess of €1 billion.

Waterways Ireland's work programmes are critical to providing a safe and high-quality recreational environment for customers, whilst preserving the industrial and environmental heritage of the waterways for future generations.

5. Five Steps to Undertake the Assessment

Waterways Ireland strives to fulfil its Section 42 obligations as an employer and as a public body delivering a service to the public. Its service to the public is to manage, maintain and reimagine the inland navigable waterways principally for recreational use. Waterways Ireland is therefore a provider of public space for outdoor recreation, boats as a navigation authority and a wide range of water-based sports alongside walking and cycling. Whilst Waterways Ireland's remit covers 1,100 km of waterways, 85% of its geographical remit on the inland navigable waterways is in Ireland covering the Shannon-Erne System, Shannon Navigation, Royal Canal, Grand Canal, Barrow Navigation and parts of the Ulster Canal.

There are regional offices in Carrick-On-Shannon, Dublin and Scarriff, Co Clare. Whilst Waterways Ireland has a total staff of c360, its Republic of Ireland staff number is c263. Organisation chart at Appendix B.

Since the implementation of the 2023 – 2025 Equality and Disability Action Plans there has been focus on sustainability and climate action which has been a key consideration when developing and implementing new plans.

In Waterways Ireland's Equality and Disability Action Plans 2026 - 2028, we will be aligning and embedding sustainability and procurement to develop social value throughout the cross sections of Waterways Ireland.

5.1 Step One: Leadership and Responsibility

The assessment of the equality and human rights issues has been agreed and approved by the Senior Management Team. The Senior Management Team meet twice yearly to review the progress of the Equality and Disability Action Plans and assess the targets met and what has to be achieved.

The assessment has been undertaken by Corporate Services and members of the Equality and Diversity Working Group. This group is responsible for the implementation of the Equality and Disability Action Plans and is comprised of representatives from throughout the different sections and regions within Waterways Ireland.

5.2 Step Two: Gather Evidence for the Assessment

The Equality and Diversity Working Group has taken an evidence-based approach to identify, scrutinise and analyse the information required based on the 9 protected groups under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 and also barriers to social inclusion, protection of human rights and equal opportunity.

The information has been gathered from several anonymous surveys issued to all staff and from monitoring information held by the organisation. This data has been reviewed and considered against national statistics to identify any disadvantages, discrimination or barriers.

Surveys

Survey of staff of the Nine Protected Groups i.e. Gender (including transgender persons or persons transitioning to another gender), civil status, family status (including lone parents and carers), age, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community.

Results

*Note - WI Figures based on the number of staff that completed the survey in Ireland.

Disability	Census 2022 ²	WI 2025
	22%	6.67%

Type of Disability	Census 2022*	WI 2025
Physical	31%	5.9%
Sensory	48%	5.9%
Mental	24%	29.5%
Progressive	40%	23.5%
Learning	23%	23.5%
Other	-	11.7%

*People experience more than one type of disability

Nationality	Census 2022*	WI 2025
Irish	87%	92.8%
UK	6%	4.8%
Romanian	2%	0.8%
French	0.5%	0.8%
Spanish	0.5%	0.8%

*Based on nationalities within WI

Ethnic Group	Census 2022*	WI 2025
White	86%	100%
Irish Traveller	1%	0%
Asian	3.7%	0%
Black	1.5%	0%

² [Census - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

*Not all groups included

Status	Census 2022	WI 2025
Single	43%	21.6%
Married	46.2%	71.2%
Widowed	5.1%	0%
Separated*	6%	2.4%
Divorced*		4.8%

*The percentage of separated and divorced is combined in the census

Sexual Orientation	National Estimate	WI 2025
Different Sex		99.2%
Same Sex	1.2% - 10.8%*	0.8%

*No official figures

Carers	Census 2022	WI
Carers	6%	12.5%

Staff Survey - Implementing the Public Sector Duty

- Barriers experienced by the Protected group - On average 79.8% of staff indicated that they did not believe that there are any barriers for the protected groups.
- Equal Opportunity - 79% indicated that everyone has an equal opportunity to access, avail of and enjoy any service or function provided by Waterways Ireland including employment
- Social Inclusion - 88% of staff are not aware of any areas within Waterways Ireland remit where social exclusion is a factor
- Protection of Human Rights - 94% believed that Waterways Ireland works to have staff human rights protected
- Policies and Practice – 91% Waterways staff confirmed that Ireland policies and practices are inclusive of diverse beliefs & practices
- Inclusive workplace – 73% agreed that Waterways Ireland is an inclusive workplace

Consultees

Feedback indicated that physical disability sensory impairments, learning difficulties and language could be barriers when accessing Waterways Irelands amenities.

Marketing Consultancy survey

A recent survey carried out by a Marketing Consultant on behalf of Waterways Ireland indicated that people with disabilities (32% cited some living experience and issue), rated the waterways well overall (60%), but did call out the need for greater access, ramps, improved facilities and amenities, as well as more information points.

Waterways Ireland had a preliminary meeting with one of our consultees in June 2025 to discuss the draft Equality and Disability Action Plans for 2026 - 2028. Waterways Ireland received positive feedback on the draft plans with further contacts established between Waterways Ireland and the group to work collaboratively in the future.

Assessment of progression since Audit 2022

Positives

- Successful training and awareness of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion has seen an increase in Waterways Ireland disability figure within the organisation from 3.26% in 2022 to 6.67% in 2025.
- The Hybrid Working Policy supports parents and carers and accommodates flexibility.
- There is a rise in females in PTA employment up to 53% in 2024. A rise of 5% since 2022.
- Based on Waterways Ireland employment numbers in both jurisdictions, Waterways Ireland is retaining an older age bracket of staff – 14% of staff aged 61 – 70 which is a rise of 2% since 2022.
- The most Popular age bracket remains 41-60, 66% of staff.

Gaps

- Female Operation Staff - there remains a gap in female operations staff. A key performance indicator is to attract a more gender balance in operations staff by attracting more females into the workplace.
- Young people - There is a low employment rate of young people in Waterways Ireland. A key performance indicator is to attract young People into Employment through Waterways Ireland new HR “People Strategy for WI” through Graduate Programme and Student Mentor Programme.
- Accessibility - Barriers facing unrepresented groups and people with a disability. A key performance indicator is to continue to work on enhancing the waterways and adjoining towpaths to make our facilities accessible.

All of Waterways Ireland Actions and Key Performance indicators with proposed outcomes are listed in our Equality and Disability Action Plans.

Screening

All new plans and policies are screened to ensure that the plans will not have an adverse impact on the protected groups. The screening documents are published on Waterways Ireland website.

Public Consultation

Public Consultation will commence on 1st September to 24th November 2025.

Methodology

1. The consultation contains information in relation to Waterways Ireland's Audit of Inequalities, Draft Equality Action Plan 2026-2028 and Draft Disability Action Plan 2026-2028.
2. The Consultation Documents are as follows: -
Draft Equality Action Plan 2026-2028
Draft Disability Action Plan 2026-2028
Audit of Inequalities 2026 – 2028
Assessment of Equality and Human Rights 2026 - 2028.
3. Consultation Response Document – Draft Equality Action Plan
4. Consultation Response Document – Draft Disability Action Plan
5. Meeting in Person or Virtual - Option to request a meeting with Waterways Ireland to give comments face-to-face or virtual
6. Consultation Open Days - We are planning to hold a small number of Consultation Open Days between September and November where the Action Plans will be available to view and discuss with Waterways Ireland.

Consultee List. The draft plans will be circulated to our Consultee List – Please see Appendix B.

5.3 Step 3: Assess and Prioritise the Relevant Equality and Human Rights Issues

The equality and human rights issues identified from this data has been assessed for their relevance to the specific functions within Waterways Ireland.

Four themes have been identified for the Equality Action Plan

1. Promote awareness of the Equality Agenda among Waterways Ireland staff.
2. Provide a working environment where employees are treated with fairness, dignity and respect.
3. Attract, recruit and retain a diverse range of employees in a culture which celebrates diversity and inclusion.
4. Deliver services that are accessible, inclusive and responsive to visitors to our property and waterways.

Two themes have been identified for the Disability Action Plan

1. Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
2. Encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

5.4 Step 4: Validate and Approve the Final Draft Assessment

The final reports of the Assessment and Audit of Inequalities and drafts of the Equality and Disability Action Plans for 2026-28 will be sent to all staff and Trade Unions within Waterways Ireland, Sponsor Departments and a consultee list comprising of organisations and charities from across Ireland which represent or have a vested interest in the nine identified categories.

The Public Consultation will commence on 1 September 2025 and close on 24 November 2025. The responses received will be analysed by Corporate Services and the Equality and Diversity Working Group and the draft Equality and Disability Action Plans adjusted and adapted based on this review after SMT approval.

The Commission's guidance states 'Consultation and engagement are important throughout the process of assessing, addressing and reporting on the public sector duty. Consultation with staff and service users assists in developing an evidence-based human rights and equality assessment; it can also inform how an organisation could most effectively address its priority actions; and it can form part of the ongoing monitoring of progress against those priority actions'

5.5 Step 5 : Publish and Communicate the Assessment of Equality and Human Rights Issues

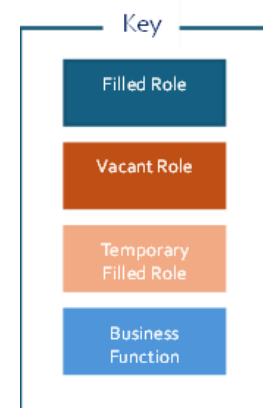
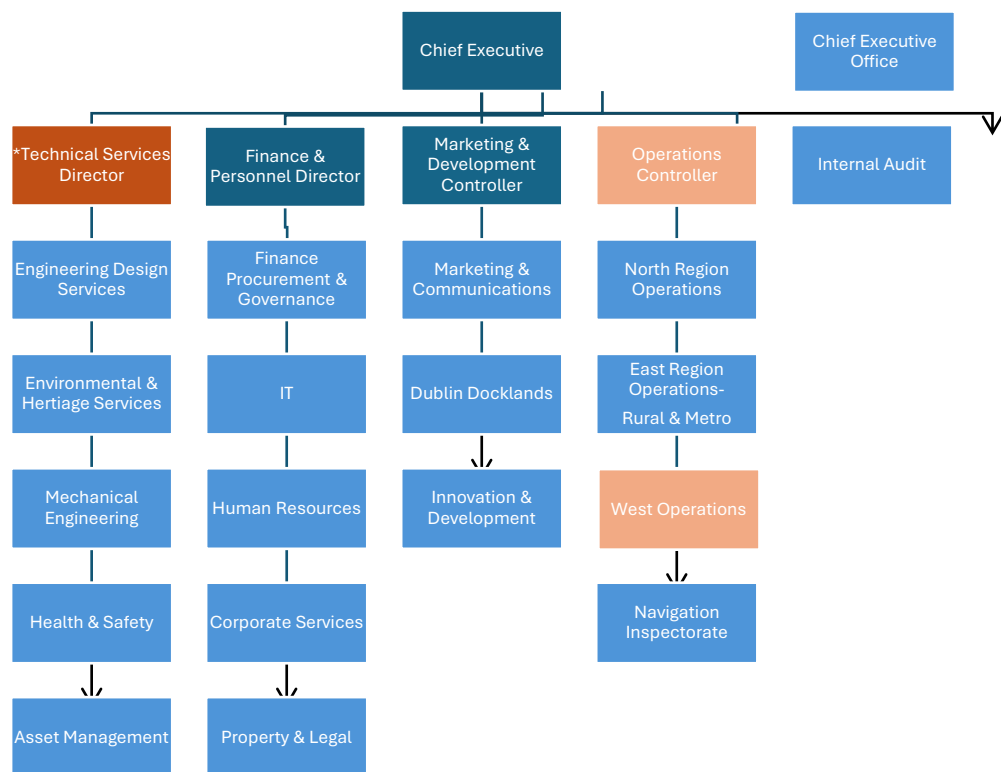
Following the Public Consultation the Assessment of Equality and Human Rights 2026-2028, will be published on Waterways Ireland's website together with the Equality and Disability Action Plans 2026- 2028.

It will also be circulated to our Staff, Consultee list, and Trade Unions.

The evidence of this assessment will also be included in Waterways Ireland's Implementing the Public Sector Duty Plan which will also make reference to the Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan 2026 – 2028.

Waterways Ireland will continue to complete the annual Monitoring form in relation to our performance of functions under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014.

Appendix A – Our Organisational Structure



Appendix B – List of Consultees

This is a list of individuals and groups with which Waterways Ireland will consult, as appropriate, as part of its Section 75 responsibilities and Irish Human Rights to implement the Public Sector Duty. It is an indicative rather than an exhaustive list, which will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure the consultees remain relevant to our functions and policies.

List of Consultees

- Action Aid Ireland
- Action Mental Health (Regional Office)
- Action MS
- Action on Hearing Loss
- Active Ireland
- Advice NI
- Age Action Ireland
- Age and Opportunity
- Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
- Versus Arthritis
- Antrim and Newtownabbey Council
- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
- Arts Council of NI
- Aware NI
- Autism NI (PAPA)
- Belfast City Council
- British Deaf Association
- British Epilepsy Association
- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
- Carrickcraft
- Cara Friend
- Carers Northern Ireland National Association
- Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
- Children's Law Centre
- Committee on the Administration of Justice
- Community Action Network
- Community NI (NICVA)
- Community Development & Health Network
- Community Foundation Ireland
- Community Relations Council (CRC)
- Confederation of Community Groups
- Council For Catholic Maintained Schools
- Democratic Unionist Party
- Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs (DAERA)
- Department for Communities (DfC)
- Department for the Economy (DfE)
- Department for the Economy Head of Student Support
- Department Of Education (DoE)
- Department of Finance (DoF)

- Department of Health (DoH)
- Department for Infrastructure (DfI)
- Department of Justice (DoJ)
- Derry City and Strabane District Council
- Diabetes UK (NI)
- Disability Action
- Disability Federation of Ireland
- Disability Sport NI
- Down Syndrome International
- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
- County Down Rural Community Network
- Early Years - The Organisation for Young Children
- Education Authority for NI
- Emerald Star
- Enable Ireland
- Equality Commission for NI
- Equality and Human Rights Unit
- Erne Boat Hire
- Erne Charter Boat Association
- The Executive Office (Northern Ireland Executive)
- Extern Organisation
- Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
- Fermanagh Rural Community Network
- Fermanagh Shadow Youth Council
- Foras na Gaeilge
- Girl Guiding Ulster
- GMB
- Health and Social Care Board
- Heritage Boat Association
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Huntington Disease Association
- I.C.B.A.N.
- Inclusion Ireland
- Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (NI Branch)
- Inner City Organisations Network
- Libraries NI
- Inspire NI (NI Association of Mental Health)
- Intertrade Ireland
- Irish Deaf Society
- Irish Network Against Racism
- Irish Traveller Movement
- Irish Wheelchair Association
- LGBT Ireland
- Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
- Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners
- Loughs Agency
- LUPUS Group
- Manor House Marine
- Mencap NI
- Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
- Mid Ulster District Council
- Mid-Ulster Women's Network
- Multiple Sclerosis Society (NI)
- Muscular Dystrophy Group, NI
- National Trust NI

- Newry Mourne and Down District Council
- North West Forum of People With Disabilities
- Northern Health and Social Care Trust
- Northern Ireland Committee - Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
- Northern Ireland Dyslexia Association
- Northern Ireland Environmental Link
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)
- Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA)
- Northern Ireland Women's European Platform
- NOW Group
- Northern Ireland Youth Forum
- NSPCC Northern Ireland Division
- NUS USI
- Office of the First Minister & Deputy First Minister
- Omagh Women's Area Network
- Outdoor Recreation NI
- Outhouse
- Playboard NI Ltd
- Praxis Care
- Positive Futures
- Riding for the Disabled
- Department For Infrastructure Rivers
- Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)
- Safefood
- Scout Association NI
- SDLP
- Sense Northern Ireland
- Share Discovery Village
- Sinn Fein
- Special EU Programmes Body
- South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
- Southern Health and Social Care Trust
- South West Age Partnership SWAP
- Strabane Community Network
- The Cedar Foundation
- The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association
- The Local Government Staff Commission for NI
- The Rainbow Project
- The Special Olympics Ulster
- The Women's Centre
- Tourism Northern Ireland
- Tourist Development International
- Ulster Unionist Party
- Ulster Wildlife
- Ulster's People College
- Ulster Scots Community Network
- Walk NI (Outdoor Recreation NI)
- Western Health and Social Care Trust
- Youth Council for Northern Ireland

