



Equality Action Plan

January 2026 –

December 2028



Waterways For All



1. Introduction

This Equality Action Plan 2026-2028 has been developed from the outcome of an Audit of Inequalities for NI and Assessment in Ireland conducted by Waterways Ireland

Note on terminology

In this Action Plan, the terms “persons with disabilities” and “disabled people” are used interchangeably. We recognise that within our diverse communities, people may experience multiple, intersecting forms of disabilities.

We also recognise that disabled people have multiple identities in relation to other equality categories such as gender, race, age etc. and will aim to adopt an intersectional approach when considering barriers to employment, access to services and participation in public life to ensure individuals are not disadvantaged because of a combination of equality grounds.

The term ‘disabled people’ is recognised by many within the disability rights movement to align with the social and human rights model of disability, as it is considered to acknowledge the fact that people with an impairment are disabled by barriers in the environment and society. However, we also recognise that others prefer the term “persons with disabilities” because of the inherent understanding in the term that they are first and foremost human beings entitled to human rights. This reflects the language used in the UNCRPD. Finally, we recognise that some people do not identify as being disabled.

Alternative Format

Copies of this document are available on the 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

2. Background

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires Waterways Ireland to comply with two statutory duties: the Equality of Opportunity Duty and the Good Relations Duty.

- (1) A public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:
 - a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
 - b) between men and women generally;
 - c) between persons with a disability and persons without; and
 - d) between persons with dependants and persons without
- (2) Without prejudice to its obligations under subsection (1), a public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Waterways Ireland undertook an Audit of Inequalities to establish whether any of the above-mentioned Section 75 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 this 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.

As a North-South Body, it is also intended that delivery of the measures in this Action Plan will address the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014. This Public Sector Duty places a responsibility on all public sector bodies in Ireland to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of our employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by our policies and plans.

This Action Plan aims to reduce these inequalities through the identification and implementation of key strategic actions, with the aim of outcomes improving over time.

This Equality Action Plan 2026-2028 has been linked to the Waterways Ireland Corporate Plan 2026-2028 planning cycle.

Four themes have been identified:

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 equality, diversity and inclusion.
4. Deliver services that are accessible, inclusive and responsive to visitors to our property and waterways.

Actions are categorised according to the theme they contribute to. Each action includes a timescale for delivery, a performance indicator and the name of the department responsible for delivery.

We will also seek to promote good practice across the range of our policies and in respect of all equality categories. The Plan will build on existing equality work undertaken by Waterways Ireland and assist in meeting future equality requirements.

It is designed to be flexible and will be reviewed regularly, with the support of the Equality Commission. It is recognised that the timescale of the plan may have to be amended in response to other work priorities and available resources.

3. 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 Scarriff, 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. In addition, accessible and inclusive waterways contribute to community resilience, biodiversity conservation and blue-green infrastructure which benefits health and 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.

4. Key Equality Considerations

Waterways Ireland strives to fulfil its equality 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 promote the inland navigable waterways principally for recreational use. Waterways Ireland, as a navigation authority, is therefore a provider of public space for outdoor recreation including boating, a wide range of water-based sports, walking and cycling. Whilst Waterways Ireland's remit covers 1,100 km of inland navigable waterways and 600 km of Greenways and Blueways, just 15% of its geographical remit on the inland navigable waterways is in Northern Ireland covering the Erne System in County Fermanagh and the Lower Bann from Lough Neagh to Coleraine.

Waterways Ireland has a total staff of 360¹, 97 of these are employed in Northern Ireland, 263 in Ireland.

Responsibility for the delivery of this Equality Action Plan lies with the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team. Day to day responsibility lies with the Corporate Services Section who will be responsible for the implementation of administrative arrangements to ensure that Waterways Ireland complies with its equality and good relations duties when carrying out its functions.

5. Monitoring and Review Process

The Action Plan will be monitored on a bi-annual basis by the Senior Management Team who will review progress in implementing previously agreed actions together with consideration of any new developments in the intervening period. Where appropriate, the Action Plan will be revised to reflect any new developments, consultations, the outcome of any new Equality Impact Assessments or any additional information not previously available.

¹ Headcount at 31/12/24

Waterways Ireland will submit an Annual Review of Progress on Section 75 implementation to the Equality Commission and will report on developments and achievements in its annual report as required under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014

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 Waterways Ireland's functions. Any changes or amendments to the Action Plan will be reported to the Equality Commission.

6. EQUALITY ACTION PLAN 2026 - 2028

Themes

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 equality, diversity and inclusion.
4. Deliver services that are accessible, inclusive and responsive to visitors to our property and waterways.

1. Promote awareness of the Equality Agenda among Waterways Ireland staff

Ref	Actions	Performance Measure	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
1	<p>Develop and incorporate equality and good relations actions for all aspects of the Body's work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek regular updates to capture work done and/or identify ongoing/persistent inequalities. Monitor the number of complaints received in relation to equality / disability / good relations. Ensure that Equality and Good Relations is embedded to all WI corporate documents 	<p>Review delivery of Action Plan measures at quarterly Equality & Diversity Working Group Meetings</p> <p>Register of Complaints.</p> <p>Positive images and content used in corporate publications, on social media and on our website including sustainable waterway activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 collaborations per annum to create and capture positive imagery / content 	<p>Accessibility of Information and Services for staff and visitors to our facilities and waterways who experience information barriers.</p> <p>Integration of equality duties into all planning and decision-making processes.</p> <p>Meet National Disability Authority requirements.</p> <p>Raise awareness through social media platforms on our website.</p>	<p>31/12/2026</p> <p>31/12/2027</p> <p>31/12/2028</p>	All
2	<p>Create a calendar of events and awareness campaigns to celebrate diversity and inclusion across our workforce.</p>	<p>3 communications per annum.</p> <p>Increased opportunities for staff collaboration and participation</p>	<p>Increased awareness and celebration of diversity and inclusion.</p>	<p>31/12/2026</p> <p>31/12/2027</p> <p>31/12/2028</p>	CS / WG / M&C

2. Provide a working environment where employees are treated with fairness, dignity and respect

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
3	<p>Continue to provide a suite of workplace, work-life balance policies and entitlements and flexible working for staff in the organisation.</p> <p>Monitoring of Hybrid Working Policies</p>	<p>Review of existing HR policies every 3 years in line with WI procedures.</p> <p>Monitoring of hybrid working across the organisation.</p> <p>Ongoing review of HR Policies as committed to in People Strategy Review and in accordance with the Waterways Ireland Guidance on Policy Development Process and Equality Screening</p>	Workplace where staff feel valued and safe.	<p>31/12/2026</p> <p>31/12/2027</p> <p>31/12/2028</p>	HR
4	Review and develop the extent of the inclusion of equality responsibilities in performance reviews across all relevant staff.	<p>Introduction of new performance management system</p> <p>Review and inclusion of equality responsibilities, where relevant for relevant staff.</p>	<p>Integration of equality duties into all planning and decision-making processes.</p> <p>Core Values – Equality responsibilities with all relevant line management staff.</p>	<p>31/12/2026</p> <p>31/12/2027</p> <p>31/12/2028</p>	<p>HR</p> <p>HR / CS</p>

3. Attract, recruit and retain a diverse range of employees in a culture which celebrates equality, diversity and inclusion

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
5	Undertake voluntary staff census to gather relevant information on equality categories covered by legislation.	Annual staff census 80% return of questionnaires from Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland workforce.	Accurate and up to date reflection of the equality groups within our workforce to inform statutory reporting, and to guide policy making as per National Disability Authority requirements.	31/12/2026 31/12/2027 31/12/2028	HR
6	Develop entry to employment workforce actions within new HR "People Strategy for WI" to underpin detailed workforce planning across the organisation and include succession planning for key roles, eg engineers. Consider issues such as hard to recruit / retain posts and ways of effectively succession planning for future workforce needs. Positive targeting of under-represented groups through	Increased applications received for vacant posts identified by the HR Strategy for WI. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women/Men in traditional work roles. • Young people. • People from Protestant community • People from other racial groups • Increased representation of people with a disability in the workforce 	Robust understanding of our workforce and have identified and responded to areas for improvement. Effective succession planning for future workforce needs. Establish a benchmark in 2026 and build on improvements in year 2027/2028.	31/12/2026 31/12/2027 31/12/2028	HR / CS

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
	<p>recruitment/promotion campaigns and engagement with representative groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled • Racial group • Protestant <p>Use of welcoming statements, where applicable. Guaranteed Interview Scheme for people with a disability</p> <p>Engage with disability umbrella groups to promote recruitment opportunities.</p>				
7	<p>Seek to offer a range of work experience opportunities for young people, from a range of educational achievements and background.</p> <p>Raise awareness of Waterways Irelands jobs/skills through schools/colleges eg engineering, marketing/digital marketing, legal, HR, etc to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview skill training 	Facilitate 2 schools/colleges per annum, to include for example Transition Year students	Young people acquire skills and experience that will equip them to apply for positions throughout the regions within the organisation	<p>30/06/2026 31/12/2026</p> <p>30/06/2027 31/12/2027</p> <p>30/06/2028 31/12/2028</p>	CS / WG

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student mentor programme • Develop/run competition for students ie build a bridge / explore biodiversity/climate action within Waterways Ireland • Continue to Support national programmes ie Engineers Week • Support and engage female participation in Science Technology Engineering and Math subjects. 				

4. Deliver services that are accessible, inclusive and responsive to visitors to our property and waterways.

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
8	Continue to develop and work with strategic partners, for example, local authorities, community groups and organisations across Ireland to promote our facilities for	Number of programmes supported, providing opportunities for each of the identified target groups to participate in recreation /leisure.	<p>Increased visitor experience for those accessing WI facilities.</p> <p>Improved profile and understanding of our activities.</p>	<p>30/06/2026 31/12/2026</p> <p>30/06/2027 31/12/2027</p>	WG

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
	<p>engagement in recreational activities. Build partnerships with diverse community groups around environmental stewardship or access to the waterways</p> <p>Identified target groups include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older people • Women and girls • People with disabilities • Those living in areas of deprivation adjoining our waterways. 	<p>Target: 2 events per annum.</p> <p>Engaging with local community groups/foundations</p> <p>Create ways for people from underrepresented backgrounds into initiatives WI support.</p>	<p>Increased participation of under-represented groups on and along our waterways.</p> <p>Increase in number of applications to WI seeking approval for events targeting under-represented groups approval.</p> <p>Embed sustainability and climate action into our Equality Plans. For example, actions that contribute to sustainable and inclusive communities, with the aim of measurable outcomes improving over time.</p>	<p>30/06/2028</p> <p>31/12/2028</p>	E&H
9	<p>Increase Event / Awareness Programme in partnership with external stakeholders such as other government agencies, community groups, equality groups etc.</p> <p>Consult with Department of Communities; North South Ministerial Council Bodies and Equality Commission to</p>	<p>Establishment of at least one collaborative working group.</p>	<p>Partnerships to develop and increase opportunities for participation in leisure / recreation with external stakeholders e.g. Local County Councils.</p> <p>Accessibility of Information and Services with other public bodies.</p>	<p>31/12/2028</p>	<p>WG</p> <p>WG</p>

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
	explore the potential to create a NI/Ireland wide collaborative Working Group amongst public bodies such as Councils and ourselves				
10	<p>Ensure the principles of Access for All and Universal Design are central to the design, upgrade and development of facilities on and along our waterways, where practical, that people with disabilities have equality of opportunity to access the recreational facilities provided by the organisation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor accessibility of our buildings and facilities through Access Audits • Explore opportunities to create inclusive and engaging spaces along our waterways for example – Our greenways and towpaths provide accessible routes into natural waterside 	<p>Compliance with best practice and legislation.</p> <p>3 staff trained to undertake Access Auditing</p> <p>5 accessibility audits completed by end of Action Plan</p> <p>Completion of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shannon Greenway • Barrow Blueway • Grand Canal Greenway <p>Progress development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shannon-erne Blueway • Completion of the Royal Canal Greenway 	<p>Facilities on and along our waterways which are designed and built, where applicable to the highest standards of accessibility for all to use and enjoy.</p> <p>Reduction in obstacles to participation in leisure / recreation</p> <p>Accessibility of the built environment for all, where it is feasible and with consideration to navigational limitations and safety constraints.</p>	<p>31/12/2026</p> <p>31/12/2027</p> <p>31/12/2028</p>	AM / TS / Ops

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
	<p>environments, offering opportunities for users of varying abilities to experience nature through sight, sound, touch and scent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage umbrella groups such as Irish Wheelchair Association <p>Consult with the public and invite stakeholder interest groups to help shape services on major capital works as appropriate to ensure views of equality groups form part of the decision-making process.</p>				
11	<p>Ensure all third-party activity provider leases/agreements – include equality/disability clauses to ensure inclusivity.</p> <p>Collaborate with WI licensed providers to promote /encourage increased opportunities for equality groups experiencing obstacles to participation to take part.</p>	<p>Continue to build equality and sustainability into our licensing and leasing processes.</p> <p>Number of events run by third party licenced providers supported and/or promoted by WI per annum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support 2 events per annum. 	Obstacles to participation in leisure / recreation.	<p>31/12/2026</p> <p>31/12/2027</p> <p>31/12/2028</p>	<p>P&L</p> <p>CS / WG</p>

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
12	<p>Review our user communications to make sure they are clear and easy to understand, meet the needs of all users, and are available in other languages and alternative formats.</p> <p>Ensuring compliance with European Accessibility Act legislation on digital accessibility</p> <p>Continue to analyse equality related complaints to identify emerging trends which will allow for targeted intervention to improve the service and support we provide our disabled users.</p>	<p>Number of requests for information in alternative formats.</p> <p>Number of complaints of equality/disability nature reported on Complaints Register.</p>	<p>Creation of accessible communications, where applicable - written, spoken, digital and signed Ensuring compliance with European Accessibility Act legislation on digital accessibility</p>	<p>31/12/2026</p> <p>31/12/2027</p> <p>31/12/2028</p>	<p>CS / M&C</p> <p>CS / M&C</p>
13	<p>Develop an accessible information policy to highlight the organisation's commitment to communicating effectively with everyone.</p> <p>Develop opportunities to use alternative formats to communicate information for staff and public</p>	<p>2 promotional content (such as video, podcast or article) which include an alternative format of communication to raise awareness of the accessibility of Waterways Ireland facilities</p>	<p>Accessibility of Information and Services for staff and visitors to our facilities and waterways who experience information barriers. For example - digital accessible approaches that reduce environmental impact to</p>	<p>31/12/2026</p> <p>31/12/2027</p> <p>31/12/2028</p>	<p>CS / M&C / CEO</p>

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the use of accessible public communication boards/signage incorporating pictogram images, Braille, tactile contrasting, illustrations systems, QR code, etc on our facilities and at locations along our waterways. 		<p>provide a much greater range of tools to offer accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Or use of caption, audio description, sign language, training videos, Braille, large print; etc 		
14	Explore opportunities to promote the accessibility of Waterways Ireland's facilities	Run social media campaigns to raise awareness and, showcase the Accessibility of WI facilities/waterways	Wider audience showing accessibility of Information and Services for visitors to our facilities and waterways.	31/12/2026 31/12/2027 31/12/2028	M&C EDWG
15	Continue to develop links with advocacy and representative organisations to improve under representation in decision making processes across the equality groups.	Collaborate with service user's consultative forum representative of equality groups North and South established.	<p>Improved opportunities for engagement with and influence policy makers</p> <p>Robust understanding of the needs of our users and stakeholder groups and have identified and responded to areas for improvement.</p>	31/12/2026 31/12/2027 31/12/2028	CS

Ref	Actions	Performance Indicator	Outcome	Timescale	Function Lead
16	Explore opportunities to Achieve Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development Through Procurement.	Engage with Internal and External stakeholders for the delivery of sustainable and inclusive procurement. Create a fair, inclusive sustainable environment in all procurement and operational practices. Promote equal opportunity in supply chains. Support diverse and environmentally responsible suppliers.	Engagement with diverse suppliers. Contracts awarded with sustainability criteria. Carbon reduction in supply chain	31/122028	PT E&H
17	Formulation and delivery of long-term Sustainable Development planning to deliver the right amenities and services in the right places across the navigational network, transforming them for the longer term.	Development of a Sustainable Development Strategy Formulation and delivery of a Sustainable Development Plan for each of the 8 navigations, to build a pipeline of future projects	Direct future development investment decisions that can most effectively optimise Social, Economic and Environmental wellbeing value. Realise optimisation of Social, Economic and Environmental wellbeing value through future development investments.	31/12/2025 To 31/12/2026 31/12/2026 31/12/2028	I&D

Key to Function Lead abbreviations:

WG Equality & Diversity Working Group

HR Human Resources

E&H Environment & Heritage

I&D Innovation & Development

CEO Chief Executive's Office

Ops Operations

CS Corporate Services

TS Technical Services

M&C Marketing & Communications

P&L Property & Legal

AM Asset Management

FIN Finance

PT Procurement Team

Our Equality and Disability Action Plans are in line with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This does not affect our Equality and Disability commitment or actions. It demonstrates cross sections working together on achieving deliverables for positive outcomes.



SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities.



SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities)



SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals),



SDG 4 (Quality Education)



SDG 13 (Climate Action)



SDG3 – Good Health and wellbeing



SDG 15 – Life on the land.



SDG5 Gender Equality



SDG12 Responsible Consumption