



The Centre  
for Effective  
Services

# Realising the promise of national equality policy

An evaluation of the processes of implementation of  
three national equality strategies

May 2023



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The corresponding author is:

Lauren Kavanagh [lkavanagh@effectiveservices.org](mailto:lkavanagh@effectiveservices.org)

Oversight of the evaluation was provided by Inez Bailey (CEO of the Centre for Effective Services) and by an evaluation steering group with the following membership:

- Carol Baxter, Assistant Secretary, International Protection, Integration and Equality Division, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- Paul Geraghty, Principal Officer, Social Inclusion/Communities Unit, Department of Rural and Community Development
- Jane Ann Duffy, Principal Officer, Equality and Gender Equality Unit, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- Ciarán Madden, Assistant Principal, Research & Evaluation Unit, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- Conor McGinn, Assistant Principal, Traveller, Roma Policy and LGBTI Unit, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

**Disclaimer**

The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Children Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, which takes no responsibility for any errors or omissions in, or for the accuracy of, the information contained in this report.

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## Table of contents

Acknowledgements .....	i
List of abbreviations .....	viii
Executive Summary .....	ix
Purpose and scope of the evaluation .....	ix
Background and Context.....	ix
Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020 .....	x
National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 .....	x
National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 .....	x
Evaluation methodology .....	xi
Literature review .....	xi
Expert consultation .....	xii
Document review.....	xii
Stakeholder consultation .....	xii
Main findings .....	xiii
Addressing intersectionality.....	xiii
Role of Committees in Whole-of-Government Strategies.....	xiv
Challenges relating to capacity and commitment .....	xv
Importance of planning for implementation.....	xvi
Need to maintain a focus on implementation.....	xvi
Impact of disruptions on strategy implementation .....	xvi
Appropriateness of the monitoring system.....	xvii
Recommendations .....	xvii
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020 .....	1
National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020.....	2
National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 .....	3
Independent evaluation of the three equality strategies.....	3
Chapter 2: Literature review.....	5
Public policy as a means of promoting equality.....	6
Migrant integration.....	6
Traveller and Roma Inclusion .....	7
Gender equality .....	8
Limitations of public policy responses to inequality .....	9
Failure to adequately address intersectionality in public policy .....	9
Inadequate attention paid to policy implementation.....	11
Policy implementation .....	11
An implementation science approach to policy implementation.....	13
Implementing whole-of-government approaches.....	15

The value of implementation frameworks .....	17
Selecting a framework to evaluate implementation .....	17
Reviewing evaluation frameworks.....	20
Process models .....	21
Policy frameworks and toolkits.....	23
Incorporating an equality perspective .....	25
Summary .....	26
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	28
Evaluation approach .....	28
Design of the evaluation.....	29
Literature review.....	30
Purpose and approach .....	30
Procedure .....	30
Analysis and results .....	30
Expert consultation.....	31
Purpose and approach .....	31
Procedure .....	33
Analysis and results .....	36
Review of strategy documentation.....	36
Purpose and approach .....	36
Analysis and results .....	36
Stakeholder consultation.....	37
Purpose and approach .....	37
Procedure .....	37
Chapter 4: Establishing best practice for implementation of national equality policy .....	41
Implementation Approach 1: Taking a whole-of-government approach.....	47
Implementation Approach 2: Engaging with stakeholders.....	53
Implementation Approach 3: Conducting situation analysis, scoping and prioritisation .....	63
Implementation Approach 4: Setting objectives and action planning .....	68
Implementation Approach 5: Ensuring effective leadership .....	74
Implementation Approach 6: Securing adequate resources .....	78
Implementation Approach 7: Instituting implementation structures and teams.....	82
Implementation Approach 8: Developing an implementation plan .....	86
Implementation Approach 9: Developing staff capacity.....	93
Implementation Approach 10: Cultivating a supportive culture .....	96
Implementation Approach 11: Monitoring and evaluation .....	100
Implementation Approach 12: Learning from experience.....	105
Most important considerations .....	108
Addressing intersectionality .....	110
Summary .....	111
Taking a whole-of-government approach .....	112

A vision for equality .....	112
High government priority .....	113
Clear roles and responsibilities across government .....	113
Whole-of-government structures .....	114
The disruptive effect of government restructuring and staff turnover .....	115
Stakeholder Engagement.....	116
Initial consultation.....	117
Representation .....	119
Ongoing collaboration .....	120
Supporting stakeholder engagement .....	121
Strategies “owned” by government .....	122
Public communication about the strategies .....	123
Situation analysis, scoping and prioritization .....	125
Broad scope of the strategy objectives: “everything is a priority; nothing is a priority” .....	125
Prioritising alignment with existing government work .....	125
Focus on broad social categories .....	127
Objective setting and action planning .....	128
Processes for setting objectives and determining actions .....	128
‘Unwieldy’ lists of actions.....	129
Negotiating actions with departments .....	130
Clarity needed on actions.....	130
Strategies were “static”.....	130
Developing performance indicators, targets and measures .....	131
Ensuring effective leadership .....	133
High-level endorsement of strategies.....	133
Leadership of the coordinating department .....	134
Leadership in other departments and agencies.....	134
Securing adequate resources .....	135
Budgets and funding mechanisms .....	135
Adequacy of available resources .....	137
Instituting implementation structures and teams .....	138
Responsibility for implementation .....	138
The role of sub-committees.....	140
Creating an implementation plan .....	140
Developing staff capacity .....	141
Cultivating a supportive climate .....	142
Monitoring and evaluation .....	142
The monitoring function of the committees .....	142
Traffic light reporting system .....	143
Lack of disaggregated data .....	145
Difficulty assessing impact .....	145

Learning from experience .....	147
Scope to capture learning .....	147
Conclusion.....	147
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations .....	148
Role of Committees in Whole-of-Government Strategies.....	151
Challenges in Incorporating Emerging Issues and Maintaining Dynamism .....	151
Challenges relating to capacity and commitment .....	152
Issues with Indicator Sets for Progress Assessment.....	153
Importance of planning for implementation.....	154
Need to maintain a focus on implementation.....	155
Impact of disruptions on strategy implementation .....	155
Appropriateness of the monitoring system.....	156
Learning from evaluation.....	157
References .....	158
Appendix 1: List of expert panel members .....	164
Appendix 2: Lists of strategy documents reviewed .....	165

## List of tables

Table 1 Mapping of evaluation phases onto evaluation questions	29
Table 2 Areas of expertise of experts who participated in the modified Delphi process	34
Table 3 Breakdown of the national equality strategy/ies reported on by each interviewee	38
Table 4 Numbers of qualitative survey respondents, by informant group and equality strategy	39
Table 5 Framework of implementation stages, strategies and actions for implementation national equality strategies	42



## List of figures

Figure 1 The policy cycle .....	13
Figure 2 Four stages of implementation .....	14
Figure 3 Stages and enablers framework for implementing whole-of-government initiatives .....	24
Figure 4 Levels of stakeholder engagement .....	59

## List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
CES	Centre for Effective Services
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DAF	Dormant Accounts Fund
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
DSGBV	Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FRA	European Agency for Fundamental Rights
HSE	Health Services Executive
IHREC	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
LGBTI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and more
MIS	Migrant Integration Strategy
MISMCC	Migrant Integration Strategy Monitoring and Coordination Committee
NDIS	National Disability Inclusion Strategy
NIRN	[United States] National Implementation Research Network
NLIS	National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy
NSWG	National Strategy for Women and Girls
NTRIS	National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy
NWCI	National Women's Council of Ireland
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPMI	Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration
QIF	Quality Implementation Framework
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations

## Executive Summary

### Purpose and scope of the evaluation

In 2022, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) commissioned the Centre for Effective Services (CES) to conduct an independent evaluation of the processes used by government to implement three national equality strategies: the Migrant Integration Strategy (MIS), the National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG), and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS).

The evaluation was guided by four overarching questions:

1. **Evaluation Question 1:** What represents best practice in implementing national equality or human rights strategies or policies?
2. **Evaluation Question 2:** What processes were used by government to implement the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS?
3. **Evaluation Question 3:** How effective were the processes used to implement the national equality strategies?
4. **Evaluation Question 4:** In what ways could the processes of implementation be improved in successor or other national equality or human rights strategies or policies?

An evaluation was designed to address each of the four evaluation questions, and which sought to assess the extent to which the processes used to implement the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS were effective. With a defined focus on evaluating *processes*, it was beyond the scope of the evaluation to establish whether, and to what extent, the equality objectives of the strategies were achieved. It was also beyond the remit of the evaluation to assess any potential impact the strategies had on the groups and communities that they were targeting. Instead, this study was focused on drawing out lessons that could be used to improve the implementation of future national equality strategies.

### Background and Context

Promoting equality is a clearly stated priority of the Irish Government. Equality is described as “*a core guiding principle of our Republic*” in the 2020 Programme for Government, where commitments were set out to pursuing a more equal society for minoritised and marginalised groups. Ireland has also signed and ratified a series of international human rights agreements under which it has obligations to eliminate various forms of discrimination. In recent years, the Irish government has developed a series of national strategies aimed at addressing inequalities in Ireland. These include the National Disability Inclusion Strategy

(NDIS) and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, the Migrant Integration Strategy (MIS), the National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG), the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS), and both the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy (NLIS) and the National LGBTI+ Youth Strategy.

Together, these strategies create a policy framework for pursuing equality in Ireland. They set out visions, missions and values relating to the creation of a safer, fairer, and more inclusive society. They also include action plans that enumerate the specific measures designed to realise these visions.

The present study evaluates the ways in which three of these strategies have been implemented:

- The Migrant Integration Strategy
- The National Strategy for Women and Girls
- The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.

#### Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020

Since 2017, the [Migrant Integration Strategy](#) (MIS) has aimed to promote the inclusion of migrants in Irish society, with 76 actions targeting social inclusion and improved access to public services for migrants. The Strategy also aims to tackle racism and xenophobia. The Migrant Integration Strategy Monitoring and Coordination Committee (MISMCC) was established to oversee strategy implementation and comprised representatives of government departments, local authorities, and key stakeholders. Due to COVID-19, the Strategy was extended to the end of 2021.

#### National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020

The [National Strategy for Women and Girls](#) 2017-2020 (NSWG) is a whole-of-government framework adopted in May 2017 to advance women's empowerment. It contains six high-level objectives to promote equality for women and girls, advanced through 139 actions relating to 85 intended outcomes. The NSWG Strategy Committee consisted of government department representatives, women's groups, civil society actors, trade unions, and business representatives. Due to the impact of COVID-19, the implementation of the Strategy was extended to the end of 2021.

#### National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021

The Government published the [National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy](#) (NTRIS) in June 2017. The Strategy represents a whole-of-government approach to bringing about

meaningful change and progress for the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland. The NTRIS contains 149 actions, grouped under ten themes, that aim to improve the lives of the Traveller and Roma Communities. A steering group was established to oversee implementation and progress monitoring, bringing together government departments, state agencies, and representatives of Traveller and Roma civil society groups.

### Evaluation methodology

To evaluate the processes employed to implement the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS, a multi-stage, multi-stakeholder evaluation was designed. The evaluation consisted of four main phases:

1. A review of the relevant literature
2. A review of the existing written documentation relating to the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS
3. An expert consultation
4. Consultation with stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of each of the three strategies.

How each component of the evaluation maps onto the four main evaluation questions is shown in Table A.

**Table A Mapping of evaluation phases onto evaluation questions**

Evaluation Question	Evaluation Phase			
	Literature review	Document review	Expert consultation	Stakeholder consultation
Q1: What represents best practice?	●		●	
Q2: What processes were used?		●		●
Q3: How effective were the processes?	●	●	●	●
Q4: What could be improved?	●	●	●	●

### Literature review

A review of the relevant policy and academic literatures was conducted in order to identify what represents good practice when implementing national equality or human rights strategies or policies. The reviewed literature emphasised the value of using an implementation framework when evaluating implementation efforts. Dozens of implementation frameworks exist, created for use in different contexts and varying in the extent to which they have been tested empirically. No single framework was identified that could be used straightforwardly in the context of the implementation of national equality strategies. Consequently, a bespoke framework was created for the purposes of the

evaluation, drawing on the most relevant elements of existing high-quality frameworks and toolkits. The draft framework compiled for the evaluation consisted of 12 high-level implementation approaches and a series of 42 associated activities that the literature suggests are important for implementing whole-of-government strategies in the area of human rights and policy.

#### Expert consultation

An external consultation process was designed to refine and validate the framework created following the review of the literature. The aim was to seek expert consensus on the implementation approaches and activities that represent good practice when implementing government equality or human rights policy. A modified Delphi process was conducted, using two rounds of rating and review over a 12-week period. Twelve experts in implementation science, policy implementation, and/or human rights or equality policy participated in the process. Consensus was reached on the value of the framework consisting of implementation approaches and associated activities representing good practice when implementing national equality strategies. The finalised framework consists both of approaches and activities compiled from the literature and additional activities suggested by experts to help focus the framework more specifically on the implementation of Irish government equality strategies.

#### Document review

To understand how the MIS, NSWG, and NTRIS were implemented, a review of all available documentation relating to each strategy was undertaken. For each strategy, the review process started with the strategy text itself and followed with a review of other relevant documents, including public consultation calls, progress reviews, annual reports and traffic light progress reports and committee meeting documentation. A timeline of actions/events was developed for the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS, which provided a summary of the implementation journey of each strategy. Where gaps existed in the information on implementation processes that could be inferred from the desk review of documentation, the evaluation team sought to fill these with data collected from interviews and surveys with stakeholders.

#### Stakeholder consultation

The stakeholder consultation had two goals: to deepen understanding of the implementation processes of MIS, NSWG, and NTRIS and to gather stakeholder opinions on the effectiveness of these processes, areas of good practice, and areas for potential improvement. The consultation involved three groups. Group 1 consisted of individuals in the DCEDIY or the (then) Department of Justice and Equality who were responsible for planning and coordinating the strategy; Group 2 comprised representatives of other government

departments and state agencies who were involved in the implementation and monitoring of strategy actions, while Group 3 comprised representatives of civil society organisations on the strategies' committees. To ensure efficiency, each group's consultation approach matched their level of engagement in the implementation process and consisted of either individual interviews or qualitative surveys.

### Main findings

Once the document review and stakeholder consultation phases were complete, the processes of implementation of the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS were considered in light of the evidence-informed, expert-validated framework representing good practice in implementing national equality strategies. Key findings of the evaluation are summarised below.

### Addressing intersectionality

- While not the primary focus of this study, experts and stakeholders provided their views on how intersectionality is or should be addressed in national equality strategies in Ireland, with mixed findings. Some argued for maintaining separate equality strategies for different target groups, while others suggested the possibility of developing one overarching equality strategy within which intersectionalities could be addressed.
- The MIS and NTRIS were criticised for not adequately addressing the diversity of experiences within the populations they targeted. It was perceived that migrants were seen as one homogeneous group in the MIS, while the differences between Traveller and Roma experiences were not fully addressed in the NTRIS.
- Challenges to addressing intersectionality in public policy in Ireland were discussed, including a lack of available data and awareness among decision-makers about its importance. The reviewed literature indicated that even policy makers who do recognise the importance of intersectionality have struggled with incorporating it effectively into the policy cycle due to a lack of established methodologies. While it was beyond the scope of the present study to find a solution to the complex issue of incorporating intersectionality into public policy, the findings indicate the need for further exploration in this area.

### Importance of Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

- According to the literature, experts, and governmental and civil society representatives consulted in the evaluation, stakeholder engagement is crucial when developing and delivering national equality strategies. The involvement of civil

society representatives in the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS was highly valued by governmental representatives coordinating the strategies.

- Members of communities targeted by equality strategies are the best experts on the lived realities of structural inequalities, and consultations with those communities in the development phases of the MIS, NSWG, and NTRIS were thorough, far-reaching, and generally well-regarded by stakeholders. There was, however, a perceived disconnect between the results of the consultations and the actions eventually included in the final strategy texts.
- There was consensus in the literature and among experts that stakeholder engagement should not end after initial consultations but should be maintained throughout the lifetime of the strategies. The primary way that stakeholder engagement was maintained for the MIS, NSWG, and NTRIS was through the strategy committees on which civil society groups were represented. The committees were viewed as valuable spaces for government departments and civil society organisations to come together to build relationships and share expertise, and these interactions were perceived to be one of the main successes of the strategies. However, the actual role of civil society representatives on the committees was variously reported as unclear, limited, and lacking in influence.
- Stakeholders generally agreed that the committees had good representation of diverse voices, which was seen as a significant success of the strategies. Initially, the NTRIS Steering Group lacked sufficient Roma community representation, but once raised by civil society, this was subsequently addressed. However, for the MIS, stakeholders suggested that more efforts could have been made to ensure that the heterogeneity of migrant experiences was reflected, both in initial consultations and overall.
- Each of the national strategies was perceived by stakeholders to be "owned by government", but the literature and experts agree that it is important to move beyond merely consulting and informing non-governmental stakeholders towards more collaborative arrangements and co-ownership of equality policy.

#### Role of Committees in Whole-of-Government Strategies

- The literature on implementing large-scale initiatives highlights the importance of structures such as decision-making or steering bodies, technical or advisory groups, and implementation teams. The MIS, NSWG and NTRIS strategies relied heavily on the steering/strategy committees to serve multiple purposes. These committees may not be well-suited for all functions, due to their large membership and quarterly meeting schedule.



- There is a strong consensus among experts and stakeholders that clear roles and responsibilities are essential for effective implementation of whole-of-government strategies. The evaluation revealed that this clarity was somewhat lacking in the implementation of the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS. Dedicated structures with explicitly-defined terms of reference may improve implementation processes for future whole-of-government strategies.

#### Challenges in Incorporating Emerging Issues and Maintaining Dynamism

- Civil society representatives on strategy committees were tasked with raising emerging issues or challenges for the communities they represent, so that these could be incorporated into the strategies. However, when such issues were raised, these were rarely acted upon.
- Each of the three strategies was intended to be dynamic and to incorporate new actions over time. In reality, the strategies were felt to be static and limited in their ability to respond to emerging issues.
- The large number of actions initially included in the strategies made it difficult to incorporate new issues over time, and the long lists of actions were described as "unwieldy" by some stakeholders.
- The reviewed literature suggests, and experts recommend, that government strategic plans should focus on a limited number of key priority objectives and associated actions to ensure a focused strategy that is feasible to implement. This was not found to be the case for the MIS, NSWG or NTRIS.

#### Challenges relating to capacity and commitment

- Ensuring commitment and buy-in from government departments and state agencies assigned responsibility for implementing MIS, NSWG and NTRIS actions has been a major challenge. "Strategy fatigue" was reported by representatives from departments and agencies who are committed to delivering multiple actions across multiple initiatives, including whole-of-government initiatives, which constrains their capacity to deliver.
- There may be underdeveloped understandings of equality and related concepts among some civil servants working in the area of equality. Developing staff expertise to work in the area of equality policy may be necessary.

#### Issues with Indicator Sets for Progress Assessment

- The identification, development, and use of indicators of progress for the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS was unsatisfactory, making it impossible to assess the extent to which the strategies were implemented as intended.

- Indicator sets were not identified or developed before strategies were launched, and it was difficult to identify appropriate indicators retrospectively. Strategy actions should be clear, specific, and measurable in order to support the identification of appropriate indicators. However, many actions in the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS were vaguely worded, making it difficult to understand what tasks or activities were necessary to achieve them. Further, the very large numbers of objectives and actions in the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS meant retrospective development of indicators was demanding and time-consuming and, ultimately, unsuccessful.

#### Importance of planning for implementation

- The literature and consulted experts emphasised the importance of implementation plans for the effective implementation of large-scale cross-government initiatives like national equality strategies. There was also consensus that implementation planning should be done *early* in the strategy development process. An implementation plan for NTRIS was initiated and created by civil society groups later in the lifetime of that strategy, though it is unclear to what degree this was, or could be, effectively operationalised by the strategy steering group. No implementation plans were produced during the development of the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS.

#### Need to maintain a focus on implementation

- Stakeholders praised the commitment, knowledge, and leadership of the teams coordinating the strategies in the DCEDIY. However, there was potential for a stronger role for these teams in terms of ensuring effective implementation of strategy actions, even allowing for the fact that most actions came under the operational responsibility of other departments and agencies. Committee members questioned whether any follow-up action was taken by the DCEDIY coordination teams when strategy actions were reported as experiencing problems or delays in monitoring reviews.

#### Impact of disruptions on strategy implementation

- The restructuring of government departments in 2020 caused considerable disruption to the implementation of strategies, leading to a perceived depletion in the resources available for strategy implementation. Associated staff changes resulted in the loss of institutional memory and of rich insights into and knowledge of the strategies.
- After government department restructuring, turnover on the strategy committees has remained high, particularly among government department and state agency representatives. Government representatives who had become involved in strategy coordination or implementation at a later stage described difficulties in "getting up to

speed" on the strategies, as it was not possible to piece together the trajectories of the strategies from existing strategy documentation such as meeting minutes or traffic light monitoring documents.

- While mentioned less frequently by stakeholders, some evaluation participants discussed the disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the strategies.

#### Appropriateness of the monitoring system

- The traffic light monitoring system used by all three strategy committees was perceived by stakeholders as superficial, and there were mixed views on its effectiveness. The user-friendliness of the system was also questioned by many.

#### Recommendations

This evaluation has produced a set of recommendations that are likely to improve the implementation of future national equality strategies. These recommendations reflect key messages on best practice from the literature and the views of experts, as well as the views of stakeholders involved in the implementation of the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS.

	<b>Address intersectionality</b>
1	Further research should be carried out to explore how an intersectional approach can be effectively incorporated into various phases of the policy cycle.
	<b>Collaborate with stakeholders</b>
2	Stakeholder consultations for future national equality strategies should seek to build on the successes of the consultations for the NTRIS, MIS and NSWG, which were felt to be thorough and to capture a broad cross-section of views.
3	Efforts should be made to ensure that key learnings emerging from stakeholder consultations are accurately reflected in national equality strategy texts or, when they are not, there should be transparent communication with stakeholders regarding how and why such decisions were made.
4	Resources should be allocated to support the capacity of seldom heard and marginalised groups to participate fully in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national equality strategies.
5	Civil society representatives should have a more formal and influential role in strategy implementation and monitoring, moving towards more collaborative arrangements or co-ownership of strategies.
	<b>Adopt appropriate structures</b>
6	It may be helpful to reconsider the reliance on steering/strategy committees to serve multiple purposes, as they may not be well-suited to fulfilling all necessary functions. Consideration should be given to the creation of dedicated structures with explicitly-defined terms of reference, such as decision-making or steering bodies, technical or advisory groups, and implementation teams.
	<b>Strive for focused and dynamic strategies</b>
7	Action should be taken to ensure that each equality strategy is actually dynamic, i.e., that there are clear mechanisms through which emerging issues or challenges can be responded to throughout the strategy cycle.
8	Large, unfocused strategies are difficult to implement. Future strategic plans should

	include a limited number of key priority objectives and associated actions.
	<b>Address capacity issues</b>
9	Strategy fatigue' should be combatted by reducing the number of actions that any individual department or agency is responsible for implementing. This is likely to help with commitment and buy-in and ensuring focus and accountability in implementation.
10	Concerted efforts should be made to ensure the availability of adequate financial resources and staff time to properly develop, coordinate, and implement national equality strategies.
11	Diversity among the teams responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing equality strategies should be aimed for, and an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) lens should be applied to leadership practices.
	<b>Develop suitable indicators of progress</b>
12	Indicators sets should be identified or developed before equality strategies are launched, rather than retrospectively.
13	For every objective included in a national equality strategy, 3-5 outcome or impact indicators should be selected; for every action, one output indicator should be identified. If no indicator of progress (with a baseline and target value) can be identified for an action, and if it is not possible to develop one, then that action should not be included in the strategy text.
	<b>Plan for implementation</b>
14	An implementation plan should be created in parallel with any future equality strategy development. This plan should be based on input from all departments and agencies tasked with implementing strategy actions and feedback on these implementation plans should be sought from civil society representatives.
	<b>Pay ongoing attention to implementation</b>
15	Greater administrative support should be provided to teams coordinating the strategies in the DCEDIY to allow for greater focus and attention on issues related to actual implementation of strategy actions.
16	Outside of the committee meeting structure, the strategy coordination teams should engage in bilateral communication and troubleshooting with departments and agencies in cases where implementation of actions have stalled. An update should then be given to the wider committee membership.
	<b>Minimise the potential impact of disruptions on strategy implementation</b>
17	A comprehensive repository of knowledge on the various stages of strategy development and implementation should be created, including decisions taken and reflections on what went well, what challenges were experienced, and how these were handled. In the context of high turnover of equality strategy committee members, this repository could minimise the disruption of losing institutional memory.
	<b>Promote the effective collection and use of monitoring information</b>
18	Consideration should be given to moving beyond the monitoring "snapshot" offered by the traffic light system towards fuller narrative accounts of progress that allow for strategic input and troubleshooting by stakeholders.
19	There should be greater use of monitoring information to inform adaptive decision making throughout the lifetimes of the strategies.
	<b>Act to implement learnings from evaluation activities</b>
20	Action should be taken to operationalise the evidence-informed and expert-validated framework of implementation approaches and activities developed as part of this evaluation. Doing so should improve the implementation of future national equality strategies, helping to realise the promise of equality policy.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Promoting equality is a clearly stated priority of the Irish Government. Equality is described as “*a core guiding principle of our Republic*” in the 2020 Programme for Government, where commitments are set out to pursuing a more equal society for women and for minoritised groups including migrants, individuals with disabilities, Traveller and Roma communities, and LGBTBI+ communities. Ireland has also signed and ratified a series of international human rights agreements, under which it has obligations to eliminate various forms of discrimination.

In recent years, the Irish government has developed a series of national strategies aimed at addressing inequalities in Ireland. These include the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, the Migrant Integration Strategy (MIS), the National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG), the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS), and both the National LGBTBI+ Inclusion Strategy (NLIS) and the National LGBTBI+ Youth Strategy.

Together, these strategies create a policy framework for pursuing equality in Ireland. They set out visions, missions and values relating to the creation of a safer, fairer, and more inclusive Ireland. They also include action plans that enumerate the specific measures designed to realise these visions.

In 2022, the Centre for Effective Services (CES) was commissioned by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to evaluate the processes used by government to implement three of these national equality strategies: the MIS, the NSWG and the NTRIS.

### Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020

Since 2017, the [Migrant Integration Strategy](#) (MIS) has been the primary policy framework adopted by the Irish Government to promote the integration of all migrants who are legally in the State. The Strategy contains 76 actions aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion across all aspects of Irish society, including increased focus on social inclusion measures and improved access for migrants to public services. The MIS also aims to tackle racism and xenophobia.

The Migrant Integration Strategy Monitoring and Coordination Committee (MISMCC) was established to oversee the implementation of the Strategy and to examine and report on issues concerning integration. The MISMCC was chaired by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and comprised representatives of government departments and state agencies, local authorities, and other key stakeholders from local communities, the business sector, sporting and arts organisations, and other civil society organisations.

In November 2020, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth announced his decision to extend the Strategy to the end of 2021, as the Committee's ability to engage and report on the actions contained within the Strategy was significantly impacted by the onset of COVID-19.

### [National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020](#)

The [National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020](#) (NSWG), adopted by Government and launched in May 2017, provides a whole-of-government framework to advancing women's empowerment.

The Strategy contains six high-level objectives which aim to advance socio-economic equality for women and girls: to promote their physical and mental well-being; to increase their visibility in society and equal and active citizenship; to promote women's participation in leadership; to combat gender-based violence; and to embed gender equality in decision-making. These objectives are advanced through 139 actions relating to 85 intended outcomes, undertaken by government departments and state agencies in cooperation with social partners and civil society.

A strategy committee was established with responsibility for preparation, implementation and monitoring of the NSWG. The committee was chaired by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, and membership consisted of government department representatives, women's groups, other civil society actors, the trade union movement and business representatives.

In view of the significant impact of COVID-19 on planned work, the implementation of the Strategy was extended from 2020 to the end of 2021.

## National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021

The Government published the [National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy](#) (NTRIS) in June 2017. The Strategy represents a whole-of-government approach to bringing about meaningful change and progress for the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland.

The NTRIS contains 149 actions, grouped under ten themes that aim to improve the lives of the Traveller and Roma Communities: Cultural Identity; Education; Employment and the Traveller Economy; Children and Youth; Health; Gender Equality; Anti-discrimination and equality; Accommodation; Traveller and Roma Communities and Public Services.

The NTRIS Steering Group was established to bring government departments and state agencies together with representatives of both Traveller and Roma civil society groups to ensure a focus on the issues that most impact the Traveller and Roma communities. The Steering Group was tasked with responsibility for overseeing the implementation and monitoring of progress for the strategy.

## Independent evaluation of the three equality strategies

In 2021, Government committed to commissioning an independent evaluation of the three equality strategies for the purpose of informing future iterations of the three national equality strategies which had been committed to in the 2020 Programme for Government.

The CES evaluation team was tasked with designing an evaluation to answer the following questions:

- What are the key success factors in implementing government equality and human rights strategies and policies?
- What processes were used for the implementation of the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS?
- Was the implementation of the three strategies based on effective consultation, governance, monitoring and reporting practices?
- What specific factors acted as either enablers of, or barriers to, the delivery of actions under each of the three strategies?
- How might the implementation processes and governance structures for these strategies be built upon to inform the development of future equality strategies?

With a clear focus on evaluating *processes*, it was beyond the scope of the evaluation to establish the extent to which strategy actions had been implemented or equality objectives achieved. It was also beyond the remit of the commissioned evaluation to assess any potential impact the strategies had on the groups and communities that they were targeting.

Instead, this study was focused on making recommendations, drawing on lessons learned, that could be used to strengthen the implementation of future national equality strategies. A multi-stage, multi-stakeholder evaluation was designed in order to address the evaluation aims. Its methods and findings are described in detail in the following chapters.



## Chapter 2: Literature review

The Irish Government has developed and launched a suite of national equality strategies in recent years, representing a comprehensive policy framework for pursuing a more equal Ireland. These strategies aspire to a vision of Ireland in which minoritised, marginalised or other historically disadvantaged groups are empowered, integrated and/or fully included in Irish society, and where they are supported and facilitated to fulfil their full potential. Public policy, however, does not succeed or fail on its merits alone; rather, the degree to which policy objectives are achieved depends heavily on the processes of implementation (Hudson et al., 2019). As a result, governments are now paying more attention than ever to how the implementation phase of the policy cycle can be strengthened (Hunter et al., 2020). Learnings from the field of implementation science can inform this process (Burke et al., 2012; CES, 2022).

Implementation science emerged in the 2000s from the need to address the challenges associated with the use of research to routinely deliver evidence-based practice in health care (Nilsen, 2015; Westerlund et al., 2019). It is focused on the identification of the best methods to bridge the gap between what is known from the research and what happens in practice. The scope of implementation research has since extended far beyond healthcare and has been applied to professional practice in a range of domains (Tabak et al., 2012). Implementation science also has much to offer to policy makers who are keen to bridge the gap between what is intended in policy and what is delivered in practice (Burke et al., 2012; CES, 2022), including in the area of equality (Shelton et al., 2021).

The Centre of Effective Services has been commissioned by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to evaluate the processes of implementation of three recent national equality strategies: the National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG), the Migrant Integration Strategy (MIS), and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS), in order that the evaluation findings might inform future equality policy development and implementation.

To this end, the theoretical and empirical literatures on implementation and policy implementation were reviewed, with particular attention paid to what is known about delivering on the goals of government equality or human rights policy. This review has informed the development of a methodology for evaluating the processes of implementation of the NSWG, NTRIS and MIS, the rationale for which is also described in this chapter.

## Public policy as a means of promoting equality

The causes and consequences of inequalities for structurally vulnerable groups are deep-rooted, far-reaching, and multidimensional. As a result, they require systematic policy responses that are large in scale and that target multiple levels of society. While public policy has a key role to play in addressing inequalities and ensuring human rights are upheld, ambitious equality goals have failed to be realised for groups including women and girls, migrants, and minority ethnic groups such as Travellers and Roma in many post-industrial democracies (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2020; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2018, 2020).

### Migrant integration

While migrant integration systems have improved in many countries in recent decades, there is considerable work left to do to ensure that migrants, and particularly humanitarian migrants<sup>1</sup> who tend to have the poorest outcomes, become fully integrated into their host societies (OECD, 2016, 2018b). Countries vary in the extent to which they have succeeded in achieving migrant integration through public policy approaches. Scandinavian countries, for example, have extensive experience of, and advanced policy responses to, the integration of humanitarian migrants, while countries such as Canada and Australia have substantial experience of integrating resettled migrants<sup>2</sup> (OECD, 2016). However, many European countries have had difficulty coping with the increased scale of migration in recent years (OECD, 2016), and immigrants in European countries tend to have worse social and economic outcomes than migrants in other OECD countries (OECD, 2018b). In particular, migrants to Europe from non-EU countries tend to have worse outcomes (OECD, 2018b). While most EU countries now have migrant integration strategies in place, many of these have not been subject to effective implementation processes like systematic assessment, monitoring and review (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017) and have had only limited success in achieving their objectives.

Ireland is a relatively recent country of immigration. In Census 1997, just 6% of the population was born outside of the Republic of Ireland; of these, over 71% were born in Britain (many to Irish parents) (Gilmartin & Dagg, 2022). In 2022, it is estimated that just under 704,000, or 13.8% of the population are non-Irish nationals (Central Statistics Office, 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> Humanitarian migration relates to the movement of people who feel forced to move, including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, victims of trafficking and unaccompanied migrant minors (Talleraas et al., 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Resettlement refers to the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State which has volunteered to admit them and grant permanent residence (Talleraas et al., 2022).

According to Census 2022, Ireland's population has increased by 7.6% since 2016 and now stands at 5.12 million. More than half of this increase is attributable to net inward migration (ESRI, 2022). The places of origin of migrants to Ireland have also become much more diverse. In the year to April 2022, there was a 15-year high in immigration and of the 120,700 immigrants, 24% were returning Irish nationals, 20% were other EU nationals, and just 3% were UK nationals. The remaining 53% were other nationals, including almost 28,000 Ukrainians (23% of all immigrants in that 12-month period) (Central Statistics Office, 2022).

Compared to EU averages, migrant integration outcomes in Ireland are favourable across several indicators. Migrants in Ireland had higher employment rates, higher median net income, and better self-perceived health in 2020 than the EU averages for migrants. However, when compared to Irish nationals in Ireland, migrants are at a greater risk of poverty, have lower median net incomes, and much lower rates of property ownership (Gilmartin & Dagg, 2022). Furthermore, data from the European Social Survey indicate that attitudes towards immigration are less favourable in Ireland than on average in Western Europe (McGinnity et al., 2018). Attitudes towards migrant groups among Irish nationals are also much more negative for some migrant groups than others, with less favourable attitudes to Muslim and Roma migrants (McGinnity et al., 2018). Non-Irish nationals were more likely to report that they had experienced discrimination in the previous two years (27%) than Irish nationals (16%) (CSO, 2019a).

### Traveller and Roma Inclusion

Travellers and Roma<sup>3</sup> have a long history of persecution and exclusion in Europe, where they are still denied their basic human rights (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020). A recent survey by the EU Agency for Fundamental rights on Travellers and Roma in six EU countries, including Ireland, outlines "*a bleak, but familiar, picture of discrimination and deprivation fuelled by anti-Gypsyism*" (FRA, 2020, p.1), with Travellers and Roma experiencing huge problems in relation to accessing housing, poverty and exclusion, healthcare, education, discrimination and harassment (FRA, 2020), despite ambitious goals set in the 2011 EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Travellers' and 'Roma' are umbrella terms used in line with the Council of Europe definitions, comprising Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichal, Boyash/Rudari, Balkan Egyptians, Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal) and groups such as Travellers, Yenish, the populations designated under the administrative term Gens du voyage, as well as the diversity of people who identify as Gypsies (Council of Europe, 2012).

In Census 2015, the total number of Irish Travellers ordinarily resident in Ireland was 30,987, or 0.7% of the total population (CSO, 2017). Of the six countries in which the FRA survey mentioned above was conducted, Ireland had the lowest rate of employment for Travellers (15%, compared to a high of 55% in the Netherlands), and the second highest proportion of Travellers who felt discriminated against because of their background (65%, compared to a low of 19% in Belgium). Over 90% of Travellers in Ireland reported that there were not enough places for them to live (FRA, 2020). No official statistics are available on the number of Roma in Ireland, although it has been estimated to be in the region of 5,000 (HSE, n.d.). Research conducted with this population has shown that there are high levels of poverty and deprivation among the Roma community in Ireland, who also experience high levels of discrimination and barriers to accessing services (Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre & Department of Justice and Equality, 2018).

#### Gender equality

While it has yet to reach the status of a core issue on many national agendas, there has been growing interest in, commitment to, and attention paid to promoting gender equality through public policy in many countries around the world (Engeli & Mazur, 2018). Worldwide, gender equality programmes have been developed, gender dimensions have been embedded into what were initially gender-blind programmes, and gender mainstreaming (the integration of a gender perspective into all aspects of a programme or policy) is now often emphasised as a crucial component for delivery on gender equality policy outcomes (Engeli & Mazur, 2018). However, many of these policies have had only qualified success to date. As Engeli and Mazur (2018) note: “*While a rich scholarship examines gender policy and the state, the recipe for successful policies still remains as elusive as the formula to turn lead into gold.*” (p. 112). While there has undoubtedly been progress, true gender equality remains a distant reality in most Western democracies, despite concerted policy efforts (Engeli & Mazur, 2018).

In Ireland, there is a mixed picture when it comes to gender equality. On the 2022 version of EU Gender Equality Index, a composite index including data on work, income, power, knowledge, and health outcomes, Ireland had the seventh highest score among EU countries (with higher scores indicating greater gender equality) (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). However, when looking at some of the individual domains in the index, the picture is less positive. In the area of gender equality in political decision-making, for example, Ireland ranked only 18<sup>th</sup> (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022) and

women in Ireland are also vastly underrepresented in senior roles in business and in the civil service and a range of other sectors (CSO, 2019b). Rates of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of women and girls in Ireland remain worryingly high (Women's Aid, 2021).

### Limitations of public policy responses to inequality

The questions then arise as to *why* equality policies have failed to live up to governments' ambitious equality visions and *how* public policy responses to inequalities can be improved.

### Failure to adequately address intersectionality in public policy

One explanation offered for the limited successes of public equality policy is that decision makers interested in pursuing equality agendas have typically selected their individual categories of interest (women, for example, or migrants) and have designed policies attempting to target these as distinct groups, without paying proper attention to how they intersect with other social categories. Paying insufficient attention to intersectionality in public policy has been posited as one major reason why attempts to redress inequalities have had only limited success. With origins in Black feminist writing, Indigenous feminism, Global feminism, postcolonial theory and queer theory, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) has become a prominent tool for theorising identity and oppression (Hankivsky et al., 2014). Increasingly, the theoretical framework of intersectionality is applied to research across a range of disciplines and fields; however, it has been comparatively slower in gaining traction in the sphere of public policy (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2010), although it is an area of growing interest (Hankivsky & Jordan-Zachery, 2019).

In broad terms, intersectionality recognizes that an individual's experience is influenced by the interaction of the vast array of cultural, social and structural roles with which they identify and contexts by which they are shaped (Crenshaw, 1991). Such a perspective considers how social identities such as race, ethnicity, social class, age, disability status, gender identity and sexual orientation interact to create unique meanings and complex experiences within and across societal groups (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2019; Presseau et al., 2022). In Ireland, for example, full equality and inclusion has not yet been achieved for LGBTI+ people, with high levels of discrimination still reported among this group (CSO, 2019a). As mentioned above, very high levels of discrimination are experienced among Travellers and Roma in Ireland. There is research evidence indicating that LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma experience particular challenges arising from the intersection of their sexual or gender and ethnic identities that may require tailored policy responses (Sartori, 2022).

In the context of public policy, an intersectionality approach aims to identify and address the ways in which specific policies address the inequalities experienced by diverse social groups. According to an intersectionality perspective, in efforts to tackle complex inequities, a one-size-fits-all approach will not succeed (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2019); since policy is not experienced identically by all groups, no social problem that public policy attempts to address should be seen through a single-axis framework (Garcia & Zajicek, 2021; Hankivsky & Cormier, 2019).

Intersectionality as a framework, therefore, has commonalities with other critical lenses that highlight that policy is not neutral, that it is experienced differently by different populations, and therefore that *“important differences and concomitant needs have to be taken into account when developing, implementing, and evaluating public policy”* (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2019, p. 70). However, intersectionality diverges from those approaches designed to accommodate difference by targeting single identity markers like immigrant status, disability or gender. Intersectionality holds central the premise that *“focusing on single markers leads to a false classification of people that simply does not reflect lived realities. People’s lives, their experiences, and subject positions vis-à-vis policy are created by intersecting social locations”* (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2019, p. 71). It can be argued that, from an intersectionality perspective, targeted policies can be as ineffective as general policies, as both fail to address multiple identities and diversity within groups (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2019).

Similarly, intersectionality differs from an approach to public policy that attempts to address inequality and diversity by starting with a single identity marker (e.g., gender) and then adding others. Such an additive approach assumes unidimensional categories based on a uniform set of experiences that can be simply combined or brought together to understand differences (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2019). This is not uncommon in public policy, but it is an approach that fails to get at the complex interrelationships between wider social inequalities and individual experiences of discrimination (Garcia & Zajicek, 2021; Hankivsky & Cormier, 2019). Hankivsky and Cormier (2019) argued that even policy makers who recognise the importance of intersectionality have struggled with realising its promise, as they have lacked methodological clarity on how such a perspective can be effectively incorporated into various phases of the policy cycle.



Inadequate attention paid to policy implementation

A second major reason posited for why equality goals have not been achieved by public policy is that insufficient attention has been paid to the post-adoption phases of the policy cycle: implementation and evaluation (Engeli & Mazur, 2018). In the context of gender equality policies specifically, Engeli and Mazur (2018) argue that:

*Long is the list of policies that looked beautiful on the statute book but were never fully implemented. At other times, governments adopt policies that they simply have no intention of implementing. What is more often the case, however, is that governments make policies for which they lack the financial and/or organisational capacity to fully put into practice (p. 113).*

These authors note that while much attention is paid to the agenda setting and adoption phases of policy formation, with particular focus on problem definition, policy debates and the content of policies, much less attention is paid to what happens after a policy or strategy is agreed upon. Similarly, Hill and Hupe (2015) argue that because implementation happens 'late' in the policy cycle, it tends to be seen as secondary or subordinate to agenda-setting and policy formulation. They point out that in policy making, implementation is often viewed and addressed as merely 'the rest'. This can be costly, as implementation is identified as one of the four main contributors to policy failure (along with overly optimistic expectations, inadequate collaborative policymaking, and the vagaries of the political cycle) (Hudson et al., 2019; Hunter et al., 2020)

Engeli and Mazur (2018) argue that the real roots of the success or failure of equality policies lie in the post-adoption phases, and they advocate strongly for a shift in focus towards implementation and evaluation if equality goals are to be achieved through public policy.

### Policy implementation

Implementation can be defined in its most broad terms as the carrying out of a plan for doing something. The focus is on the operationalisation of the plan rather than the content of the plan itself (Burke et al., 2012). In the policy context, after a public problem has been placed on the policy agenda, alternatives have been proposed to tackle the issue, and the government has decided on their desired course of action, the plan must then be put into action. The activities, effort, knowledge and resources applied to translating policy decisions into action are categorised as the implementation phase of the policy cycle (Howlett, 2018) (Figure 1). Until the early 1970s, implementation was mostly regarded as an unproblematic,

almost automatic process, with an underlying assumption that once a policy decision was made, civil or public servants would simply carry it out in a neutral, technical fashion (Howlett, 2018). However, throughout the 1970s, numerous studies were published that described the problems inherent in trying to execute policy objectives (Howlett, 2018).

These studies led to a wave of policy implementation work throughout the 1980s (e.g., Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980) that tried to understand the factors that influence the implementation of public policy. This work challenged the assumption that policy implementation would happen 'automatically' by attempting to explain why implementation 'failed' in some cases, and to show that implementation is a political process of similar or greater complexity to policy formulation (Brynard, 2005). However, this so-called second generation of policy implementation research soon became mired in a debate over whether a 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' approach to the study of policy implementation should be taken, i.e., whether the focus should be on policy officials and government decision makers, or on people implementing policy on the ground. According to Howlett (2018, p. 408), this debate, while largely methodological in nature, "*effectively froze theorization and model building into two falsely competitive paradigms*" and "*effectively blocked theoretical development in the area for decades*". As a result, "*the study of policy implementation within the policy sciences remains fractured and largely anecdotal*" (Howlett, 2018, p. 405).

Newer ideas that reconcile bottom-up and top-down approaches to policy implementation have gained traction in recent decades. Governance concepts such as collaborative governance and network governance emphasise that solving problems and achieving collective objectives cannot be accomplished by political or administrative actors alone (Wang & Ran, 2021). They therefore emphasise collective decision-making processes that directly involve non-state actors, based on normative principles such as trust, diversity, consensus, inclusiveness, deliberativeness, and the sharing of power (Wang & Ran, 2021). Improving policy design through collaboration between upstream and downstream actors, including those likely to be affected or targeted by policy and other non-governmental actors, is posited to improve implementation (Ansell et al., 2017). Multi-actor collaboration can help to reduce the gap between what is intended and what is delivered by policy, by capitalising on the valuable knowledge about the nature of problems and the types of solutions that are likely to work on the ground (Ansell et al., 2017).



## An implementation science approach to policy implementation

Implementation science has the potential to shed light on how public policy can be effectively implemented, as there are similarities between implementing policies and other types of intervention (Burke et al., 2012; CES, 2022). Enablers important in the context of implementing practices and programmes, including leadership, communication and feedback mechanisms, are also important for policy implementation (Colgan et al., 2014). While implementation of a policy or programme is not linear, there is consensus in the literature that implementation is a process that takes time and occurs in stages, each requiring different conditions and activities (NIRN, 2022). Although different authors use different terminology to refer to the various stages of implementation, the research points to four main distinct phases of implementation (e.g., Fixsen et al., 2005). Building on this implementation research and CES's practical experience of supporting implementation, the four phases of implementation are summarised in Figure 2. The first two phases involve planning and preparation activities. In the third phase, the intervention is implemented for the first time and is reviewed and refined before being fully implemented in the fourth stage. Those implementing a policy or programme need to pay attention to all four stages if the implementation is to be a success (CES, 2022).

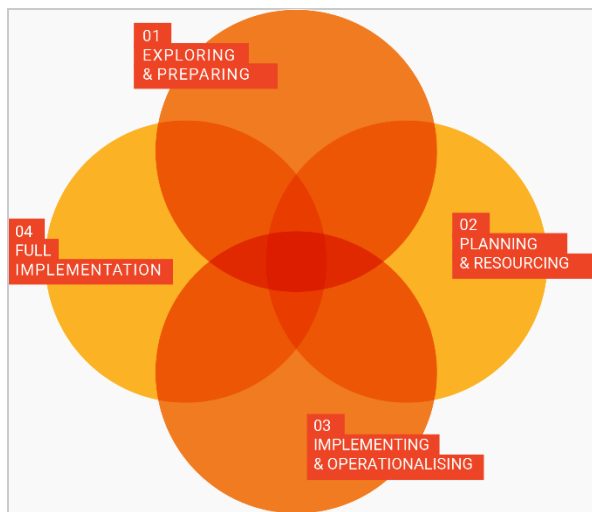
In the context of policy implementation, while policy formulation/development and policy implementation have traditionally been viewed as distinct phases of the policy cycle (Figure 1), in practice they overlap significantly. Poor policy design is a common reason for poor implementation (CES, 2022). Similarly, well-designed policies can be poorly implemented (Gold, 2014). Thinking about how a policy will be implemented should be a central feature of the policy development stage.

**Figure 1 The policy cycle**



Source: The CES Guide to Implementation (2022)

**Figure 2 Four stages of implementation**



Source: CES (2022), adapted from (Fixsen et al., 2005)

While the implementation of public policy has much in common with the implementation of other types of intervention (e.g., a single evidence-based programme, service, or practice), it also differs in some identifiable ways. For example, a broad range of stakeholders is involved in implementing government policy or strategy, often including government departments, agencies, service providers, and other organisations. This can make policy implementation diffuse and challenging (Colgan et al., 2014). As a result, objectives, actions need to be clearly articulated and key actors identified during the process of policy development to ensure that these diverse stakeholders can interpret and implement them as intended .

Furthermore, the context for policy implementation is often complex. While a given government strategy or policy is being implemented, a variety of other implementation efforts may be underway throughout the system. Policies and strategies arising from various parts of government may cut across or contradict one another, or they may interact with one another in ways that were unintended. More complex governance and accountability arrangements are therefore required to coordinate implementation of policy than are needed when implementing a more discrete, standalone programme or practice. Policy problems associated with inequality span many government departments, and responsibility for relevant policy instruments spans many levels of government (Cairney et al., 2021). This can result in policy incoherence that contributes to a wide gap between expectations or intentions and actual policy outcomes (Cairney et al., 2021). One way of maximising policy

coherence when tackling social issues like equality is through the adoption of a joined-up, whole-of-government approach.

#### Implementing whole-of-government approaches

A whole-of-government approach can be defined as one in which government departments and state agencies work across portfolio boundaries to develop integrated policies and programmes in pursuit of shared, complementary or interdependent goals (Christensen & Lægneid, 2007; Orzenzi et al., 2022). It has variously been termed ‘whole-of-government’, ‘joined-up government’, ‘horizontal management’, and ‘integrated government’ (Christensen & Lægneid, 2007). Whole-of-government approaches have been applied to the management of crises (Christensen et al., 2016), as a means to deliver integrated services (Colgan et al., 2014) and, most relevant for our current purposes, to tackling deep-seated, complex or intractable policy issues like inequality (Karre et al., 2012).

With complex causes and no easy solutions, there is increasing recognition that deep-rooted social problems (so-called ‘wicked problems’ like inequality [Head, 2017]) require well-designed whole-of-government responses. A whole-of-government approach to a wicked problem avoids having different policy responses emanating from different departments that may contradict or undermine one another. Such an approach also helps to maximise the impact of public policy, by using all the instruments at the disposal of the State in an integrated way in pursuit of a particular outcome, allowing the achievement of goals that an isolated or ‘siloeed’ approach would not (Colgan et al., 2014).

The Centre for Effective Services (CES) published a report in 2014 (Colgan et al., 2014) on the implementation of whole-of-government approaches, in recognition of a growing trend at that time towards cross-government working in many jurisdictions, including Ireland. Early examples of joined-up government in Ireland could be seen in public sector reform initiatives in the 1990s. By the 2010s, cross-government approaches were being taken to a range of social issues in Ireland. Examples included location-specific policies like the Limerick Regeneration Scheme, as well as national strategies such as the National Positive Ageing Strategy (2013), the National Disability Strategy (2013-2015), and Healthy Ireland: A Framework for improved health and wellbeing, 2013–2025.

The prevalence of a whole-of-government approach has continued to increase in Ireland since that point, with time-bound national strategies developed across a range of policy areas. As an example, given the range of government departments that have a remit involving children and families, there has been a recognised need in Ireland for considerable

joining-up and integration of child and family policies at a whole-of-government level. The development of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020* and *First Five: A Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028* are examples of whole-of-government policy frameworks with a central theme of whole-of-government implementation.

Emerging from CES experience working with government departments and agencies on the island of Ireland, the primer examined the potential of implementation science to practically support whole-of-government working. The report draws on the implementation literature and the experience of implementing whole-of-government approaches in several countries and distils the key learning from those experiences.

As defined in that report, whole-of-government working involves:

- The joining up of multiple government departments and state agencies to achieve a shared vision
- Boundary management
- Managing interdependencies, and
- Shared understanding among stakeholders about the underlying causes of deep-seated social problems that the policy aims to address.

Drawing on a significant body of learning about implementing government policy in Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Finland and on the island of Ireland, Colgan et al. (2014) emphasise that a successful whole-of-government approach is dependent on clear goals, strong political and administrative commitment and leadership, and effective cross-government structures, which may include interdepartmental committees, taskforces, interdepartmental or cross-departmental partnerships and special purpose agencies. While cross-government structures are necessary for successful implementation, they are not sufficient and must be accompanied by cultural readiness, including a collaborative culture and incentives for collaboration. Different ways of thinking are needed than are required for pursuing narrower departmental goals, as are work processes that include clear lines of accountability, reporting and budget management, the management of boundaries and gaps, and support for staff and the development of staff capacity for this type of working.

According to the literature, whole-of-government implementation starts at the stage of policy development, when the groundwork for successful implementation can be laid by mapping the stakeholders on whose work successful implementation depends and drawing on the

expertise and experience of key stakeholders to design policy or strategy with effective implementation in mind from the outset (Colgan et al., 2014).

A whole-of-government approach has been taken to recent equality policy in Ireland. This way of working is likely to continue to be a feature of the policy implementation landscape for some time to come, given the increasing complexities of the social and economic landscape, not just in Ireland but worldwide. The challenge is to find how to make it work to best effect. The reviewed evidence suggests that taking an implementation science approach, i.e., the application of systematic implementation approaches to policy development, implementation and evaluation is a promising means of achieving this (Burke et al., 2012; CES, 2022). A primary goal of the present evaluation is to evaluate how effectively whole-of-government working was implemented with respect to the Migrant Integration Strategy, National Strategy for Women and Girls, and National Traveller and Inclusion Strategy.

#### The value of implementation frameworks

Early implementation research was empirically driven and lacked strong theoretical foundations. As a result, it was viewed by some as little more than costly trial and error that yielded only mixed results (Nilsen, 2015). In the last two decades, the field of implementation science has progressed towards increased use of theories, models and frameworks to understand how or why implementation succeeds or fails and how it should be undertaken (Moullin et al., 2020; Nilsen, 2015; Tabak et al., 2012). The use of frameworks to guide implementation research, real-world implementation efforts, and the evaluation of implementation endeavours is advocated by many in the field. To achieve the aims of the present evaluation, it was deemed appropriate and important to select, as a first step, a framework to guide this evaluation.

#### Selecting a framework to evaluate implementation

According to Moullin et al. (2020), an implementation framework, or multiple frameworks, should be used before and throughout any implementation effort, whether this is implementation research or 'real-world' implementation. However, these authors point to recent reviews (e.g., Moullin et al., 2019) that have shown that implementation frameworks have often been used in limited or suboptimal ways. Inappropriate or superficial use of implementation frameworks hinders their usefulness and the learnings they can generate. To counteract this, Moullin et al (2020) present a set of recommendations to guide effective and appropriate use of implementation frameworks. Most relevant for the purposes of this review is the guidance they offer on how to select a suitable framework or frameworks.

First, Moullin et al. (2020) advocate that the selection of implementation frameworks should be informed by the *purpose of the framework* (i.e., whether the primary aim is to describe or guide implementation, to understand or explain what influences implementation outcomes, or to evaluate implementation efforts). Second, Moullin et al. (2020) recommend that the *level(s) included in a framework* (e.g., individual, team, organisation, system) be considered when selecting a framework. Third, they argue that the *degree of inclusion and the depth of operationalisation of implementation concepts* (e.g., the breadth and depth of the coverage of the processes, determinants or strategies it includes) is an important consideration. Finally, the *orientation of the framework(s)* must be considered. This includes the type of intervention and setting for which the framework was originally developed. As Moullin et al. (2020) point out, if, for example, the goal is to implement an educational programme in a school setting, then frameworks that include factors relating to healthcare settings or patient characteristics will not be an appropriate fit.

When selecting a framework to guide the evaluation of the processes of implementation of the NSWG, MIS and NTRIS, candidate frameworks were assessed against these four criteria to determine whether they fit with the present purpose (evaluation) and context (national equality strategies). Interestingly, Moullin and colleagues do not include the *evidence base* for the framework as a criterion. This may be because many of the theories, models, and frameworks used to guide implementation practice and research were not developed based on the rigorous collection and analysis of empirical data (Kislov et al., 2019). Nonetheless, as a fifth criterion when reviewing frameworks for the current study, we considered the evidence base of the framework in the selection process.

Moullin et al. (2020) also argue that it may be desirable or necessary to make use of more than one framework in any given implementation effort, given that different frameworks include different concepts and vary in the extent to which these concepts are operationalised:

*Put simply, some frameworks are more general, while others are more context or intervention specific; some frameworks are more comprehensive than others.*

*Selecting a given framework can simultaneously expand and limit consideration of factors and processes likely to be important in an implementation effort. For expansion, frameworks can enumerate issues that might not have been considered for a given effort. On the other hand, limiting consideration of implementation issues to only the theories, constructs, and/or processes identified in a given framework may attenuate or curtail the degree to which factors affecting implementation are considered. Thus, it is*

*sometimes desirable to use multiple frameworks for specific purposes, or alternatively expand on a current framework (Moullin et al., 2020, p. 4).*

With the above criteria in mind, what would be most appropriate for the purposes of the present study is an *evaluation framework* designed for evaluating the *processes of implementation of national equality or human rights strategy or policy* that has been *empirically tested* and has a *strong evidence base*. From our review of the literature, no such framework has been published.

The number of implementation frameworks has been described as “*dizzying*” (Curran, 2020 p. 1; also, Damschroder, 2020, p. 4), variously estimated as “*dozens*” (Implementation Science Research Hub, 2022) and “*around 170*” (Amsterdam University Medical Centres, n.d.). However, very few of these apply to the context of policy implementation (Howlett, 2018). Tabak et al. (2012) included 61 theories and frameworks (which they collectively term ‘models’) in their review and categorised these according to discipline. Of the 61, the fewest number of frameworks (just eight) related to policy action, with a focus often on implementation of organisational rather than government policy.

While it is true that there is a wealth of existing implementation models and frameworks from which a researcher or evaluator can select, and there are benefits to selecting an existing one, finding an exact fit to match the aims and objectives and a specific context can be challenging (Tabak et al., 2012). Tabak et al. (2012) note the possibility that no existing framework may exist for a specific purpose and that, in such cases, a researcher can choose to a) develop a new framework or b) adapt an existing framework or frameworks. For the purposes of the current evaluation, the latter approach was selected.

*A researcher will almost always adapt a model in some way; therefore, adaptation is often an important part of using a model. Adaptation often improves the appropriateness of the selected model to the intervention being disseminated or implemented, the population, and the setting. Further, adaptation contributes to the field by testing modifications to existing models, such as disregarding pieces shown to be ineffective or adding ones with additional evidence. Models should be viewed as living documents, or works in progress, not as static entities (Tabak et al., 2012, p. 7).*

Being unable to identify one existing framework that provides an exact match to our objectives and context, we have adapted a series of existing frameworks in order to create a tailored framework to guide the evaluation of the Migrant Integration Strategy, National Strategy for Women and Girls, and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, and



also to possibly inform the development and implementation of future national equality strategies in Ireland. This process is described in the following sections.

#### Reviewing evaluation frameworks

Given the primary purpose of the current study is to evaluate the processes of implementation of three national equality strategies, frameworks with an explicit evaluation focus were reviewed for potential use.

Evaluation of implementation can include evaluating progression through implementation stages, formative and summative evaluation of implementation strategies, and/or the evaluation of implementation outcomes. Regardless of the scope of the evaluation, it should be guided by a framework (Moullin et al., 2020). As noted by several authors who have conducted reviews or syntheses of implementation frameworks, there are few frameworks that have the explicit purpose of evaluating implementation (Moullin et al., 2020; Nilsen, 2015). Existing examples include PRECEDE-PROCEED (Green & Kreuter, 2005), RE-AIM (Glasgow et al., 2011) and the Implementation Outcomes Framework (Proctor et al., 2011). Most of the evaluation frameworks emerged from and are concerned with implementation in the field of public health, are not applicable to the implementation of national equality policy (failing on Moullin and colleagues' criterion of *orientation*) and were therefore excluded from further consideration. An exception was the Proctor et al. (2011) framework, which differs from many other frameworks in that it focuses on implementation outcomes rather than patient or client outcomes. Therefore, although it emerged from the field of mental health, it can be readily used to evaluate implementation across a range of fields or disciplines. However, while it can guide evaluation of implementation *outcomes* (such as whether the content of innovation/strategy is perceived as appropriate or satisfactory), it does not consider the *processes* of implementation or the 'how to' of implementation, and it was therefore not deemed to be in line with the evaluation aims. Using Moullin et al.'s (2020) criteria, it was not in line with the *purpose* of the current evaluation.

More useful for the present evaluation purposes are what are termed process models in the implementation literature, and in particular the subset of process models called action models or frameworks which outline the actual actions involved in the implementation of a policy, programme, or practice, and which can be used to guide or describe implementation initiatives but also to evaluate them (Nilsen, 2015).



## Process models

As mentioned earlier, while a small number of implementation theories, models and frameworks were designed explicitly with an evaluation purpose, other types of frameworks contain elements that can be operationalised and assessed and that can also be applied in order to evaluate implementation efforts (Nilsen, 2015). Process models present an ideal view of implementation and prescribe steps or stages that need to be carried out to achieve desired implementation outcomes (Kislov et al., 2019; Nilsen, 2015). They therefore lend themselves particularly well to the evaluation of implementation processes.

Many of the well-established action models emerged from the field of nursing research. They were explicitly designed to guide the process of translating research evidence into clinical practice, rather than on the processes of implementing a programme, policy or other initiative. Examples include the Stetler model (Stetler, 2001), the ACE STAR model of knowledge translation (Stevens, 2013) and the Knowledge to Action Framework (Graham et al., 2006), which were ruled out for the present study based on the criteria of *purpose* and *orientation*.

Examples of other action frameworks with a more relevant orientation were also identified. In recognition that implementation science frameworks were mostly developed in business and medical contexts, Aarons, Hurlburt, and Horwitz (2011) created an implementation model called EPIS aiming to address implementation efforts in public sector service contexts, which was then updated by these authors and colleagues in 2018 (Becan et al., 2018). These authors argue that common challenges to implementation in the public sector include structural and cultural barriers, staff aversion to adopting new practices, inadequate information systems, and a lack of coordination among agencies within the system (Becan et al., 2018). However, they welcome that the field of implementation science has evolved so that these factors can be identified and addressed systematically and, where possible, overcome. They also point out that implementation science facilitates researchers who are evaluating change within complex systems to make important study design decisions informed by a guiding conceptual framework (Becan et al., 2018).

The EPIS Framework highlights four main phases that guide and describe the implementation process: Exploration, Adoption/Preparation, Implementation, Sustainment (hence 'EPIS'). The framework examines influences on implementation at two levels, what it terms the outer and inner contexts, as well as the interactions between them. The outer context represents larger, socio-political factors that can either support or slow implementation, while the inner context represents what is happening within a community or

organisation that is implementing an initiative, such as staffing, procedures, and organisational culture. EPIS was developed on the basis of existing implementation literature and was developed specifically for use in child services and other public services where evidence-based programmes are being implemented, although it has applicability to other settings and contexts (Moullin et al., 2019). Its 2018 update was informed by learnings from its application in practice in the field of juvenile justice (Becan et al., 2018). EPIS has been widely used in practice and is much cited in the literature, and therefore scored well on several of our selection criteria. However, while EPIS provides an overarching framework for the implementation process, it does not provide any detail or guidance on the actual practices likely to lead to successful implementation. Therefore, on Moullin and colleagues' criterion of *degree of inclusion and the depth of operationalisation of implementation concepts*, the framework was ruled out for our present purposes.

Another highly influential and widely cited framework, the Quality Implementation Framework (QIF; Meyers et al., 2012) is a conceptual overview of implementation strategies that also provides guidance on the 'how-to' of implementation. It is based on a synthesis of information from 25 separate frameworks that focus on specific procedures that various authors deem important for quality implementation. The QIF describes 14 implementation steps across four separate phases and provides guiding questions that should be asked at each step. The synthesis also identifies specific actions for fostering quality implementation.

The QIF describes an initial preparatory phase, with associated actions relating to planning and assessment (such as conducting a needs assessment, conducting a fit assessment, and carrying out a capacity/readiness assessment) and capacity building (such as obtaining explicit buy-in from stakeholders and fostering a supportive climate, staff recruitment/maintenance and training). The second phase involves building structures for implementation (namely, creating implementation teams and developing an implementation plan). The third phase relates to ongoing structure and support once implementation is underway (including technical assistance/coaching/supervision, process evaluation, and a supportive feedback mechanism). The fourth phase is termed 'Improving further applications' and relates to learning from experience (Meyers et al., 2012).

Unlike many other process models which were developed based on their creators' own experiences of implementing initiatives in various settings (such as the Stetler model [Stetler, 2001] and the Iowa model [Titler et al., 2001]), the QIF was developed on the basis of a synthesis of 25 other frameworks, drawing together the common elements of each. In doing

so, the QIF represents consensus among the authors of those individual frameworks on the key features of successful implementation endeavours. The framework has been highly influential in implementation (cited over 1000 times at time of writing), having been applied and adapted in areas such as education (Moore et al., 2018), resilience promotion (Antcliff et al., 2014), child and family services (Barnett et al., 2019), mental health (Bergmark et al., 2018) and other health initiatives (Eboreime et al., 2019). Its wide application in empirical research underscores its usefulness (Nilsen, 2015).

As the framework has a robust evidence base, applicability across a range of disciplines, and provides specific and practical information on the implementation strategies included in it, the QIF was the action model reviewed that scored best against the criteria we had established to select an implementation science framework to guide the current study.

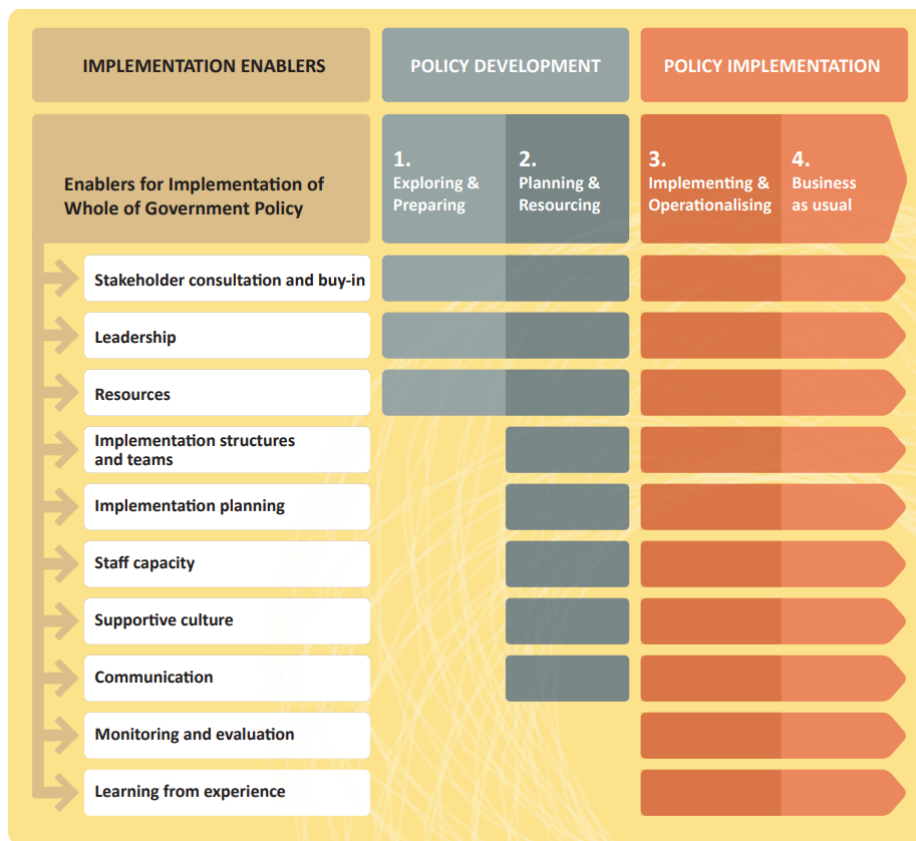
#### Policy frameworks and toolkits

The QIF can be said to be a general implementation framework, and it does not deal specifically with the context of public policy implementation (let alone equality or human rights policy). Wary that a narrow focus on one framework would limit the implementation strategies we considered (Moullin et al., 2020), and that there may be some processes specific to the context of government strategy or policy implementation that might not be covered in the QIF, we sought to identify implementation frameworks more explicitly rooted in the public policy context. While implementation frameworks, theories and models have proliferated since the emergence of implementation science in the 2000s, as mentioned earlier, very few have been designed explicitly for public policy implementation. Our searching of the academic implementation literature identified no policy implementation framework or framework for implementing whole-of-government approaches (generally, or equality-focused specifically) that had been well-tested empirically.

However, we instead identified highly relevant sources in the policy literature that were informed by actual experiences of implementing policy by national administrations. First, the CES stages and enablers framework for implementing whole-of-government approaches (Figure 3) was developed following a review of experiences of cross-government working both in Ireland and internationally, as referred to above (Colgan et al., 2014). Also informed by the literature of implementation science, the framework accounts for the specific implementation issues associated with whole-of-government approaches to tackling complex policy issues like inequality.

This framework overlaps substantially with the QIF in that it emphasises the importance of stakeholder buy-in, resources, implementation structures and teams, implementation planning, a supportive culture, evaluation, and learning from experience. Elements that it adds that are not included in the QIF but might have particular relevance in the context of implementing a whole-of-government approach include: stakeholder consultation, leadership, communication, and monitoring. In both frameworks, four implementation stages are delineated. Unlike the QIF, the whole-of-government enablers and stages framework maps the four main phases of implementation, drawn from the implementation science literature and outlined in the CES Guide to Implementation (CES, 2022), onto the relevant phases of the policy cycle.

**Figure 3 Stages and enablers framework for implementing whole-of-government initiatives**



Source: Colgan et al. (2014)

Further information on *how* the various implementation enablers in the above framework can be actioned was sourced from the CES Guide to Implementation (CES, 2022), which draws together lessons from the literature and CES implementation expertise to support

organisations implementing change. The first version of the guide was published in 2012 and drew mainly on the (at that time nascent) body of implementation science literature. The guide has since been comprehensively updated, reflecting not only advances in the literature, but practical learning from implementation endeavours in which CES was involved. The Guide provides information on implementation science as an approach, implementation enablers and barriers, implementation strategies, policy implementation, and also includes a series of practical tools developed by CES to support implementation processes. The Guide has both informed CES's successful provision of support to a host of organisations implementing programmes and policies on the island of Ireland over the course of more than a decade, and also been informed by that experience in turn.

Further information on specific actions relating to the strategies in the QIF and Enablers and Stages Framework in the context of government strategy implementation was sought from the SIGMA toolkit for the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of public administration reform and sector strategies. SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management) is a joint initiative of the European Union and the OECD that has supported national governments to develop plans for the development, implementation, and monitoring of public sector reforms and of sector strategies, regardless of the specific policy area. The SIGMA toolkit draws on this experience of working with national administrations to provide practical guidance, insights, advice, and tools to inform the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of strategies (Vági & Egle, 2018). While it is not a theoretical implementation science framework, instead based on actual real-world policy implementation experience, this toolkit was deemed to provide important context-specific information on concrete actions in policy implementation that would help tailor our adapted framework to the context of delivering government strategy. These actions include considerations such as scoping and prioritisation, objective setting, and action planning that are not explicitly covered in the QIF or the Stages and Enablers Framework, but that are likely to be important when developing and delivering national equality or human rights strategies or policy.

#### Incorporating an equality perspective

Further adaptation was deemed necessary to reflect the *equality* aspect of the implementation endeavours being evaluated. Our review of the literature revealed few sources that could usefully guide the implementation of equality or human rights policy or the evaluation of that implementation. One highly relevant exception was the OECD Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality (OECD, 2020). The toolkit was designed

to support countries to strengthen their governance and accountability for gender equality as a means of improving the gender-responsiveness of public policy and was structured around the four main pillars of the OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life: Institutional and governance frameworks for gender equality and mainstreaming; Gender-sensitive practices in parliaments; Gender-sensitive public employment systems; Gender-sensitive practices in the judiciary. Under the first pillar, specific guidance is provided on implementing a government strategic plan for gender equality. The guidance includes priority checklists for implementing gender equality as well as self-assessment questions and descriptions of good practice on implementing gender equality from several countries worldwide. Although the explicit focus of the toolkit is on *gender* equality, we deemed many of the processes and steps described as having applicability for the implementation of equality strategies more broadly. Among others, these include having a clear vision for equality, undertaking an assessment of where the government currently stands in relation to equality goals, developing a results-oriented strategic plan to achieve the equality vision that is developed through a broad consultation with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and endorsed by senior leaders, defining clear roles and responsibilities across government for delivering on equality objectives, and others.

Finally, although to a lesser degree, the adapted framework designed for this evaluation was also informed by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) guidance on Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (IHREC, 2019). ‘The Duty’ confers an obligation on public bodies to, in the performance of their functions, have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, protect the human rights of and promote equality of opportunity among those to whom they provide services and their staff. The IHREC guidance document suggests practical steps to implement the Duty. Developed on the basis of equality and human rights expertise, aspects of the guidance were deemed relevant for the implementation of national equality strategies. These include considerations such as whether the implementation of the strategies included the gathering and review of disaggregated equality data, meaningful consultation with minoritised groups, use of inclusive and accessible language in all communications, and having a regular review process through which policies and plans are living rather than static documents, so that they can be adapted based on emerging evidence from groups experiencing inequality.

## Summary

The review of the literature informed the evaluation team’s decision to use an implementation framework to guide the evaluation of the processes of implementation of the

National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, the National Strategy for Women and Girls, and the Migrant Integration Strategy. In the absence of an existing framework that represented an exact match to our purpose and specific context, we followed the advice of Moullin et al. (2020), Tabak et al. (2012) and others, by instead adapting and expanding multiple frameworks. Implementation approaches and activities<sup>4</sup> from each source that were deemed most relevant to the current project were retained, while those deemed irrelevant were not included. This process resulted in a draft framework of 12 implementation approaches with 42 associated activities across four phases of implementation spanning two main phases of the policy cycle.

The rationale for selecting and adapting the implementation sources to inform the draft framework was described above. While every attempt was made to select the most appropriate sources for the evaluation, this process did involve a degree of subjective judgement. This may have resulted in the inclusion of approaches and activities in the draft framework that may not represent best practice for implementing government equality or human rights policy or, conversely, the omission of approaches and activities that are important in this process. Moullin et al. (2020) recommend that users of an implementation framework seek involvement from stakeholders who “*understand the external context such as community norms and culture, policy and government processes, as well as the inner context such as organizational culture and climate, employee expectations, and attitudes towards innovations*” (p.4) in order to avoid a mismatch between framework selection and its applicability to practice or research.

A consultative process was therefore designed to help to refine and validate the draft framework before using it to evaluate the processes used to implementation of the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS, by involving stakeholders with the requisite expertise and experience. This process is described in detail in the next chapter as part of a full description of the overall evaluation methodology.

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<sup>4</sup> A note on terminology: In the implementation science literature, the term ‘implementation strategies’ is typically used to refer to what we will call ‘implementation approaches’ in the framework and from this point forward in this report. This decision was taken to avoid confusion for readers between ‘*implementation strategies*’ and ‘*equality strategies*’, both of which are mentioned frequently in this report.



## Chapter 3: Methodology

Previous sections of this report have emphasised the importance of attending carefully to policy implementation if intended policy outcomes are to be realised. Evaluation is an important facet of any such attention. Implementation and evaluation of policy have been characterised as two sides of the same coin (DeGroff & Cargo, 2009), with: “*implementation providing the experience that evaluation interrogates and evaluation providing the intelligence to make sense out of what is happening*” (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984, p. xv).

Evaluation in the context of policy is the systematic assessment of the development, implementation, monitoring and outcomes of policy. Policy evaluations employ a range of research methods to investigate the effectiveness of policy interventions, including their implementation and processes, to determine their merit, worth, or value in terms of improving conditions for stakeholders (HM Treasury, 2020).

The two primary functions of policy evaluation are learning and accountability. Government policies often build on previous policies and are replaced with others; evaluations produce learning evidence which can be applied to subsequent policies (Bicket et al., 2020).

### Evaluation approach

Evaluation may involve investigation of how a policy has been implemented (process evaluation), what effects it has for whom and why (impact evaluation), and/or how efficiently the policy achieves its outcomes (value-for-money evaluation). The present evaluation can be characterised as a process evaluation. Process evaluations examine activities involved in the implementation of a policy and often provide the answer to the question: “*What can be learned from how the intervention was delivered?*” through the collection of primary data (HM Treasury, 2020, p. 6). The present evaluation was concerned with investigating the effectiveness of the processes used by government to implement three national equality strategies. It was beyond the scope of the evaluation to assess the extent to which the equality strategy objectives were achieved and the impact of the policies on redressing inequalities.

This chapter describes the evaluation design and methodology used for the process evaluation of the implementation of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS), National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG), and the Migrant Integration Strategy (MIS) in Ireland.



## Design of the evaluation

To meet the evaluation objectives, it was necessary to design an evaluation that could provide answers to the following questions:

- **Evaluation Question 1:** What represents best practice in implementing national equality or human rights strategies or policies?
- **Evaluation Question 2:** What processes were used by government to implement the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS?
- **Evaluation Question 3:** How effective were the processes used to implement the national equality strategies?
- **Evaluation Question 4:** In what ways could the processes of implementation be improved in successor or other national equality or human rights strategies or policies?

Four main phases were designed and executed to address these questions:

1. A review of the relevant literature to a) develop a framework of implementation approaches to guide the evaluation and b) to understand best practice in relation to each of these approaches.
2. A review of the existing written documentation relating to the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS.
3. An expert consultation process to refine and validate the framework.
4. Consultation with stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of each of the three strategies.

How each component of the evaluation maps onto the four main evaluation questions is shown in Table 1. Each of these components are then discussed in turn.

**Table 1 Mapping of evaluation phases onto evaluation questions**

Evaluation Question	Evaluation Phase			
	Literature review	Document review	Expert consultation	Stakeholder consultation
Q1: What represents best practice?	●		●	
Q2: What processes were used?		●		●
Q3: How effective were the processes?	●	●	●	●
Q4: What could be improved?	●	●	●	●

## Literature review

### Purpose and approach

In order to identify good practice in implementation of government equality and human rights policy against which the actual processes of implementation of the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS could be assessed, a review was carried out of the relevant theoretical and empirical knowledge. A structured literature review (SLR) approach was adopted. Structured literature reviews aim to summarise the most relevant, innovative and impactful evidence on a given topic, and are guided by the concept and principles of a systematic review (Fenton Villar, 2022). Systematic reviews aim to identify, evaluate and synthesise all relevant research on a given topic and since they aim to be exhaustive, the average production time for a systematic review has been estimated at 1-2 years for a team of researchers (Snilstveit et al., 2017). In the context of evaluation, where most evaluators have limited time and resources with which to engage critically with research, systematic reviews are generally not feasible within the confines of an evaluation. As Fenton Villar (2022) points out, this problem can be amplified by urgency to implement initiatives or to make decisions about policy. Structured literature reviews aim to incorporate some elements of the systematic review methodology while excluding others. They can be considered a means by which “*any critical, central literature might be considered*” (Armitage & Keeble-Ramsay, 2009, p.27) and while they do not claim to be exhaustive, they offer increased structure and transparency over traditional literature reviews.

### Procedure

As a first step, the question that the literature review aimed to answer was formulated. Next, a set of eligibility criteria for inclusion in the literature review was determined. A search strategy was then developed: primary information sources were first identified, then key concepts in the guiding question were identified, and these core terms were then used to generate a list of potential search terms. Processes for selecting studies, extracting and synthesising data were planned. Further information on each of the above steps can be found in a literature review protocol document available from the authors on request.

### Analysis and results

One of the aims of the literature review was the selection of an evidence-based evaluation framework specifically designed for evaluating the processes of implementation of national

equality or human rights strategy or policy. However, as the review of the literature showed that no such framework has been published to date, a series of existing frameworks, toolkits and other resources was adapted to create a tailored framework to guide the evaluation process (see Chapter 2 for a detailed description of this process). The proposed framework included 12 implementation approaches and 42 relevant activities across four different stages of implementation: Exploring and Preparing, Planning and Resourcing, Implementing and Operationalising, and Full Implementation. At this stage, the status of the framework was draft; it was then refined, validated and finalised through an external review process, as described in the next section.

Another aim of the literature review was to identify 'how to' information on each of the approaches and activities in the finalised framework. This information is presented along the views of experts in Chapter 4 of this report.

## Expert consultation

### Purpose and approach

An external consultation process was designed to refine and validate the framework compiled by the evaluation team following the review of the literature. The aim was to seek expert consensus on the implementation approaches and activities that represent good practice when implementing government equality or human rights policy. While a number of expert consensus methods exist, a modified Delphi technique was selected for this study. The Delphi method is a reliable method of establishing expert consensus when there is little or no definitive evidence and where opinion is important (Eubank et al, 2016). The method was developed in the 1950s by researchers at the Rand Corporation, who developed it as a tool to forecast future events through consultation with relevant experts (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963). The modified Delphi method starts with an open-ended questionnaire administered to a panel of selected experts in order to elicit specific information about a particular content area or subject. In later rounds of the process, experts rate the relative importance of items and modify the content or phrasing of these items. The process is designed to yield consensus over a number of rounds. Delphi processes have at least two rounds of consultation, and research has suggested that three rounds are typically sufficient to arrive at consensus (Brooks, 1979).

The modified Delphi technique is similar in procedure (selected experts participating over a number of rounds) and intent (to arrive at consensus). However, rather than beginning in an open-ended manner, the modified Delphi begins the process with a set of carefully selected

items or elements. These can be drawn from various sources, including literature reviews, as is the case in the present study. Advantages of this modification include that it ensures a solid grounding in previously developed knowledge, and it tends to improve initial response rates (Custer et al., 1999). Since this method involves individuals responding separately to questionnaires, the potentially biasing effects of group interaction that characterise some other expert consensus methods are mitigated (Custer et al., 1999). This approach was deemed to be the most appropriate for addressing the aims of the present study.

There are no definitive guidelines for the optimal panel size for a Delphi process. Rowe and Wright (1999) found that the size of Delphi panel sizes in peer-reviewed studies ranged from a low of three to a high of 80, but that most studies had between eight and 16 expert panel members. Hallowell and Gambatese (2010) recommend a minimum of eight members. The relationship between panel size and the accuracy and effectiveness of the process has been studied, including by Brockhoff (1975) and Boje and Murnaghan (1982) who found no significant correlation between panel size and effectiveness (as cited in Hallowell & Gambatese, 2010). Brockhoff (1975), however, did find that expert panels of 11 members were more accurate than larger panels with respect to forecasting questions (as cited in Colton & Hatcher, 2004). Other research has shown that reliability declines quite rapidly when there are fewer than six group members in an expert consensus process, but that after crossing the threshold of 12 participants, improvements to reliability are subject to diminishing returns (Murphy et al., 1998).

In relation to the composition of the panel for the current study, the primary inclusion criterion for the panel of experts invited to take part was expertise in at least one of the following areas: implementation science (e.g., academic or other researchers with experience of researching implementation), policy implementation (e.g., current or former senior civil servants), and human rights or equality. A mix of expertise was targeted in order to facilitate deliberate integration of the perspectives of implementation scientists, individuals who have a track record of accomplishment in effectively delivering policy outcomes, and those with specialised knowledge in relation to human rights and equality policy. Involvement of different types of relevant expertise can increase the likelihood that a comprehensive range of implementation approaches is considered for inclusion in a final framework (Powell et al., 2015).

While there are various approaches to defining consensus in Delphi studies, the most common is based on the percentage agreement with respect to a given item (Diamond et al., 2014; Foth et al., 2016). The reported range for accepted consensus is wide, ranging from

50% to 97%, with a median threshold for acceptance of consensus at 75% agreement (Diamond et al., 2014; Foth et al., 2016). For the current study, the consensus threshold was set a priori at 80%.

## Procedure

The modified Delphi process was conducted using two rounds of rating and review over a 12-week period.<sup>5</sup> A blend of purposive sampling and reputation-based snowball sampling was used to recruit experts to the panel. Potential panellists were identified by the evaluation team through the review of the literature and existing networks, and suggestions were also received from the evaluation steering group. Potential panellists were invited by email to take part in the study and asked to provide consent to participate. Invited panellists were also asked to suggest others who they considered to have relevant expertise, with those meeting the inclusion criteria also invited to participate.

Ultimately, a panel of 12 experts was recruited (see Appendix 1 for the names and affiliations of the panel members), each of whom participated in at least one of the two Delphi rounds (12 in Round 1; 11 in Round 2).

Experts were asked to indicate the area(s) in which their expertise lay. The targeted balance across the three areas of expertise was largely achieved. A breakdown of the areas of expertise in the panel is presented in Table 2.

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<sup>5</sup> A three-round process was anticipated, but consensus was reached after two rounds, negating the need for a third.

**Table 2 Areas of expertise of experts who participated in the modified Delphi process**

Panel member	Area of expertise		
	Equality	Policy implementation	Implementation science
Expert 1	●		
Expert 2		●	
Expert 3			●
Expert 4	●	●	●
Expert 5	●	●	●
Expert 6	●	●	
Expert 7			●
Expert 8	●		
Expert 9		●	
Expert 10		●	
Expert 11		●	
Expert 12			●

*Round 1*

In Round 1, an online questionnaire was administered to all experts who consented to participate. This questionnaire presented each of the 12 implementation approaches in the draft framework and their definitions. Experts were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the importance of each of these approaches for implementing national equality strategies on a four-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. If an expert agreed or strongly agreed that an implementation approach was important, they were then asked to indicate their level of agreement with the importance of a series of activities associated with that approach, using the same four-point scale. If they disagreed that an implementation approach was important, they were asked to indicate their reasons using an open-text box.

In addition to each implementation approach that an expert agreed should be retained in the final framework, experts were also asked to suggest any additional activities associated with that strategy that they felt were missing from the framework. Experts were also asked to indicate, based on their experiences, what the most important considerations were in relation to that strategy.

Experts were then asked to suggest any implementation approaches that they felt were missing from the framework. They were also asked to indicate, drawing on their experience, what they believed to be the most important considerations, overall, when implementing national equality or human rights strategy or policy. Finally, experts were asked to give their opinion on how best intersectionality can be addressed when developing and implementing national equality strategies.

### Analysis and Results

Consensus was reached on all approaches and activities included in the draft framework, i.e., more than 80% of experts agreed or strongly agreed that the approaches and activities should be retained in the final framework.

A large volume of qualitative data was received that provided expert insight into these approaches and activities. These data were analysed thematically and are presented in Chapter 4.

Furthermore, the expert panellists proposed a series of additional activities relating to each of the 12 implementation approaches in the draft framework. Finally, in a small number of cases, experts suggested modifications to terminology used in the implementation approaches or activities.

### Round 2

Experts were sent a second online survey. As there were no approaches or activities in the draft framework on which consensus was not reached, all of these elements were retained in the framework and were not put to experts again in Round 2. Experts were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the inclusion of additional activities ( $n = 55$ ) suggested by panel members in Round 1. Open-ended text boxes were also included for additional comment on these actions.

Experts were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with the small number of modifications to the wording of existing approaches and activities that had been proposed by experts in Round 1.

Finally, experts were asked to indicate at which of four stages of policy development and implementation each of the 12 implementation approaches to be retained in the framework applied: 1. Exploring and Preparing, 2: Planning and Resourcing, 3: Implementing and Operationalising, 4. Full implementation.

### Analysis and results

Consensus was reached on all newly proposed implementation activities presented to experts in the second-round survey. This meant all additional activities were retained in a finalised framework (see Chapter 4). Qualitative data collected through open-ended questions were analysed thematically,

### Review of strategy documentation

#### Purpose and approach

In order to understand the processes used by government to implement the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS, the evaluation team carried out a comprehensive review of the documentation available for each equality strategy. The purpose of this review was to provide a clear picture of the implementation journeys of the National Strategy for Women and Girls, Migrant Integration Strategy, and National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, including the implementation processes used throughout the lifetime of the strategies. For each strategy, the review process started with the strategy texts themselves and followed with a review of other relevant documents, including public consultation calls, progress reviews, annual reports, traffic light progress reports and committee meeting documentation. To better understand the various implementation processes, for example stakeholder engagement, action planning, and monitoring, close attention was paid to accompanying documentation including the minutes of the committee meetings. A timeline of actions/events was developed for each strategy which provided a summary of the implementation journey of each strategy. A list of reviewed documents for each equality strategy can be viewed in Appendix 2.

### Analysis and results

The evaluation team identified processes used for implementing each national equality strategy as part of their review of the documents. Once the framework was validated and finalised, the team mapped those identified processes against the implementation approach in the framework. The mapping exercise was carried out for each equality strategy and



provided an initial description of how each equality strategy was delivered and highlighted the informational gaps in existing documentation. The mappings were used to inform the development of topic guides for consultation with stakeholders of each equality strategy.

## Stakeholder consultation

### Purpose and approach

The purpose of the stakeholder consultation was twofold. One aim was to deepen the understanding of the processes of implementation of the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS gleaned from the desk review of strategy documentation and to fill in any informational gaps. A second aim was to elicit stakeholder views on the effectiveness of these processes, to identify areas of good practice, and to determine potential areas for improvement.

For each strategy, three stakeholder groups of interest were distinguished:

- Group 1: Individuals in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) or the (then) Department of Justice and Equality with responsibility for planning and coordination of the strategy.
- Group 2: Representatives of other government departments and state agencies involved in the implementation and monitoring of one or more strategy actions.
- Group 3: Representatives of civil society organisations on the strategy steering committee.

For each group, a consultation approach was devised that matched their level of engagement in the implementation process and that was deemed most efficient in terms of time commitment and response rate. Informed explicit consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation.

### Procedure

#### *Group 1: Planning and Coordination Team*

This group consisted of individuals who were involved in the planning, development, implementation, and monitoring of the strategy, i.e., staff in DCEDIY who were directly in charge of the strategy coordination. This group had the highest level of involvement in the implementation process, from preparation to operationalisation and monitoring, and were considered a main source of information on the processes used in different stages of the

implementation. Therefore, it was deemed appropriate to conduct in-depth interviews with these individuals. Interviews were semi-structured in nature and conducted online. Interview schedules were informed by a) the desk review of strategy documentation and b) the draft framework compiled from the literature.

Six individuals were interviewed over five interview sessions. In some cases, interviewees had responsibility for and responded with respect to one of the three equality strategies, while others reported on more than one equality strategy. A breakdown is presented in Table 3. The interviews ranged in duration from 1 hour 25 minutes to 2 hours 28 minutes, with an average duration of 1 hour 46 minutes.

**Table 3 Breakdown of the national equality strategy/ies reported on by each interviewee**

Informant	Equality Strategy		
	MIS	NSWG	NTRIS
Interviewee 1	●		
Interviewee 2		●	
Interviewee 3	●	●	
Interviewee 4			●
Interviewee 5			●
Interviewee 6	●	●	●

*Groups 2 and 3: Individuals with implementation, monitoring or oversight responsibilities*

These groups consisted of individuals who were involved in the implementation process as part of their membership of the strategy steering committee. They included representatives of the government departments and agencies (Group 2) and representatives of civil society organisations (Group 3). These groups had first-hand or close-up experience of the implementation and/or monitoring processes employed in the implementation of the three equality strategies. Considering the high number of individuals in these groups and their professional responsibilities as civil or public servants or employees in nongovernmental organisations, a qualitative survey methodology was identified as the most suitable consultation approach. A qualitative survey is a series of open-ended self-administered questions centred on a particular topic and presented in a fixed and standard order to all participants. Qualitative surveys are unique in their capacity to offer a “wide-angle lens” on a topic, capturing a diversity of experiences and perspectives while also allowing for rich and

focused data collection (Braun et al, 2021). An advantage of qualitative surveys is that although they are not always completely anonymous, they can feel anonymous and encourage participation in topics that are not easy for discussion in face-to-face data collection (Boulton, 2019; Braun et al, 2021).

Due to the different roles played in the implementation process by representatives of the government departments and state agencies and by representatives of civil society groups, separate qualitative surveys were designed for each group involved in each equality strategy, meaning that six separate qualitative surveys were distributed in total. As with the interview schedules, the content of the surveys was informed by the reviews of the strategy documentation and the literature. Individuals were invited to participate by email. In total, 35 qualitative surveys were completed. Table 4 shows the breakdown of responses across each equality strategy.

**Table 4 Numbers of qualitative survey respondents, by informant group and equality strategy**

Informant group	Equality Strategy		
	NSWG	MIS	NTRIS
Group 2: Government departments and state agencies	9	3	10
Group 3: Civil society organisations	3	3	7

Note: In some instances, multiple individuals came together to complete one survey to provide a combined response from their organisation. In others, one individual provided responses to more than one survey.

### Analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. The qualitative survey data was extracted into a Microsoft Word document for each respondent. Thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative interview and survey datasets, in accordance with the six-step process of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012). This method of analysis is used to identify, interpret and report patterns (or themes) across a dataset, which represent beliefs, observations and experiences that participants may share in relation to the research questions. Two members of the evaluation team independently worked through a sample of three interview transcripts and noted the initial codes (patterns and ideas) within the data. They then met to discuss the codes identified and developed a coding framework, which was applied to the remaining interview transcripts and the qualitative survey responses, using MAXQDA qualitative data management software. In this way, the data became organised into meaningful categories. Codes that shared a similar pattern of meaning were then merged or grouped together into themes. The analysis for this evaluation was focused on

developing themes that would draw out the factors that affected the implementation of the equality strategies. The evaluation team met to discuss how the emerging findings related to the framework for effective implementation of national equality strategies. A narrative for each theme was produced, along with relevant extracts from the data. These findings are presented in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter 4: Establishing best practice for implementation of national equality policy**

A key output of this evaluation study is a framework of implementation approaches and associated activities that can be considered good practice when implementing national equality strategies. The framework also outlines the stages of the policy cycle at which of these implementation approaches should be considered. Development of the framework was important for addressing two main aims of the evaluation. First, it was necessary to establish what constituted good practice in order to facilitate evaluation of the actual processes used to implement the Migrant Integration Strategy, the National Strategy for Women and Girls, and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. Second, the framework was created to provide recommendations for the implementation of successor or future national equality strategies.

As described earlier in this report, the framework was initially devised following a comprehensive review of the literature and was then refined and validated following an expert consultation process (see Appendix 1 for the names and affiliations of expert panel members; see Chapter 3 for a description of the methods used to review the literature and achieve expert consensus). The final framework is shown in Table 5.

While the prevailing view among implementation researchers is that implementation frameworks should guide any implementation effort (see Chapter 2), their use has been somewhat limited in the past. An explanation offered for this is that frameworks often provide a list of potentially useful approaches, with little or no detail on how these should be carried out. In this chapter, guidance relating to the approaches and activities in the framework is provided, which may be useful for informing future implementation efforts in the area of equality or human rights policy. This guidance draws on relevant policy and implementation science literature as well as insights and advice offered by the experts consulted as part of this evaluation study.

**Table 5 Implementation framework for national equality strategies**

Implementation approaches and associated activities	Policy Development		Policy Implementation	
	Exploring & preparing	Planning & resourcing	Operationalising & Implementing	Full implementation
<b>Taking a whole-of-government approach</b>	●	●	●	●
Create a clear medium- to long-term vision for equality that is anchored in key government documents.				
Ensure the strategy is a clear priority of government, with high status.				
Align national equality strategies with core obligations to the European Union, Council of Europe and the United Nations for implementation of law, policy, reporting of data and monitoring				
Define clear roles and responsibilities across the government for implementing, monitoring and overseeing the equality objectives.				
Locate leadership of equality strategies in a central government department with political authority.				
Align strategies to core priority deliverables for each department and agency so that delivery of the equality strategy is delivery of core business.				
Identify legislation that might be levered or proposed to underpin progress.				
Identify the whole-of-government structures that fit with the strategy.				
<b>Engaging stakeholders</b>	●	●	●	●
Identify all the stakeholders on whose work, involvement, or cooperation the success of implementation depends and all those most likely to be impacted by the strategy.				
Take proactive steps to involve all relevant stakeholders, identifying and acting to overcome barriers to participation for minority, marginalised or seldom-included groups.				
Clarify with stakeholders the definition of stakeholder engagement, so as to establish a common language and expectations.				
Strive to move beyond consultation towards collaboration with critical stakeholders.				
Set up a communications plan to ensure that all stakeholders involved in or affected by the strategy are kept informed about progress.				
Ensure all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the views of others and of what might be competing or conflicting viewpoints or priorities				
Communicate about the work routinely with stakeholders to secure ongoing buy-in				
Engage in information sharing on best practice in stakeholder engagement with other EU countries				
Secure buy-in from the general public				
Ensure ongoing media engagement throughout the lifetime of the strategy				
<b>Situation analysis, scoping and prioritisation</b>	●	●	●	

---

Conduct a problem/situation/needs analysis in a collaborative effort between government and non-government stakeholders.

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Identify the available evidence and any evidence gaps that may need to be filled, drawing on international, national, and local experience.

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Review international, regional, and national standards to identify the changes that equality policy is required/intended to achieve.

---

Ensure that the strategy is dynamic and that the proposed policy/strategy development and implementation processes are agile enough to be able to respond if and when issues change.

---

Define the exact scope of the strategy and prioritise issues in accordance with their relative importance and urgency.

---

Conduct a readiness/capacity assessment.

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## Objective setting and action planning

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Limit the number of objectives and actions to a set of focused and realistic priorities, avoiding a broad strategy that is difficult to implement; practise “the art of saying no”.

---

Include short-term objectives for quick gains that lead to longer term objectives.

---

Calculate the costs of the necessary resources for each planned action.

---

Calculate the potential benefits of each action.

---

Assign ownership of each action.

---

Set timelines for each action.

---

Develop performance indicators, targets and measures.

---

Conduct an assessment of the appropriateness of the strategy, including a review of the evidence base for planned actions and sense-checking of these actions with those who will be implementing and impacted by the strategy.

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## Ensuring effective leadership

---

Create opportunities for visible endorsement of the strategy by key Ministers and senior public officials.

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Identify an operational leader or leadership group to drive the strategy.

---

Ensure representatives on implementation and strategic direction structures are at a decision-making level of seniority without delegation.

---

Ensure that national and local-level leadership work in tandem to secure the conditions for effective policy implementation.

---

Develop broad ownership of the strategy through distributed leadership and delegation.

---

Ensure that there is a leader who is accessible to deal promptly with challenges, with the capacity and authority to deal with minor issues that have the potential to stall implementation as they arise and without having to wait for formal meetings.

---

Review evidence-based approaches to inclusive, diverse, rights-based leadership and explicitly embed this practice, and evaluation of same, into policy implementation.

---

Engage in succession planning so that there is long-term strategy for leadership development in the area of equality policy.

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## Securing adequate resources

Determine how the budget for the strategy implementation will be secured, where accountability rests and how accountabilities will be shared, if appropriate.

Secure multi-annual funding for the duration of the strategy.

Connect resources for equality policy with budgetary policy and mechanisms, including equality budgeting and obligations regarding use of European funding and monitoring of same.

Identify and secure the staff with the skillsets and expertise needed for the work.

Ensure that an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) lens is applied when securing staff with the skills and expertise to develop and implement equality policy; include experts from underrepresented groups in the hiring process.

Systematically review the resources allocated.

## Instituting appropriate structures and implementation teams

Establish implementation teams with relevant expertise in policy development and organisational strategy, expert knowledge and boundary-spanning skills to guide the initiative.

Locate implementation teams in an appropriate setting, linked to a central department.

Ensure the implementation team has clear links to the strategy leadership.

Require the implementation team to report regularly to Government and Oireachtas in relation to meeting deadlines and targets or explaining why they have been missed

## Creating an implementation plan

Adopt a project management approach to the implementation planning.

Outline the tasks and activities necessary to achieve the actions.

Identify who is responsible for the delivery of tasks.

Assign overall responsibility for implementation of the plan and for regular reviews of progress.

Articulate the inputs, outputs and intended outcomes of the implementation process.

Map the interdepartmental/interagency 'gaps' in information, capacities, funding, operational policies

Map interdepartmental/interagency connections and synergies.

Involve local delivery-level actors at the development stage of implementation plans.


Include information on monitoring, evaluation and feedback systems



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Communicate the implementation plan to all stakeholders

## Developing staff capacity



Determine and deliver staff training, capacity building and other support requirements.

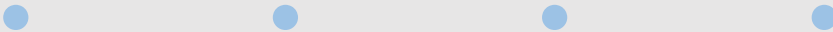
Set ambitious targets for diversity amongst the teams responsible for leading and implementing the strategy.

Ensure a strong understanding of equality and related concepts (such as targeting and mainstreaming) among staff who are designing and delivering equality-focused policies.

Assess the career ambitions of staff regarding long-term involvement in equality policy.

Incorporate equality objectives into individual staff performance assessment objectives.

## Cultivating a supportive culture



Align the strategic objectives with broader government priorities or goals.

Embed equality objectives in core government processes including procurement, evidence-based policy making, budget.

Ensure full implementation of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.


Identify and address all tacit and explicit barriers to implementation, including sources of resistance to change.

Identify a network of equality 'champions' across government who can help to effectively communicate and mainstream the strategic plan across different policy areas.

Emphasise that the equality strategy needs to be everyone's priority and that all roles should contribute in some way to its delivery.

Identify and celebrate success. Recognise and reward innovation.

## Monitoring and evaluation



Establish a robust system for gathering data, monitoring and evaluation, suited to the challenges of a whole-of-government context.

Use monitoring data and feedback to inform ongoing improvements or decisions; ensure that learning is fed back into the action plan.

Ensure monitoring systems are flexible and can incorporate examples of innovative implementation at local level.

Ensure a combination of quantitative and qualitative data is collected.

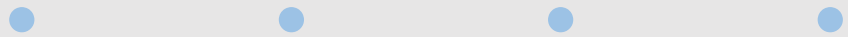
Develop data sharing agreements at the outset.

Incorporate an evaluation structure from the outset to avoid data being sought retrospectively.

Implement the European Guidelines on equality data and associated resources.

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## Learning from experience



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Set up formal systems to capture and share the learning and experience about the strategy implementation.

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Create and maintain a repository of knowledge that can be used in successor or similar strategies.

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Benchmark against international best practice.

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Facilitate peer-to-peer learning, team coaching, and learning networks to build a community of participants in equality policy.

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## Implementation Approach 1: Taking a whole-of-government approach

Inequality in its various forms has proved an intractable policy problem, not only in Ireland but worldwide. With complex causes and no easy solutions, there is increasing recognition that deep-rooted social problems like inequality (so-called ‘wicked problems’) require well-designed whole-of-government responses. A whole-of-government approach to a wicked problem avoids having different policy responses emanating from different departments that may cut across, contradict, or undermine one another. A cross-government approach also helps to maximise the impact of public policy, by using all the instruments at the disposal of the State in an integrated way in pursuit of a particular outcome (Colgan et al., 2014).

All members of the expert panel agreed that a whole-of-government approach was important when implementing national equality strategies.

### Taking a whole-of-government approach

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



However, taking a whole-of-government approach to a strategy creates unique implementation challenges. One expert, while agreeing that a whole-of-government approach is important, offered the following note of caution: “*Almost all policy studies describe it [whole-of government-working] as an ambitious aim in theory that is thwarted in practice, so I would be careful about producing too-high expectations with this language.*”

Below is a set of activities related to taking a whole-of-government approach to national equality initiatives that were identified in the literature or suggested by an expert on the panel. There was consensus from the expert panel that each of these is important for the effective delivery of national equality strategies.

**Activity: Create a clear medium- to long-term vision for equality that is anchored in key government documents.**



A vision statement can set out a country's goal to achieve equality for a particular group or groups. A compelling vision is important for equality strategy implementation, as it can set new expectations for attitudes and behaviour and can be used as a benchmark for measuring the progress of a given strategy (OECD, 2018). A vision should be time-bound and sufficiently ambitious so as to inspire societal change, but it should also be framed so as to be achievable (OECD, 2018). Generally, this vision is defined by a small group of key stakeholders and then shared more widely with stakeholder groups. It can be created through interactive methods such as brainstorming, workshops and roundtable discussions (OECD, 2018), and visioning may take place either before or after situation analysis and prioritisation.

The literature suggests that lengthy vision statements should be avoided; rather, the vision statement should be concise, clear, easy to remember and clearly provide direction for future action for both the public sector and citizens (OECD, 2018; OECD, 2020). International benchmarks or agreements can provide good starting material for equality vision statements (e.g., The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). The equality vision statement should be widely communicated both within and outside the government, including at the highest levels of politics and to wider society (OECD, 2020).

There was consensus among the expert panel that creating a medium- to long-term vision for equality that is anchored in key government documents is important. One expert, however, argued that it was more important that different government departments and agencies had an agreed level of *ambition* than an agreed *vision*, as “*the latter is always going to be at the level of an 'ideal', whereas a clear level of ambition will set an agreed benchmark (for example, agreement to set ambition at the level of equality of outcome).*”

**Activity: Ensure the strategy is a clear priority of Government, with high status.**



It is important that the centre of government is willing, tasked, and prepared to promote equality objectives and that the strategy is seen to be a key priority at the highest levels of government (OECD, 2020). Research on the implementation of social justice policies carried out by the Institute for Government in the UK, for example, highlighted that policy areas where there was close ministerial involvement in implementation had the best prospects for delivering on their objectives (Norris et al., 2014). Ensuring close ministerial involvement throughout the lifetime of equality strategies should help to ensure that they remain a high priority across the government.

When asked what the most important thing to consider in relation to taking a whole-of-government approach to equality, one expert responded: “*Clear leadership and commitment from the top of government*”.

**Activity: Align national equality strategies with core obligations to the European Union, Council of Europe and the United Nations for implementation of law, policy, reporting of data and monitoring.**



It was suggested by an expert, and then agreed by the expert panel, that aligning equality strategies with international commitments is an important way of ensuring that equality objectives remain a high priority of government. Being accountable for the delivery of equality goals outside of Ireland was believed to give extra impetus to implement whole-of-government equality policies. One expert, for example, recommended that future equality strategies: “*Consider the implications of the new EU Directive on Binding Standards for Equality Bodies to mandate an authoritative and impactful approach to equality policy.*”

**Activity: Define clear roles and responsibilities across the government for implementing, monitoring and overseeing the equality objectives.**



Effective realisation of an equality vision requires multiple institutions to promote, contribute to, implement, monitor and evaluate the equality strategy. These typically include: *a central equality institute* which promotes equality and the implementation of equality objectives; *the centre of government* which is responsible for promoting equality in government policy; *line ministries and agencies*, who have responsibility for developing, implementing and reporting on equality objectives in their initiatives and policies; *bodies that produce and collect data*, who ensure that high-quality data is available to support decision making; and *accountability and oversight structures*, that ensure compliance with equality objectives and identify shortcomings (OECD, 2018). Experts agreed that, at the outset of a new equality strategy, each of the relevant institutions should be identified and their roles and responsibilities clearly defined. For example, one expert responded that the most important consideration when taking a whole-of-government approach is:

*That the aim of the project is set out in such a way that it is: Clear, Concise & Enforceable. That everyone knows, in as simple terms as possible, what is expected of them; what it is they are to do, and that it is a possible/tangible goal they are expected to reach.*

Strong coordination of the various relevant institutions and agencies is required to ensure effective implementation of the equality strategy (OECD, 2018). Experts suggested a number of ways in which this could be achieved. For example, while multiple entities will be involved, one expert emphasised how important it is “*the project has a clear identified lead. If this is not done, then no one leads/pushes to ensure that actions are followed through. If everyone is in charge, no one is in charge.*”

Ensuring departments and agencies who will have responsibilities in relation to strategy implementation are invested in and commitment to these at the outset was identified as the most important consideration for implementing whole-of-government strategies by one of the experts:

*An equality policy that straddles a number of government departments will invariably be located in one of those departments, which will assume overall lead. Experience*

has shown that in such a scenario, the 'lead' department does not have the authority to drive implementation across another department. The need to get cross-departmental buy-in for policy objectives, at the policy design stage, is critical in going some way to address this.

Similarly, one expert commented that among the most important considerations for delivering whole-of-government initiatives is that there is “committed buy-in from both those delivering and overseeing the policy”, while another expert discussed the importance of “identification and involvement, at the policy design stage, of those tasked with driving implementation in each area of government, with a view to securing agreement in regard to identified goals/objectives for their area”.

**Activity: Locate leadership of equality strategies in a central government department with political authority.**



As mentioned above, experts acknowledged the challenges experienced by a coordinating department in influencing policy implementation in other departments and agencies. A potential solution proposed and agreed by the expert panel was to locate leadership of equality strategies in a central government department with a high level of political authority. The Department of An Taoiseach was mentioned specifically by one expert.

While consensus was reached on the importance of this action, there was one dissenting opinion: “I have indicated that I disagree with locating leadership of equality strategies in a central government department as it may not be appropriate in all circumstances. It may also become burdensome for a small number of departments.”

**Activity: Align strategies to core priority deliverables for each department and agency so that delivery of the equality strategy is delivery of core business.**



Another solution proposed and agreed by experts for ensuring that responsibilities for implementing strategies are fulfilled across the whole of government was to maximise alignment with other priority commitments: One expert recommended, for example, that “*Equality objectives are embedded in core government policy including COVID Recovery and Resilience Plan, National Development Plan.*” Embedding equality policy objectives in other priority policies may provide important incentives to ensure strategy actions are implemented as planned.

**Activity: Identify legislation that might be levered or proposed to underpin progress.**



Experts proposed and then agreed with the importance of having legislative underpinnings to the strategies, wherever possible. As one expert wrote: “*It is the creation of effective leverage rather than indication of intrinsic importance that promotes implementation.*” Another expert advised that “*if [the strategy is] embedded with legislative background this supports implementation*”. While there might be agreement across government about the intrinsic importance of national equality strategies, this may not be sufficient to ensure effective implementation and other levers, such as legislation, may be required in some instances.

**Activity: Identify the whole of government structures that fit with the strategy.**



The implementation of any whole-of-government initiative requires a set of practical structures or arrangements to enable it to happen (Colgan et al., 2014). The most commonly adopted structures for implementing whole-of-government initiatives are taskforces, interdepartmental committees, interdepartmental partnerships, cross-departmental partnerships, and special purpose agencies. Colgan et al. (2014) note that in countries where there has been strong commitment and investment in whole-of-government approaches to complex policy problems, the traditional interdepartmental committee has often been supplemented by newer structures or arrangements including taskforces, cross-sectoral programmes, and super networks. The literature suggests that different structures



have different strengths and limitations, and that the selection should align with the purpose of the strategy or initiative. Short-term projects may rely on informal and temporary arrangements, whereas initiatives aimed at achieving long-term change may need more permanent structures. There is a need for a clear mandate for all structures and, given the boundary-spanning nature of the work, structures should be built around a clear understanding of where authority, expertise and competencies lie (Fafard, 2013). One expert, for example, emphasised that the most important element of successful whole-of-government strategy implementation is: “*A meaningful cross-governmental working group (with invested members) to ensure that there's accountability for delivery.*”

### Implementation Approach 2: Engaging with stakeholders

Complex policy problems like inequality cannot be solved by government alone. Instead, governments need to work with citizens and other stakeholders to generate and implement effective solutions. Recent decades have seen a shift towards more open and inclusive policy-making processes aimed at increasing the transparency, legitimacy and efficacy of public policy responses to societal problems. Methods range from broad public consultation aiming to elicit views representative of the general public (from opinion polls to citizen assemblies) to targeted collaboration with what can be termed ‘communities of fate’ (Catt & Murphy, 2003), i.e., the segments of the population most likely to be impacted by the policy or strategy in question. In the context of national equality strategies, the latter type of targeted stakeholder involvement is likely to be particularly important.

In addition to its merits from democratic, social justice, and minority representation standpoints (Catt & Murphy, 2003), engaging stakeholders early in the process of the development of a national equality strategy and throughout its delivery has a range of benefits for *implementation*, including that it:

- Creates awareness of the policy or strategy (Catt & Murphy, 2003; CES, 2022)
- Generates buy-in (OECD, 2005)
- Identifies and acknowledges any resistance (CES, 2022)
- Helps to assess need, fit, feasibility, capacity and readiness (OECD, 2018a; CES, 2022)

All members of the expert panel agreed that stakeholder engagement is important for the development and implementation of national equality strategies.

## Stakeholder engagement

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



Expert consensus was also achieved on the importance of the following associated activities.

**Activity: Identify all the stakeholders on whose work, involvement, or cooperation the success of implementation depends and all stakeholders most likely to be impacted by the strategy.**

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



'Who should be engaged?' is a fundamental question when planning stakeholder engagement, but one that it is deceptive in its simplicity (Catt & Murphy, 2003). When developing equality strategies, decisions about which stakeholders should be involved will and should be made on a case-by-case basis. However, problems will arise if there is a failure to identify the nature and purpose of different types of societal groups, the reasons why they should be included or excluded, and how this relates to how representatives of these groups are selected to engage (Catt & Murphy, 2003).

Catt and Murphy (2003) suggest that the identification of relevant stakeholders be informed by four critical questions:

**1. What are the goals of undertaking stakeholder engagement/public consultation?**

The goals of the engagement (e.g., to gain up-to-date information or data on an issue, to canvass general opinion, to hear lived experiences of members of specific groups) will determine which combination of the general public, representatives of communities of fate, academic experts, etc. will be engaged.

**2. Are there specific societal groups whose inclusion in these consultations is essential to their purpose, or whose exclusion would be a grave mistake, and why?**

In line with the mantra “*Nothing about us without us*”, care should be taken to ensure that those groups targeted by the strategy are properly included in the equality strategy development and implementation. The heterogeneity of those groups must be reflected in the stakeholder engagement. For example, a strategy targeting migrant integration should recognise that there is not a unitary ‘migrant experience’, but that migrant status intersects with other aspects of identity like religion, culture and race to create multiple disadvantages. True collaborative stakeholder engagement should reflect this diversity.

**3. What are the relevant characteristics of these specific societal groups, and what does this tell us about the proper means by which the groups themselves and their representatives should be chosen?**

If the group in question is the general public, for example, selecting a random sample might be a suitable means of canvassing opinion. When seeking input from specific minority groups or communities of experts, government selection of representatives might be appropriate (perhaps from a list of candidates provided by the group itself). An alternative is group selection, where members of the target group elect their own representatives. In some cases, self-appointment may be appropriate (where government issues an open call, and an individual or group volunteers as a representative of that group). Each of these approaches has benefits and limitations, which should be carefully weighed (Catt & Murphy, 2003).

**4. In what way is a group’s representative accountable to the group, and what does this tell us about the capacity of that representative to faithfully represent the interests of its members?**

If a stakeholder representative is elected or selected by its group members, it may have a higher level of accountability to its members than if government-selected or self-appointed. This should be taken into consideration when planning stakeholder engagement.

The primary focus in the literature is on the importance of consulting the groups that are targeted by equality policy, and this was reflected in the views of most of the experts consulted. For example, one expert commented: “*I would just reiterate the importance of involving the people whose lived experience of the issue the policy is seeking to address. ‘Nothing about us without us’*”.

However, one expert emphasised the importance of “*also consulting with those indirectly impacted, and whose support is necessary for effective implementation*”, while another

expert argued that “*The crucial stakeholders are those with capacity to secure rather than benefit from strategy success.*” However, this was a minority viewpoint, with experts more commonly expressing that it is crucial to appropriately engage the communities that are targeted by the equality strategies.

One expert emphasised that the identification of relevant stakeholders is not a one-off process, but rather that it “*needs to be an on-going process, as during the consultation phases participants may identify people that the original TOR had overlooked or were unaware of*”.

**Activity: Take proactive steps to involve all relevant stakeholders in the development and implementation phases of the strategy, including minority, minoritised and hard-to-reach groups.**



Once decisions have been taken about *who* should be engaged, the next question is *how* representatives of that group should be included. Openness to stakeholder involvement is a necessary but insufficient condition for effective stakeholder engagement, which must also be *inclusive* (Johnson & Howsam, 2018). Inclusion is important for reasons of efficacy and equity (OECD, 2005). Efficacy, because the real value of engaging stakeholders in a process like the development of an equality strategy lies in the specificity of the perspectives and lived experiences of those who are typically underrepresented in decision-making and are not “*the usual suspects*” (Catt & Murphy, 2003; OECD, 2005). The equity factor requires governments to make extra efforts to engage those who may not be well-equipped for public participation (OECD, 2005). The inclusion of the voices of people in minoritised, marginalised or structurally vulnerable communities should be important for the development of *any* public policy, as it “*confers recognition of their unique identity, the worth of their input and their equal democratic right to participate in policy formation*” (Catt & Murphy, 2003, p.411). When considering public policy or strategy in the area of equality *specifically*, failure to include these voices in a meaningful way would constitute a fatal threat to the legitimacy of the strategy and would likely have serious consequences for the effectiveness of its implementation (Catt & Murphy, 2003).

For stakeholder engagement processes in equality strategies to be inclusive and equitable means moving beyond merely inviting participation to the active removal of barriers to that

participation (Catt & Murphy, 2003; OECD, 2005; Johnson & Howsam, 2018). Such barriers may be particularly high for minoritised, marginalised or seldom-included groups that may be targeted by equality strategies. Removal of these barriers may include actions such as the provision of childcare, transportation, and/or financial recompense for the expenses incurred by engaging (Johnson & Howsam, 2018). For stakeholders to be empowered requires that they fully understand the various options and the implications of proposed actions, which may require language translation or interpretation services, ensuring any written materials are produced in accessible, plain language formats, and/or the provision of independent experts to explain or describe issues and to answer questions (Johnson & Howsam, 2018). Finally, for truly empowered stakeholder engagement, action needs to be taken to ensure that all participants can voice their perspectives, including those who might find it difficult to share their thoughts in front of a large audience for either personal or cultural reasons (Johnson & Howsam, 2018).

One of the consulted experts noted that there are many reasons why representatives of minoritised or marginalised groups may be reluctant to engage with national equality strategy development and that this should be recognised by governmental actors leading the strategies. This expert emphasised how important it is to:

*Appreciate that stakeholders may be undertaking a risk assessment about the costs and benefits of engaging in equality policy, and this may be informed by real-world negative experiences, e.g., discrimination by State actors and those funded by the State, disabled people reliant on service providers, refugees and asylum seekers with pre- and post-migration experiences of discrimination and oppression.*

One expert wrote that the most important thing to consider in terms of stakeholder engagement is “*Supporting the capacity of minority, marginalised and hard to reach groups to be able to engage.*” Another echoed this sentiment, but took issue with the language of individuals being ‘hard to reach’, writing: “*Change language from 'hard to reach' - structurally vulnerable groups are 'seldom heard', 'seldom included' etc and the responsibility for that is with the State.*” This suggested change of language was proposed to the expert panel for consideration in the second round of consultation but did not reach the a priori threshold for consensus.

Related to taking proactive steps to include structurally vulnerable and marginalised groups, one expert argued that the most important things to consider in relation to stakeholder engagement are: “*Transparency, honesty and supporting capacity*”. Another expert felt the

most important considerations were: “Accessibility, relevance of line of questioning, and generally respecting their role in the process.” Another emphasised the need “To identify the investment and supports that structurally vulnerable groups require to engage in equality policy and ring fence that budget.”

**Activity: Clarify with stakeholders the definition of stakeholder engagement, so as to establish a common language and expectations**



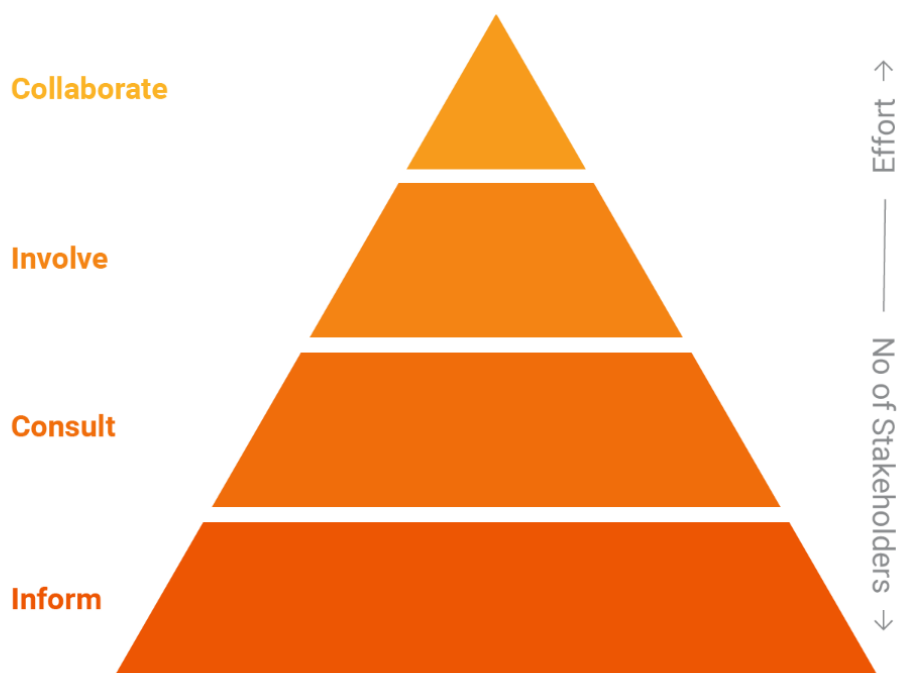
It was raised in the expert consultation process that the term ‘stakeholder engagement’ is ambiguous, with one expert writing: “One issue is the vagueness of the aim. ‘Stakeholder engagement’ is one of many buzz phrases that makes little sense before people make sense of it in practice.” It was proposed and agreed by experts that clarifying a definition of stakeholder engagement at the outset was important for setting expectations. Such clarification should help to ensure ongoing buy-in to the strategies among stakeholders, which may be important for implementation.

**Activity: Strive to move beyond consultation towards collaboration with key stakeholders.**



Four main levels of stakeholder engagement can be distinguished, as shown in Figure 4. Resources are often the determining factor in the level of stakeholder engagement undertaken (CES, 2022). ‘Informing’ and ‘consulting’ are forms of engagement that can reach large numbers of stakeholders, but as they allow for only limited engagement, there is an associated risk people feel their views are not being taken on board. At the top of the pyramid, ‘collaboration’ is most likely to have stakeholders feeling engaged and like partners in the policy or strategy, if it is done well. Doing so, rather than merely paying lip service, is resource intensive and requires substantial effort (CES, 2022). Doing collaboration poorly has little benefit to stakeholders or to government (CES, 2022).

Figure 4 Levels of stakeholder engagement



Source: CES Guide to Implementation (CES, 2022)

Inadequate collaborative policymaking has been cited as one of the four primary reasons for public policy failure (Hunter et al., 2020). Some have questioned whether public consultation and stakeholder engagement can ever be truly collaborative, arguing that, in practice, it is rare for consultative processes to go beyond justifying the decisions of elites (Johnson & Howsam, 2018). *Consultation* can be defined as a top-down, government-initiated process through which non-state actors provide their opinions or input on a policy or issue to government. This can be contrasted with collaboration, which strives to create a common set of goals through 'high intensity' participant engagement (Johnson & Howsam, 2018). Collaboration with stakeholders means that stakeholders are collectively engaged in “*formal, consensus-oriented and deliberative*” decision-making processes (Ansell & Gash, 2008, p. 544), so that goals and actions are co-produced by stakeholders (Johnson & Howsam, 2018).

The following are the main characteristics of empowered stakeholder collaboration (Johnson & Howsam, 2018):

- Governmental and non-governmental stakeholders are interdependent and seeking joint action towards mutually beneficial outcomes

- Processes are consensus or agreement-oriented
- Participants share their opinions, perspectives and conclusions in order to find common ground, reveal shared goals and priorities, and reach new understandings
- Communication is not unidirectional; participants present their perspectives and respond to inquiries about those perspectives
- The process has consequences in that it induces responsive political decisions
- The process allows participants a role in implementation as well as design, to ensure that the intentions of stakeholders are realised and unintended consequences addressed.

As mentioned above, collaboration is resource intensive and likely to only be possible with a smaller number of stakeholders. Stakeholder mapping can help decide which stakeholders should be collaborated with, which involved, which consulted, and which merely informed.

When asked to identify the most important considerations in relation to stakeholder engagement, collaboration was explicitly mentioned by one expert: *“Collaboration is the most important; it provides an opportunity to share power, resources and space, which is fundamental to achieving true equality. Stakeholders, particularly those from marginalised groups, should be engaged as [a] valuable resource and compensated accordingly.”*

Another expert wrote that the most important thing to consider with respect to stakeholder engagement is that it is based on *“Meaningful participation (rather than [a] tick box exercise)”*. Similarly, one expert wrote:

*It is important that the approach to stakeholder engagement is unambiguous, detailed and provides no opportunity for the State to simply go through the motions in a performative manner. Participation is part of the State's international obligations and should be treated as a core practice.*

**Activity: Set up a communications plan to ensure that all stakeholders involved in or affected by the strategy are kept informed about progress.**





While true collaboration should be aimed for with critical stakeholders, it is also important that the wider group of stakeholders (and perhaps the general public) are kept informed of developments. At the outset, a plan should be made that describes who should be communicated to about strategy progress and how frequently. This plan should be reviewed throughout the lifetime of the strategy and updated, as necessary.

One expert noted that it is important to: “*Articulate a communications approach that is about two-way communication, not only communicating out.*”, while another emphasised that there should be “*Openness to listen, ongoing feedback*”.

**Activity: Ensure all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the views of others and of what might be competing or conflicting viewpoints or priorities.**



It was proposed and then agreed by expert panel members that it is important that those facilitating stakeholder engagement aim to ensure that various parties have a comprehensive understanding of viewpoints and priorities contrary to their own. This may help to deepen understanding of why certain decisions are made in the strategy development process and why not all desired courses of action can be accommodated in a given strategy. This may be important for securing sustained buy-in from stakeholders throughout the lifetime of the strategies.

**Activity: Communicate about the work routinely with stakeholders to secure ongoing buy-in.**



The communications plan should be adhered to and revised throughout the lifetime of the strategies. Overly optimistic expectations have been identified as one of four main contributors to public policy failure (Hunter et al., 2020; McConnell, 2015). If stakeholders are heavily involved in the initial stages of strategy development but then subsequently less involved, they may feel let down by the process. Ongoing bidirectional communication with stakeholders may be important for securing continued buy-in from stakeholders (CES, 2022). This was highlighted by one member of the expert panel who indicated that one of the

most important things to consider with respect to stakeholder engagement was: “*Clarity about the scope of possible action so as not to generate unwarranted hopes or fears.*” One expert advised that communication with stakeholders should involve: “*Openness and factual information [and] identifying barriers and approaches under consideration*”, while another suggested ways in which ongoing communication about the strategy may be achieved: “*Regular briefings/ townhall meeting and other engagement processes to support effective engagement*”.

**Activity: Engage in information sharing on best practice in stakeholder engagement with other EU countries.**



It is possible that other European countries have had more extensive experience than Ireland of engaging representatives of particular groups that equality strategies might target. For example, while migration at the level currently experienced in Ireland is a relatively new phenomenon here, many EU countries have longer traditions of inward migration and in promoting migrant integration. It was proposed and agreed by experts that sharing information with other EU countries or European institutions may help to identify innovative stakeholder engagement methodologies (although unlike for many of the other proposed activities, the agreement was not unanimous). One expert recommended the following:

*Undertake a national exercise using innovative methodology to design the domestic realisation of these requirements/intentions with core stakeholders from a range of backgrounds (group membership / lived experience, relevant professionals - practitioner, policy makers, evidence generators and translators, data experts, advocates etc). Include international advisers including from European Institutions such as FRA, EIGE.*

**Activity: Secure buy-in from the general public.**



In addition to a concerted focus on collaborating with key stakeholders, it was also proposed and then agreed by expert panel members that gaining public support for equality initiatives

is important for effective implementation. Delivering on equality objectives involves societal shifts and cannot be achieved without collective action. Attention should be paid to promoting equality strategies widely and to making the case for their importance. However, it was also argued by one expert that securing the buy-in of the general public would likely be strategy-specific, perhaps due to differing societal views towards different groups: “*Securing the buy in of the general public may be subject to the nature or objectives of a specific strategy.*”

**Activity: Ensure ongoing media engagement throughout the lifetime of the strategy**



Engaging with the media in an ongoing manner throughout the course of a fixed-term equality strategy was proposed by an expert panel member and then agreed to be important by the wider group. Media engagement may help to keep a focus on the strategy over time, helping to hold those responsible for its delivery accountable for progress. It was also noted that the media were likely to play an important role in generating broad support for equality goals:

*In regard to media engagement, a more strategic engagement is required in particular to prevent / address public backlash to equality-focused policies. In the current political climate where the emergence of far-right rhetoric is gaining traction, there is a pressing need to engage strategically with the media as a key institution that has a role to promote social cohesion.*

**Implementation Approach 3: Conducting situation analysis, scoping and prioritisation**

The implementation literature indicates that a comprehensive exploration of the challenges to be addressed and their context (situation analysis), consideration and identification of potential policy interventions to address identified challenges (scoping), and the determination of the most important or pressing issues (prioritisation), are essential steps when designing and implementing an initiative like a national equality strategy. Conducting these steps well should help to ensure that resources are allocated appropriately and efficiently and that the strategy aims are achievable.

Situation analysis allows policy makers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context in which the policy is being proposed. In the case of equality or human rights policies, issues such as the nature and extent of existing inequalities and entrenched discriminatory practices can be identified, and by undertaking such an analysis, policy responses can be structured in a way that more effectively and efficiently address the issues identified. This process helps to identify the gaps between what is currently being done and the desired policy outcomes, allowing for more effective policy decisions. In the policy literature, these gaps are typically referred to as ‘problems’, with terminology like ‘problem framing’, ‘problem definition’ and ‘problem analysis’ often used (Head, 2018). Accordingly, in the draft framework initially presented to experts, the name of the implementation approach was ‘*Problem analysis, scoping and prioritisation*’. One expert consulted argued that language that problematises the target of equality policy is not desirable: “*I question the framing of the approach to equality policy as a ‘problem analysis’. This is a negative and unhelpful step off point.*” A change of wording was proposed to the panel of experts in the second round of consultation, and consensus was reached that ‘situation analysis’ was more appropriate language to include in the framework. This decision was not unanimous. One expert argued that “*Implementation happens when the status quo is experienced as a problem by those with power/influence.*”

Experts consulted as part of this research were unanimous in endorsing the importance of these steps for the implementation of national equality policy.

#### Situation analysis, scoping and prioritisation

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



Expert consensus was also reached on the usefulness of the following set of associated activities.

**Activity: Conduct a situation or needs analysis in a collaborative effort between government and non-government stakeholders.**

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



All experts consulted as part of this research agreed that conducting a situation or needs analysis was important. As one expert put it: “*Conducting problem analysis is really the first step, it will help identify gaps, needs and areas to prioritise.*”

A comprehensive situation analysis will seek to not only identify current issues, problems or inequalities, but also to gauge their relative severity and urgency and to investigate their root causes. When done in partnership with stakeholders, a situation analysis can help to ensure that policy responses are focused on the most pressing needs, are responsive to the diversity of targeted populations, and contain meaningful goals that can lead to improved outcomes (OECD, 2018). One expert wrote of the importance of a “*thoroughly researched policy problem analysis (with key stakeholders, including those with real-time experience of the issue)*”.

**Activity: Identify the available evidence and any evidence gaps that may need to be filled, drawing on international, national, and local experience.**



Several approaches can be taken to a situation or needs analysis, including the analysis of existing data, consultation, or research. One expert, for example, argued that the most important things to consider in relation to this implementation approach are: “*Good data and reviews of previous policies and strategies.*” Another expert argued that it was important that any such analysis be undertaken with “*Academic and independent rigour, along with clear communication of the analysis.*”

However, one expert warned that waiting until a *complete* picture of the situation is available may serve to delay necessary action, and that policy makers should guard against this:

*In an ideal world, needs analysis would precede policy development; however, in the field of equality, there is a dearth of equality data from which to assess need and, in some instances, getting such data is not straightforward. In light of this, needs assessments can delay policy action. Government departments/agencies/service providers are reluctant, often resistant, to collecting equality data. This has a detrimental impact on evidence-based policy making.”*

**Activity:** Review international, regional, and national standards to identify the changes that equality policy is required/intended to achieve.



Identifying gaps between current conditions and agreed standards is another important means through which needs can be identified. This was proposed by an expert panel member and then agreed by the group. One expert advised:

*Consider the equality and human rights obligations on the State, including EU requirements of Member States. Even if requirements are non-binding... the State should be an exemplar of good practice and leadership.*

**Activity:** Ensure that the strategy is dynamic and that the proposed policy/strategy development and implementation processes are agile enough to be able to respond if and when issues change.



There was a recognition among experts that while a comprehensive situation or needs analysis is important for determining the initial direction of an equality strategy, it is also important to ensure that this direction can be altered over time to accommodate changing or arising needs of the communities targeted by the strategy. One expert advised:

*Be open to the shifting sands of time. A policy/strategy cannot be developed quickly so the issue being addressed may change/mutate in the intervening period of time and the proposed process must be agile enough to change in order to be able to respond.*

**Activity: Define the exact scope of the strategy and prioritise issues in accordance with their relative importance and urgency.**



There is evidence that many countries often try to tackle too many issues in their strategic plans, which can be a major threat to achieving the strategic objectives (OECD, 2018): “A *strategic initiative with a somewhat limited scope but genuine focus and realistic intervention plans is worth more than a broad strategy which cannot be realistically implemented.*” (OECD, 2018, p. 32).

While experts agreed on the importance of a defined scope and a prioritisation of issues, one expert cautioned against being overly exact in terms of the scope of the strategy, commenting that:

*In relation to defining the scope, I think it can be detrimental to concentrate too much on the exactness. Some fluidity needs to be built in in order to ensure that there are some 'easy wins' in order to establish the strategy. The precise objectives can be defined, but I think there has to be latitude in the scope.*

In terms of how any prioritisation should be carried out, one expert advocated for: “*Co-designing criteria for prioritisation and being transparent on the evidence used, the process for and decision-making practices, and the actors in prioritisation. This is a readily assembled set of principles-based criteria.*” Another spoke about the need when determining priorities for: “*A mechanism for identifying frameworks which are capable of receiving political support as well as being accepted as progress by advocacy groups.*”

**Activity: Conduct a readiness/capacity assessment.**



Implementation readiness refers to the extent to which organisations and individuals are willing to deliver, and capable of delivering, the intervention (Weiner, Lewis & Linnan, 2009; Dynmicki et al., 2014). Assessing implementation readiness is an important step in preparing for the implementation of any initiative. In the context of public policy, readiness

assessments may involve evaluation of the current infrastructure and resource capacity of government departments and agencies, as well as of local-level actors, where appropriate, to plan for and deliver strategy actions. It may also involve review of barriers such as existing policy, legislation or regulation that would hinder implementation of the equality strategy. Assessing capacity to implement a national strategy may also involve assessing political commitment, technical expertise, and financial resources. Such an assessment can help to identify issues that need to be addressed prior to implementation, thereby facilitating a more successful and efficient implementation process.

One expert pointed out that: *“Policy problems can evoke policy conflict, in particular when the policy area in question is contentious. These issues need to be honestly and openly discussed at the design stage, so that implementation barriers associated with such policy conflict, can be named/addressed/mitigated.”*

When asked the most important consideration in relation to this implementation approach, one expert responded: *“Forward planning, as the implementation of a strategy will take time and forecasting and identifying barriers need full consideration”*.

#### Implementation Approach 4: Setting objectives and action planning

Objective setting and action planning are essential steps when developing and implementing government strategies, as they give those involved in implementing the strategy clear goals to work towards and concrete steps towards achieving those goals. Along with the overall vision, the objectives, actions and specific indicators of progress are the key foundational elements of any government strategy (OECD, 2018). An objective is a goal, target or intended outcome, while actions are the activities or tasks that are designed to lead to the realisation of objectives. The information gleaned from a situation or needs analysis as described above, i.e., the list of key issues and their causes, can be used to set objectives for the strategy; if the situation or needs analysis and scoping and prioritisation have been done well, then the setting of objectives should be relatively straightforward (OECD, 2018). Once objectives have been determined, the necessary actions to achieve those objectives can be planned. In parallel with the selection of objectives and the planning of actions, indicators of progress should be chosen. Indicators are directly tied to objectives and actions, as they are the means through which it can be gauged whether actions have been implemented or objectives achieved (OECD, 2018).



All experts agreed that objective setting and action planning are important for developing and implementing national equality strategies.

### Setting objectives and action planning



Expert consensus was also reached on the following associated activities.

**Activity: Limit the number of objectives and actions to a set of focused and realistic priorities, avoiding a broad strategy that is difficult to implement; practise the art of saying no.**



If a strategy has too many objectives, it is likely to be difficult, if not impossible, to implement. The literature suggests that a focused set of objectives is preferable:

*As a rule, there should be only a **limited number of objectives** to help focus and mobilise resources for their achievement. Too many objectives will split scarce resources and may lead to the unfocused, and hence suboptimal, delivery of policies and reforms. (OECD, 2018, p. 42)*

The panel of experts was generally in agreement with limiting objectives and actions to realistic and clear sets. For example, one expert advised that strategic objectives should be “*Realistic and linked to clear actions*”, while another stressed that: “*Setting realistic priorities and ensuring that there is designated budget to achieve those priorities is very crucial.*” Similarly, one expert indicated that the most important consideration in relation to this implementation approach was to have “*A number of clear agreed objectives, with associated actions and areas of responsibility with timeframes.*”

One expert provided advice on how these clear and specific objectives should be determined:

*Consultations on policy objectives, including with affected groups, should employ a framework to focus these stakeholders on identifying measurable and clear objectives, rather than open-ended consultations with no framework, that result in 'wish lists' and/or very broad and/or unclear objectives.*

Consulted experts cautioned that limiting the objectives and actions within a strategy such as a national equality strategy can be a difficult and contentious process, with one commenting: “*Note the potential scope for conflict: setting priorities means moving from a vague consensus to a concrete competition to prioritise.*”, while another emphasised the importance of considering: “*competing demands, political and public buy in*” when ‘practising the art of saying no’. Another expert pointed out: “*The need to be conscious that tough decisions have to be made - sometimes including all points result in a policy that is too wide and cannot be implemented.*” Nonetheless, experts agreed that decisions about limiting objectives and actions should be public and transparent. One expert, for example, stressed the importance of “*Transparency and accountability about what has been included, non-included and why.*”

While most of the experts were in agreement about the importance of limiting objectives and actions to a focused and realistic set, it is worth noting that one expert disagreed with the inclusion of this action in the final framework:

*I disagreed...because, while I agree that policies should set a limited number of clear objectives, I am reacting to the word 'realistic'...: most policymakers are (wrongly) of the view that achieving even modest equality-focused objectives is 'unrealistic'.*

**Activity: Include short-term objectives for quick gains that lead to longer term objectives.**



While most of the expert advice was that objectives should be a) limited in number, b) realistic, c) clear, d) linked to actions and e) agreed by stakeholders, it was also proposed by one expert and then agreed by the panel that including objectives of varying scope, ambition or duration could be helpful in terms of gaining momentum for a national strategy through the attainment of “*quick wins*”.

**Activity: Calculate the costs of the necessary resources for each planned action.**



To determine the capacity to deliver on actions being committed to in strategy documents, it is important to ensure that they are costed. Accurate costings may help to make the case for increased resources or may help decisions about which actions can realistically be achieved and should therefore be included in the final strategy. While consulted experts all agreed with the importance of this action (e.g., “costs associated with implementing the strategy also required”), one expert sounded the following note of caution: “Equality policies can be difficult to accurately cost, in particular regarding policy objectives that involve on-going rather than one-off initiatives. This should not be used as an impediment to policy development.”

**Activity: Calculate the potential benefits of each planned action.**



In addition to the importance of calculating the costs of strategy actions, it was proposed by an expert and agreed by the panel that it is also important to calculate the potential benefits of strategy actions. Such calculations will bolster the rationale for individual actions and may serve to crystallise intentions and incentivise implementation. One example mentioned the importance of “identifying and clearly understanding the shared benefits and opportunities” when engaging in whole-of-government initiatives. Another expert advised how this process should be undertaken: “Be clear that this includes modelling and costing work both of the benefits and the costs of inaction (perpetuating and increasing inequality through inaction, different actions).”

**Activity: Assign ownership of each action.**



When asked to indicate the most important considerations in relation to objective setting and action planning, one expert responded: “Identifying who is responsible to actioning the

various objectives.” Indeed, a key theme throughout the experts’ contributions was the need for accountability. Identifying the department or agency with primary responsibility for delivering an action is a necessary step, one that may be particularly important where multiple departments or agencies are implicated in a single action.

**Activity: Set timelines for each action.**



The importance of establishing timeframes within which actions are to be achieved was affirmed by all expert panel members. Experts discussed how these timelines should be both realistic and achievable. For example:

*The goal of the policy/strategy needs to be centre. This is the 'goal' i.e., to actually implement something. Therefore, this is put down first and work back from this giving realistic timeframes. Artificial timeframes, ones that are desirable but not realistic, set up stumbling blocks and halt a good plan.*

**Activity: Develop performance indicators, targets and measures.**



While it is a crucial step in strategy formation, the development of indicators, including their baseline values and targets, is often neglected while national strategies are being developed, “*leaving the strategy as a vague document that does not **properly guide implementers** on what they should actually achieve, and leaving the wider audience without a **clear measurable and traceable definition** of the ambitions of the government*” (OECD, 2018, p.27). Indicators can be either qualitative or quantitative and in order to facilitate the assessment of progress, they must have a baseline value and a target value. They may also have interim targets or *milestones*.

There are different types of indicators that can be employed to assess whether actions are implemented or objectives being achieved. Input indicators refer to the value of the resources employed to achieve an output, e.g., the number of working days or amount of money devoted to developing or delivering a programme of work. Output indicators refer to

the products, goods or services produce by the activities, e.g., the number of people who received training, the number of events held. Outcome indicators relate to short-term and medium-term effects of an action's outputs, while impact indicators refer to overall and longer-term effects (OECD, 2018).

National equality strategies are likely to require a range of indicator types be employed. For each *objective*, between one and three outcome and/or impact indicators should be identified and for every *action*, at least one output indicator should be identified (OECD, 2018). As it is a time-consuming and resource-intensive process to identify indicators and measure progress towards targets, it is recommended that the number of indicators used is limited (OECD, 2018). This necessarily means that, as discussed earlier, the number of objectives and the number of actions in the strategies must similarly be limited to a manageable and focused set.

Experts commented about the importance of “*setting public, quantifiable targets and timelines for reaching them*”, of “*Measurable targets and clear definitions.*” Similarly, “*where policy objectives involve ongoing (rather than one-off) initiative, the strategy should set targets to be achieved within the lifetime of the strategy/policy.*”

One expert highlighted that the development of appropriate indicators should be a collaborative process: “*For each objective set, the relevant local level implementers should be involved in setting targets and indicators.*”

**Activity: Conduct an assessment of the appropriateness of the strategy, including a review of the evidence base for planned actions and sense-checking of these actions with those who will be implementing and impacted by the strategy.**



Before finalising any list of proposed actions, it is important to assess whether each intervention is likely to address identified issues and to provide meaningful movement towards the achievement of objectives. This may involve assessing whether there is an evidence base for actions and also ‘sense checking’ the actions with local implementers and those targeted by the strategy. One expert, for example, advised “*that those involved or affected by the policy are the real 'experts' and will have lived experience. The researcher needs to get 'down and dirty' to ensure that the final policy to be implemented is realistic and*

based on as wide a consultation as possible.”, while another emphasised the importance of local-level actors, who can often be overlooked, in sense checking the proposed actions:

*Local-level policy implementers are often not, or very peripherally, involved at the policy design stage. Their involvement is critical, not just to secure buy-in, but to troubleshoot possible implementation barriers- they have the coalface experience of likely issues, that the policymaker doesn't always have.*

## Implementation Approach 5: Ensuring effective leadership

Effective leadership may be essential for successful implementation of whole-of-government strategies, with leadership emerging as a key theme in the literature and all experts in the consultation process endorsing its importance. As one expert wrote: “*Meaningful, committed leadership is crucial - particularly when it comes to issues pertaining to equality policy.*”

### Ensuring effective leadership



Expert consensus was reached on the usefulness of the following activities to promote effective leadership in the context of implementing national equality strategies.

### **Activity: Create opportunities for visible endorsement of the strategy by key Ministers and senior public officials.**



When ministers and other senior public officials publicly support a strategy, policy or programme, this sends a clear signal about the importance of the initiative and the priority it is being given by government. This may help to give the strategy credibility and generate broader support among both those tasked with implementing it and those it seeks to impact. Promotion and endorsement of the strategy by ministers can also help to shape public opinion and may influence behaviour and engagement by members of the public.

Some potential ways that ministers and other senior officials can visibly endorse and support the equality strategy are: holding press conferences or other events that highlight the strategy, participating in promotional or educational campaigns; speaking about the strategy

at conferences or other events; holding roundtable discussions to discuss the strategy with stakeholders; making television or radio appearances when the strategy is launched or to give updates on its progress; meeting local officials and community leaders to talk about the strategy; issuing press releases providing progress updates relating to the strategy, and sharing information or images on social media relating to activities or events associated with the strategy.

**Activity: Identify an operational leader or leadership group to drive the strategy**



Identifying an operational leader or leadership group is important for implementing a whole-of-government strategy like a national equality strategy as it creates a single point of accountability for the strategy.

Several experts expressed that this leadership group should have sufficient authority and autonomy in driving the strategies, while also being accountable. For example, one expert wrote that there should be a focus on: *“Providing some level of autonomy while maintaining accountability but supporting flexibility in implementations due to evolving prioritisations.”* This was echoed in another expert comment that mentioned the importance of: *“Ensuring that the Leadership team has the authority and wherewithal to implement the strategy, with accountability measures built in”*. One expert suggested that the most important thing to consider with respect to leadership is *“A clear, identifiable leader with authority, but who is also accountable.”*, while another felt that the most important thing with respect to leadership is that the *“Leader needs to be given the scope to make decisions; to intervene in an appropriate manner at the appropriate level and be strong enough to be able to stand over decisions made.”*

In addition to organisational or structural considerations like autonomy, authority and accountability, some highlighted the importance of considering psychological factors for the effectiveness of leaders. One expert highlighted the importance of resilience and persistence among leaders, noting the importance of: *“Resilience and ability to sustain significant challenges, internally/externally”*, while another mentioned the importance of fostering motivation and fulfilment among leaders, providing the following advice:

1. Understand and build on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators for leaders who are participating in the implementation efforts so that their experience of leadership is meaningful, rewarding. 2. Take an innovative and enjoyable approach to leadership of implementation efforts - too often policy implementation is deadening, dull and dispiriting. 3. Develop a team and peer culture among leaders including through the use of team coaching.

**Activity: Ensure representatives on implementation and strategic direction structures are at a decision-making level of seniority without delegation.**



There was strong agreement among the experts consulted that it is important to have individuals with the authority to make decisions regularly attend strategy meetings. This was deemed to be important for reasons of efficiency and accountability. One expert wrote:

*Accountability is critical. Leaders set the tone for how business gets done and must be held accountable. From experience, clear Roles and Responsibilities is great but it's not enough. Leadership must be held accountable for equality goals and equality objectives must be tied to their performance goals/appraisal.*

**Activity: Ensure that national and local-level leadership work together to secure the conditions for effective policy implementation.**



In whole-of-government strategy implementation, the boundaries between government departments and agencies, between policymakers and implementation bodies, and between different levels (national and local, policymakers and front-line personnel, administrative and professional personnel) need to be well managed if implementation is to be effective (Colgan et al., 2014).



Comments from experts emphasised this. For example, one expert wrote: “National and local-level leadership (for a specific policy) should work in tandem to secure the conditions for policy implementation. There is often a disconnect between the national and local level in this regard.” Relatedly, when asked what they believed was the most important consideration in relation to leadership when implementing public policy, one expert responded as follows:

*Leadership at the local level of policy delivery is often neglected in the policy process. In this regard, there is often an over-emphasis (by all stakeholders) of national-level leadership and with securing national drivers. Yet national leadership rarely drives policy implementation at the local level. Local leadership requires significant focus at the policy design stage.*

**Activity: Develop broad ownership of the strategy through distributed leadership and delegation.**



While experts were clear that there should be an overall leadership group, they acknowledged that this leadership group could not ensure implementation of whole-of-government strategies in isolation and that delegation and broad ownership would be important. One expert recommended the following:

*I would also explore the concept of 'followership' (and other concepts), since most of this work is about collaboration in the absence of a clear leader. Necessarily, there will be many 'centres' of activity, which makes it difficult to pin too many hopes on one.*

**Activity: Review evidence-based approaches to inclusive, diverse, rights-based leadership and explicitly embed this practice, and evaluation of same, into policy implementation.**



An expert proposed and the panel then agreed that it was important to develop an understanding of inclusive leadership and to embed this into the leadership practices of

those responsible for delivering national equality strategies. One expert recommended the creation of: “a Compendium of promising, good leadership practices based on evaluation of leadership in equality policy.”

Another expert reported their experience that such practices were rarely present among those leading in the area equality policy:

*From my experience, many Leaders are not held accountable for equality goals, they hardly engage in EDI training, they are not held accountable to demonstrate how they embed EDI in their daily work processes, many leaders are viewed as “untouchables” to the point that even when they are clearly being discriminatory, everyone turns a blind eye or are afraid to speak up. So, the operational leader driving the strategy must be assessed for inclusive leadership skills and should set up mechanisms to hold themselves and other leaders accountable.*

### Implementation Approach 6: Securing adequate resources

Securing adequate resources for implementation involves obtaining funding, staff, technology, data, and any other asset identified as necessary for effective implementation of the initiative. This will involve the securing of resources upfront and may also be an ongoing process. Consulted experts were unanimous that adequate resources are important for the implementation of national equality strategies.

#### Securing adequate resources



Consensus was also reached that the following associated actions are important.

**Activity: Determine how the budget for the strategy implementation will be secured, where accountability rests and how accountabilities will be shared, if appropriate.**



Expert panel members acknowledged that there were challenges around securing adequate resources for strategy development and implementation. For example, when asked to

indicate the most important things to consider in relation to resourcing national equality strategies, one expert responded: *“That you likely won't secure sufficient resources.”*

One expert indicated that the most important considerations when securing adequate resources for national equality strategy implementation were *“Identifying budget lines and allocating trained staff resources”*.

Being able to evidence that equality strategies can bring benefits was also mentioned as an important approach for securing resources. For example, one expert argued that there should be *“Strong political, civil service and public arguments for investment and the returns that equality policy will achieve. Modelling studies [should be undertaken] so that the case for investment is evidentially based and the costing for all types of resources are accurate.”*

Finally, one expert spoke of the importance of factoring in indirect costs when securing resources for strategy implementation, mentioning in particular: *“Resources for training staff appropriately and also for collecting additional data, as necessary.”*

**Activity: Secure multi-annual funding for the duration of the strategy.**



Given that whole-of-government strategies involve many actors, this can create difficulties in deciding how implementation is resourced. One expert offered the following advice:

*When dealing with cross-departmental issues, where there is no one identified funder, an MOU/Service Level Agreement (SLA) needs to be in place to ensure funding will not need to be 'fought' for every year...One 'body' takes on the responsibility and is given the authority under a MOU/SLA to demand the agreed resources for the term of the agreements.*

In a similar vein, another expert mentioned the importance of *“Multiannual budgeting”* while one expert commented on the importance of *“Financial resources [being] agreed, [and this] approach maintained during political changing environments.”*

However, one expert disagreed with the inclusion of this activity in the framework, indicating that multi-annual funding is challenging to obtain and is not necessary for successful

implementation: “*multi-annual funding is technically difficult to secure; multi-annual programmes can be effective even without formal multi-annual budgets.*”

**Activity: Connect resources for equality policy with budgetary policy and mechanisms, including equality budgeting and obligations regarding use of European funding and monitoring of same.**



It was proposed by an expert and agreed by the panel that it is important that there are coherent links between the resourcing of national equality strategies and broader budgetary policy and mechanisms. Specifically, it was mentioned that national equality strategy development should be explicitly connected with the equality budgeting programme introduced on a pilot basis in Ireland in 2017 and since expanded. European funding streams were also specified as an important tie-in for national equality strategies.

**Activity: Identify and secure the staff with the skillsets and expertise needed for the work.**



There was consensus that it is important to identify individuals with the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience to implement national equality strategies. The literature suggests that implementation of a whole-of-government initiative is likely to require key personnel with strong communication skills, the capacity to cultivate interpersonal relationships, political savvy, an ability to influence others, and an appreciation of the interdependencies involved in understanding and solving complex problems (Colgan et al., 2014). Empathy, reciprocity and trust, and a capacity to see the problem from the social and values perspectives of other stakeholders may also be key capacities. Other relevant capacities may include an ability to manage the complexity and interdependence involved in working across horizontal and vertical boundaries, and the capacity to manage multiple and potentially conflicting accountabilities (Colgan et al., 2014). Identifying and securing staff with these skillsets is likely to be important to ensure effective implementation.

Experts also mentioned attributes that are likely to be important for implementing whole-of-government initiatives, which include commitment and independence. One expert noted the need for key personnel with “*Commitment to the shared goal. Be independently strong, able to put forward their opinion (based on experience /knowledge but with the ability to take on new challenges because of their desire to learn).*”, while another highlighted the importance of a strong understanding of the political context in which the equality strategy is being delivered: “*They need a strong sense of the political and administrative context in which they are operating so as not to be myopic about the place of equality in the competing priorities of government.*”

**Activity: Ensure that an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) lens is applied when securing staff with the skills and expertise to develop and implement equality policy; include experts from underrepresented groups in the hiring process.**



It was proposed and then agreed by experts that it is important to aim for diversity in the teams in government departments tasked with delivering on equality policy and that an EDI lens should be applied when identifying staff who will be charged with developing and delivering equality policy. Ensuring diversity in these teams requires ensuring an EDI lens is secured in initial civil service recruitment processes and also when considering staff movement internally. Experts expressed that it is particularly important that staff working on equality and human rights policy are diverse and that this should be a consideration when identifying teams leading national equality strategies.

**Activity: Systematically review the resources allocated.**



Experts agreed that there needs to be ongoing review of the resources made available to implement national equality strategies. In terms of securing a budget upfront, one expert noted that “*This may not be possible at the time of adoption of the policy but require a progressive negotiation in line with the progress of implementation.*”

Another expert highlighted how personnel needs might change over the lifetime of the strategy's implementation, noting that there may be a need for “*Different skillsets throughout the period of implementation, recognising change management and cultural demands, internally/externally*”.

### Implementation Approach 7: Instituting implementation structures and teams

Any implementation effort needs dedicated people to provide direction and support, and the implementation science literature suggests that establishing an implementation team may be an important step for successful implementation of programmes, practices or policies (CES, 2022; National Implementation Research Network [NIRN], 2022).

All consulted experts agreed that instituting implementation teams was important for the implementation of national equality strategies.

#### Instituting implementation structures and teams



Consensus was also reached on the following associated activities.

**Activity: Establish implementation teams with the relevant expertise in policy development and organisational strategy, expert knowledge and boundary-spanning skills to guide the initiative.**



*Implementation teams are the foundation of effective implementation, collectively leveraging members' diverse skills and perspectives to build an enabling context for interventions. Implementation teams ensure the inclusion of multiple actors and perspectives in activities such as communication, problem-solving, and data-driven decision-making. (Metz & Bartley, 2020, p. 199).*

The purpose of implementation teams is to attend to, support and oversee implementation (Metz & Bartley, 2020). They are not to be confused with other groups of structures like governance groups or steering committees, in that while they may have some decision-making authority, major decisions are taken by other governance structures (CES, 2022; Higgins et al., 2011). They are also distinct from advisory groups or technical working groups which may provide input at distinct and limited time periods (Metz & Bartley, 2020). Instead, implementation teams are actively involved in managing the implementation process over the longer term; they are a group accountable for 'making it happen' (NIRN, 2022).

According to the implementation literature (e.g., CES, 2022; Metz & Bartley, 2020; NIRN, 2022), core functions of implementation teams include:

- Increasing collaboration and readiness for change
- Installing and sustaining implementation drivers such as coaching, training and data systems
- Assessing and reporting on issues such as capacity and outcomes
- Ensuring equity in implementation
- Building linkages with external stakeholders and partners
- Problem-solving and promoting sustainability

The literature suggests that implementation teams should have the knowledge, skills, abilities, and time to succeed and to sustain the work. The following are ideal competencies to secure on implementation teams, as outlined by NIRN (2022):

- The ability to engage, collaborate, and build relationships with leadership and stakeholders
- The ability to facilitate change through implementation training and coaching
- The ability to analyse data for informed decision making and to support complex change
- An understanding of the components of the strategy or policy and their connection to outcomes

Experts consulted as part of the evaluation highlighted similar attributes and competencies as being important for any implementation teams tasked with supporting the implementation of national equality strategies. For example, one expert argued for the importance of:

*Ensuring that the people in structures, teams have the following: 1. Subject expertise and the means to develop this. 2. Professional commitment to advancing equality. 3. Strong working relationships and involvement with rights holders. 4. Strong working relationships with colleagues in other Member States and in European institutions and organisations, e.g., Equinet. 5. Mindset characterised by ambition, innovation, creativity, persistence.*

Other experts highlighted the importance of implementation teams having a “*proactive understanding of core challenges*”.

In order to ensure that the requisite skills and expertise are available on an implementation team created to support the implementation of national equality strategies, concerted capacity building and training efforts, may be required, as mentioned by one consulted expert who recommended: “*1. Capacity building for implementation team members and continuing professional development. 2. Team coaching so that members work effectively and efficiently with impact both individually and collectively.*”

Other important considerations include the appropriate size and composition of any implementation team. The implementation literature is clear that implementation teams should be as small as possible given the nature of the work to be accomplished (Wageman, Hackman & Lehman, 2005), with teams typically including a limited number of members (in the region of 3-12 according to CES, 2022; Metz and Barkley [2020] mention a typical range of 6-10 members).

The importance of implementation teams reflecting a diversity of perspectives is frequently emphasised in the literature (CES, 2022; Metz & Barkley, 2020). This was echoed in the comment of one expert, who when asked what the most important consideration in relation to implementation teams was: “*Ensuring that the implementation team is diverse and are trained to manage team diversity and power dynamics.*”

Another expert commented:

*A key aspect... which is crucial to implementation, is attention to implementing actors/teams at the local delivery level. This is not to dismiss the importance of the national level; however, policy implementation is completely reliant on having effective local-level implementation drivers.*



**Activity: Locate implementation teams in an appropriate setting, linked to a central department.**



It was proposed by an expert and agreed by the panel that it is important to consider the appropriate location of implementation teams. One consideration is whether to have a central, national team in the coordinating department whose sole remit is to attend to implementation issues. It may instead or also be deemed desirable to have an implementation team in each department/agency tasked with implementing at least one action, or to have an implementation team for each individual action, which may be located in an individual unit, division or team. Decisions about where implementation teams should be located should be made on a strategy-by-strategy basis and may depend on the number of the actions included in the strategic plan and the nature of those actions.

**Activity: Ensure the implementation team has clear links to the Strategy leadership.**



Regardless of the location of the implementation team(s), the expert panel members agreed that it was important to ensure clear pathways between the team(s) and leadership, with bidirectional communication regarding implementation issues, challenges and successes that can feed into decision making about the strategy.

**Activity: Require the implementation team to report regularly to Government and Oireachtas in relation to meeting deadlines and targets or explaining why they have been missed.**



In line with a common theme in the experts' responses, the need for accountability among those implementing national equality strategies was strongly expressed by experts. Specifically, it was proposed by an expert and agreed by the panel that implementation

teams should be mandated to report regularly to government on implementation progress. Having to account for missed deadlines or targets was felt to provide an important spur for implementation efforts. One expert commented that: *“Implementation is crucial and a weak area in IRL. The type of reporting needs to be carefully considered.”* Another expert provided a recommendation on how this reporting should be achieved:

*Suggest an annual equality report to the Oireachtas on policy implementation in a manner that provides a coherent overview across all strategies, and for the report to be formally considered in an Oireachtas debate and by an Oireachtas Committee. Consider how this approach could relate to forthcoming transposition of the EU Directive on Binding Standards for Equality Bodies that is IHREC’s monitoring, reporting and Oireachtas oversight mechanisms aligned to Government reporting.*

### Implementation Approach 8: Developing an implementation plan

The implementation literature is clear that implementation has a greater likelihood of success if adequate planning is done in advance. An implementation plan includes important information for achieving the desired outcomes from implementing an initiative. It differs from the action plan typically produced for government strategies in that it includes more specific and detailed information on how actions are to be achieved. To illustrate the difference, the following (Table 6) is an example of an action as included in the action plan in the National Strategy for Women and Girls:

Table 6: Sample entry from the National Strategy for Women and Girls action plan

Objective	Action	Time scale	Responsible body
Information gathered to support Government investment in childcare	1.6 Conduct and publish an independent review of the cost of providing quality childcare in private and community settings, consistent with the principle of ongoing professionalisation of the sector.	2018	DCYA

This entry in the action plan lists the action, the strategy objective it relates to, the year in which the action is to be completed, and the government department with overall responsibility for its delivery. By contrast, an *implementation* plan for this action would include detail on how the action is to be achieved. A hypothetical extract from such a plan is shown in Table 7.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The table contains fictional government department units and EUR amounts.

Table 7: Hypothetical extract from an implementation plan for an equality strategy action

Action: Conduct and publish an independent review of the cost of providing quality childcare in private and community settings, consistent with the principle of ongoing professionalisation of the sector.

Task/activity	Timeframe	Responsibility	Resources required	Risks	Mitigation strategies
Draft a request for tenders and put on eTenders	Sept 2017	Childcare Unit, Early Years Division	Two working days of administrative officer time, half a day of assistant principal officer time, half a day of principal officer time.	None identified.	n/a
Assess tender submissions and appoint a contractor to conduct the review.	Nov 2017	Childcare Unit	€30,000 for the review	No suitable tenders received.	Ensure the budget for the work is appropriate. Ensure the deadline for receipt of submissions is reasonable.
Establish an oversight group for the work.	Nov 2017	Childcare Unit	Five individuals with relevant expertise to serve on the group.	None identified.	n/a

Conduct an initiation meeting with successful tenderer.	January 2018	Childcare Unit	Half day to arrange the meeting; time for participants to attend the meeting. An appropriate room with teleconferencing capabilities.	None identified.	n/a
Convene oversight group meetings	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 2018	Childcare Unit	Half a day per quarter X 5 group members	Availability of oversight group members to participate.	Set all meeting dates at project outset to give sufficient notice and ensure group members' availability.
Receive and review interim report	Aug 2018	Oversight Group	Half a working day x 5 group members	Contractor misses deadline.	Include penalties in contract for unreasonable.
Receive and review final report	Nov 2018	Oversight Group	Half a working day x 5 group members	Contractor misses deadline	Include penalties in contract for unreasonable delay.
Brief the Minister on findings of the review	Nov 2018	Assistant Secretary, Early Years Division	None	Review concludes there is limited data available or that costs are prohibitive.	None.

There was consensus among consulted experts on the value of developing an implementation plan.

### Creating an implementation plan

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



Despite this consensus, a small number of experts raised notes of caution around implementation planning in this context. For example, one expert warned that: *“The level of desired detail may not be available at the time of adoption of the policy. The best should not be enemy of the good in preparing policy decisions regarding strategic objectives.”*

Yet another expert cautioned:

*While implementation plans are important, in the context of implementing equality policy, they should not be so restrictive as to stifle local-level creativity. Where national policies are attempting to address 'wicked problems' (and many equality policies fall into this ambit) the local level becomes more important (in driving implementation) than the national level. Local context can be a significant barrier to or enabler for the implementation of equality policies.*

Nonetheless, consensus was reached that developing a comprehensive implementation plan was an important step in the implementation process. Doing so may help those involved in strategy development and delivery to anticipate challenges to effective implementation at an early enough stage for corrective action to be taken (Meyers et al., 2012).

### Activity: Adopt a project management approach to the implementation planning.

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



A project management approach helps to organise and focus the activities necessary to ensure effective implementation, breaking larger actions down into smaller, achievable tasks. Using a project management approach ensures that activities, timelines and results are documented and tracked. Such a structured approach can have benefits for communication, monitoring and accountability. Additionally, a project management approach

usually involves a formalised approach to risk assessment, which could be important in foreseeing and then acting to mitigate risks that could serve to stall implementation. Experts proposed and then agreed that it was important for policy implementation that a project management approach is adopted.

**Activity: Outline the tasks and activities necessary to achieve the objectives.**



While a strategy action plan will contain high-level descriptors of actions designed to lead to the realisation of strategy objectives, an implementation plan should contain more granular detail on the steps necessary to achieve actions, i.e., on the specific tasks to be undertaken to progress actions. Where the wording of actions in the published strategy text are vague or broad, this will be particularly important.

**Activity: Identify who is responsible for the delivery of tasks.**



While a strategy action plan will likely identify who has overall ownership of or responsibility for a given action, an implementation plan should provide more specific information on who is responsible for delivery of the tasks necessary to complete the action. This should serve to enhance accountability. Rather than merely naming a government department or agency as responsible, in an implementation plan, specific divisions, units, teams or even individuals will be identified.

**Activity: Assign overall responsibility for implementation of the plan and regular reviews of progress.**



For each implementation plan, in addition to assigning responsibility for different tasks or activities, experts were agreed that there should be a named role responsible for ensuring the plan is developed, updated and implemented, as well as being responsible for reporting back on progress at regular intervals.

**Activity: Articulate the inputs, outputs and intended outcomes of the implementation process.**



As the focus of an implementation plan is to move beyond a mere listing of actions towards a comprehensive planning of how these actions will be delivered, experts agree that implementation plans should include information on the various inputs, outputs and desired outcomes of the implementation process as well as indicators of each.

**Activity: Map the interdepartmental/interagency 'gaps' in information, capacities, funding, operational policies.**



When developing and implementing whole-of-government strategies, there are likely to be objectives and actions in which multiple government departments and state agencies are implicated. Experts affirmed that it is important at the implementation planning stage to identify any interdepartmental/interagency 'gaps' that may present stumbling blocks to effective implementation.

**Activity: Map interdepartmental/interagency connections and synergies.**



While mapping interdepartmental/interagency gaps is important for effective implementation of whole-of-government initiatives, the experts consulted as part of this study also suggested

and agreed that it is important to also consider the opportunities afforded by interdepartmental/interagency collaboration on whole-of-government equality strategies. It was proposed and agreed by the expert panel that taking time at the implementation planning phase to map out potential synergies is likely to be important to ensure effective implementation. Again, this might be most important where multiple entities are involved in implementing shared actions.

**Activity: Involve local delivery-level actors at the development stage of implementation plans.**



Implementation plans should not be ‘top-down’ documents, developed by leaders and then handed down to others to follow. Rather, there was consensus among the expert panel that those who will be responsible for actual implementation should be involved in developing implementation plans. These individuals will have a better insight into the feasibility of elements of the plan, including timeframes and resources required, and will likely have an important role in monitoring progress.

**Activity: Include information on monitoring, evaluation and feedback systems.**



Experts were in clear agreement on the importance of establishing at the planning stages how monitoring, reporting and evaluation of implementation will be carried out, rather than trying to establish monitoring and reporting systems when implementation is already underway, or trying to plan evaluations retrospectively. Clear information on the purpose of monitoring, the tools to be used, and the frequency of reporting should all be available to include in implementation plans. When asked the most important consideration in relation to implementation planning, one expert commented: *“Identifying the data needs and building the data infrastructure for implementation, monitoring, evaluation, review and revision.”*



## Activity: Communicate the plan to all stakeholders.



While a primary purpose of an implementation plan is to maximise the likelihood of effective implementation, it can also serve an accountability purpose. It was proposed and then agreed by experts that implementation plans should not merely be internal planning documents but should be communicated transparently to all stakeholders. One expert offered the following advice in relation to this action: “*Consider a dialogic approach, for example through convening an annual review dialogue (e.g., a stakeholder forum) so that communication is two-way / multi-directional and multi-level.*”

### Implementation Approach 9: Developing staff capacity

Developing the capacity of staff with a leading role in coordinating national equality strategies to work in a whole-of-government context, and to work in the area of equality policy specifically, may be an effective strategy for ensuring effective development and implementation of national equality strategies. Ensuring those tasked with implementing actions included in national equalities have the workload capacity to deliver on these commitments is also an important consideration.

The expert group were unanimous in their endorsement of the importance of developing staff capacity to improve implementation of national equality strategies.

When asked the most important consideration in relation to this implementation approach, one expert responded: “*That staff have the capacity, authority and support to deliver on the actions required of them*”

### Developing staff capacity



**Activity: Determine and deliver staff training, capacity building and other support requirements.**



The skills, knowledge and attributes likely to be important for those tasked with leading the development and implementation of national equality strategies were outlined above, under the activity relating to securing staff with the appropriate expertise for the work. Experts acknowledge that there are likely to be gaps in the necessary skillsets, which should be addressed through capacity building and training. One expert, for example, wrote of the need for: *“Empowering new skills training / education”*,

In relation to how staff capacity could be built, collaboration with other countries and European institutions was mentioned: *“Identify opportunities for development of staff capacity through collaboration with other MS [member states] - and European institutions and organisations.”*

Capacity building may be necessary across all personnel levels, with one expert advising: *“Ensure that Management and Leadership team are trained as well.”*

**Activity: Set ambitious targets for diversity amongst the teams responsible for leading and implementing the strategy.**



Experts proposed and then consensus was reached that it was important to aim for diversity among those tasked with delivering and implementing equality policy. One expert, for example, spoke of the need for *“Diversity amongst the team and approach.”* Another expert advised that it was important to *“Include Public Sector and Equality Human Rights Duty targets into developing staff capacity.”*

However, one expert sounded the following note of caution: “*In the context of how the civil service works e.g., staff being moved regularly, etc, this approach isn't realistic.*” Another wrote that “*Virtue signalling is not an implementation strategy*”.

**Activity: Ensure a strong understanding of equality and related concepts among staff who are designing and delivering equality-focused policies.**



In addition to the skills necessary to deliver results in a whole-of-government context generally, consulted experts mentioned specific attributes, skills and knowledge that are likely to be important for key personnel working in the area of equality policy, specifically, and where capacity may need to be further developed. For example, one expert wrote: “*There is a lack of capacity in regard to understanding equality and related concepts (such as targeting and mainstreaming)*” among those working on equality policy in the civil service.

Individuals working in this area should be supported to keep up to date with developments in equality policy. One expert wrote: “*Ensure leaders are up-to-date on equality policy innovation including from civil society organisations, EU institutions and other Member States.*” Another expert wrote of the need for: “*Investment in development of expertise beyond core equality policy professionals.*”

**Activity: Assess the career ambitions of staff regarding long-term involvement in equality policy.**



As mentioned earlier, several experts discussed the importance of commitment and dedication among those tasked with developing, leading and implementing national equality strategies. One expert proposed, and consensus was reached, that there are benefits to ensuring that those assigned to work in the area of equality policy have ambition to work in that policy area over the long term. One expert commented: “*This is very important: equality policy should become an attractive and successful career trajectory that staff compete to work in.*”

### Activity: Incorporate equality objectives into individual staff performance assessment objectives.



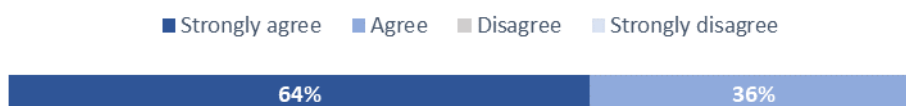
Incorporating responsibilities with respect to national equality strategy into individuals' staff performance assessments may help to incentivise effective delivery of strategy objectives (OECD, 2020). As one expert noted: *"Accountability is key!"*. Furthermore, such an approach may help to ensure that sufficient time is made available for this work, which will be seen as part of individuals' core duties. One expert emphasised how important it is to: *"Ensure the actions required of staff are not added on to their current workload but that they have the capacity to deliver what is required of them."*

### Implementation Approach 10: Cultivating a supportive culture

There can be an overemphasis on *structures* when taking a whole-of-government approach to a wicked policy problem, and although they are necessary, structures alone are insufficient to deliver successful implementation of whole-of-government initiatives (Colgan et al., 2014). Structures must be accompanied by the fostering of a supportive climate or culture. It is important that there is an organisational climate supportive of cross-government collaboration in and of itself and of the pursuit of equality goals.

All experts consulted as part of this research agreed that cultivation of a supportive climate is important when implementing a national equality strategy.

### Cultivating a supportive culture



Several experts mentioned the potentially obstructive influence that a culture or climate that is not aligned with the policy or strategy goals can have. One expert, for example, wrote: *"Agree vehemently with [this]! Org / institutional culture can thwart the success of a policy - a*

*supportive culture is critical.*” When asked what the most important consideration should be in relation to this implementation approach, one expert wrote: “*Acknowledging the importance of culture - which can sometimes stymie change if not explicitly addressed.*”

Consensus was reached among experts on the following associated activities.

**Activity: Align the strategic objectives with broader government priorities or goals.**



One way of helping to ensure that there is a climate or culture that is supportive of implementation of a whole-of-government strategy is by helping to ensure that everyone is ‘facing in the same direction’. This may be achieved by maximising alignment between the strategy objectives and broader priorities and goals. One expert, for example, offered the following advice:

*Set equality strategies within a larger framework articulating a long-term vision, ambition, outcomes for equality groups and [for] Irish [and] European society... Connect equality policy with both explicitly aligned policy (Roadmap for Social Inclusion, Third National Strategy on DSGBV [Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence]) and implicitly aligned policy (Recovery and Resilience, National Development Plan) that address systemic factors impacting equality and discrimination.*

Similarly, one expert argued that it is important that “*Strategies [are] aligned to core priority deliverables for each department and agency so that delivery of the equality strategy is delivery of core business.*” It was also suggested that “*Equality objectives are embedded in core government processes including procurement, evidence-based policy making, budget.*”

Another expert spoke about the importance of policy coherence: “*Ensuring that policies are linked and not counter to each other and that the links are clear.*”

**Activity: Ensure full implementation of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.**



As previously mentioned, the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty is a statutory provision requiring all public bodies to proactively promote equality, eliminate discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, service users and everyone affected by their policies or plans. Experts were in agreement that ensuring that the Duty is fully implemented in all government departments and agencies will contribute to a culture that is supportive of the pursuit of equality goals:

*All public bodies are required to implement the public sector equality and human rights duty which requires a proactive focus on equality for all function areas. This Duty is an important lever to drive cultural change in the public and civil service including in regard to policy development and implementation.*

**Activity: Identify and address all tacit and explicit barriers to implementation, including sources of resistance to change.**



The implementation literature identifies many potential barriers to implementation and suggests that these need to be identified and overcome at an early stage of implementation (CES, 2022). Common barriers include resistance to change among those stakeholders tasked with delivering an intervention. Common reasons for resistance to change include stakeholders feeling they have been inadequately consulted, changes being implemented before stakeholders are ready, implementation is perceived as happening as a result of coercion or control from leadership, or an organisational culture that is at odds with the nature of the intervention (CES, 2022). Another category of barriers relates to vested interests; stakeholders may hold beliefs, ideals or vested interests that are not aligned with the objectives of equality strategies. This can interfere with implementation processes by seeking to interfere with, block, or otherwise influence them (CES, 2022). Early identification of and action to overcome such barriers is likely to be important to ensure effective implementation (CES, 2022).

**Activity: Identify a network of equality ‘champions’ across government who can help to effectively communicate and mainstream the strategic plan across different policy areas.**



Effective implementation of national equality strategies requires collective commitment and ownership by all governmental actors (OECD, 2020). A network of “champions” across government departments and agencies can help effectively communicate and mainstream the vision and goals of the policy in different departments or agencies (OCED, 2020).

Experts agreed that engaging ‘champions’ is a valuable way of supporting implementation of national equality strategies. However, they also emphasised that these champions should be **supported** (“*Being supportive of the 'champions' within the various groups of their 'core' organisation is very important to reach the committed, not so committed and the resistant. By having 'champions' in as many of these groupings as possible gives a better chance of reaching the majority.*”), **trained** (“*Ensure that the network of equality champions engage in Cultural Competency, Inclusive Leadership and Antiracism training*”) and **engaged with** (“*1. Engage with EC network of equality champions to identify good, promising practices. 2. Review the evidence base to build an effective and impactful network of equality champions.*”).

One expert cautioned against an over-reliance on champions to bring about change, commenting that “*Champions (and entrepreneurs) matter, but be careful that people don't see this move as a way to place the responsibility on one person or unit.*”

**Activity: Emphasise that the equality strategy needs to be everyone’s priority and that all roles should contribute in some way to its delivery.**



Delivering on ambitious equality goals requires large-scale collaborative effort. While identifying leaders, champions, and creating lines of responsibility within the initiative were

all identified as important, experts also expressed the importance of broader ownership of national equality strategies. A supportive culture for the work, in which everyone is making a contribution, however small, towards achieving equality objectives, is likely to have a facilitative effect on implementation. One expert made the following comment about the need for equality strategy implementation to be a widely-shared priority: “*Highlight to all how their roles can be seen in the final strategy. Let people see themselves in the final strategy.*”

**Activity: Identify and celebrate success. Recognise and reward innovation.**



Experts agreed that it was important to make concerted efforts to identify when things are going well with strategy implementation and to amplify success and good practice. One expert argued that it is: “*Important to acknowledge and reward effort and actions.*”, while another recommended:

*Having a positive brand for the policy by being purposeful, dynamic, innovative, impactful and keeping its profile high so that it engages people with varying degrees of interest in agenda. Create a positive reputation for how staff and stakeholders experience their work on the strategy.*

### Implementation Approach 11: Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring is the routine and systematic collection and use of information against a plan. It typically makes use of existing data and information, with a view to ongoing cycles of improvement (CES, 2022). Evaluation is a planned investigation of a project, programme, or policy used to answer specific questions. It can be related to the design, implementation or results of an intervention. Monitoring and evaluation use data on indicators to determine if targets are being met and outcomes achieved. This information can be used to improve both the policy or strategy and the implementation process. Doing this well builds credibility, support, and momentum for the strategy or policy (CES, 2022). Monitoring and evaluation help to identify implementation challenges or bottlenecks which can then be addressed to ensure successful achievement and objectives (OECD, 2018). Monitoring, reporting and evaluation also have an important accountability function, playing a significant role in informing all stakeholders (including civil society groups, Ministers, senior officials, the general public) about the attainment or otherwise of the commitments outlined in the strategy



and its action plan (OECD, 2018). Finally, monitoring and evaluation can help to ensure that implementation of a strategy or policy is not subject to ‘drift’ with the emergence of other priorities or policies (Colgan et al., 2014).

All consulted experts agreed that monitoring and evaluation are important when implementing national equality strategies.



Expert consensus was also reached on the following associated activities.

**Activity: Establish a robust system for gathering data, monitoring, and evaluating, suited to the challenges of a whole-of-government context.**



Monitoring is a regular and recurring process, through which responsible staff collect and analyse information about where a strategy stands at a point in time, and over time, relative to targets. Typically, monitoring reports are produced based on the monitoring information. Good monitoring and reporting require well-defined indicators that have baselines and targets (OECD, 2018). Monitoring and evaluation are more complex in a whole-of-government context, where there are multiple institutions involved in the implementation of actions, and it is important that monitoring and reporting systems are established and agreed at the outset of the strategy (OECD, 2018).

The OECD (2018) identified four key characteristics of a good monitoring and reporting system:

- **Timeliness:** Monitoring reports should be produced on time and also in line with the government’s planning and budgetary processes.
- **Focus:** Monitoring should be focused on the most important aspects of strategy delivery, which are likely to include activities and targets.

- **Relevance:** Reporting should include only relevant and strategic information (and should exclude business-as-usual or administrative information)
- **User-friendliness:** User-friendly monitoring reporting means providing concise information in a simple structure and using visual information as much as possible.

Evaluation is a more elaborate process that seeks to analyse the success of the strategy implementation, aimed at identifying what went well and exploring reasons for what went wrong (OECD, 2018). It involves the formulation of evaluation questions, the collection of data to answer those questions, and the interpretation of evidence to reach conclusions and formulation of recommendations. The purpose of carrying out an evaluation is to improve the design or implementation of strategy or policy (OECD, 2018).

According to the OECD (2018), evaluation in this context requires the following skills:

- Methodological skills to structure the evaluation framework
- Analytical skills to collect, collate and analyse data
- An ability to translate technical information into useful recommendations or insights
- Networking skills (as data collection entails reaching out to many stakeholders)
- Communication and presentation skills to explain complex and technical information in effective language, avoiding jargon.

There are several options for carrying out an evaluation. Evaluation can be done internally, by commissioning external evaluators, or through a combination of internal and external approaches (OECD, 2018). One expert recommended in relation to this implementation approach: *“Consider where ‘independent’ can be added into ‘evaluation and monitoring’.”*

In addition to the monitoring of actions, one expert advised that: *“Account must be taken of the soft dimensions of implementation and progress and appropriate indicators identified.”* One expert emphasised that policy monitoring systems should not be inflexible, but rather capable of capturing innovation: *“Policy monitoring systems should be flexible to incorporate examples of innovative implementation at local level.”*

One expert, when asked what they believed the most important considerations were in relation to monitoring and evaluation, gave the following response:

*“1. That the monitoring and evaluation framework is agreed and resourced from the outset. 2. That there is a clear relationship between monitoring and evaluation with review and revision. 3. That the monitoring and evaluation framework uses diverse,*

*inclusive and innovative evidence (research and data) and methodologies to ensure that it engages a wide range of stakeholders...”*

This expert also suggested seeking external guidance on the development of appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems in the context of equality policy: *“Request the assistance of FRA, EIGE and other European institutions in the development and implementation of monitoring and evaluation frameworks.”*

**Activity: Use data and feedback to inform ongoing improvements or decisions**



Once collected and reported, monitoring and evaluation information should be used to make improvements or refinements to the content of the strategy or to its implementation processes. The importance of monitoring and evaluation to iteratively inform strategy development and implementation was emphasised by many of the consulted experts, whose comments included the following: *“Ensure that M&E contributes to adaptive planning and that there is learning that is fed back into the action plan”, “[It is important] That it is a tool for both measuring and improving performance” and “Need to share learning quickly so that strategies can be adjusted before they end.”*

While the experts were unanimous on the importance and value of effective monitoring and evaluation, one expert struck a note of caution about their influence: *“Note the many, many studies suggesting that policymakers don’t pay much attention to evaluation/ monitoring data.”*

**Activity: Ensure monitoring systems are flexible and can incorporate examples of innovative implementation at local level.**



Experts agreed that monitoring systems should not be rigid. If government strategies are to be dynamic and responsive, as many claim to be, objectives and/or actions may evolve over the lifetime of the strategy, and monitoring systems need to be able to capture these

changes in directions or other innovations that happen once those responsible for implementing actions begin to do so.

**Activity: Ensure a combination of qualitative and quantitative data is collected.**



Consulted experts agreed that both monitoring and evaluation, with their separate functions, are important elements in the context of national equality policy. One expert, for example, stressed the importance of: “*Not only counting 'how many' but also trying to understand what makes things work (or not) and why.*” In addition to advocating for flexibility in monitoring systems, experts also had recommendations for the types of *data* that these systems should capture. An expert proposed and the panel agreed that it is important to collect both quantitative and qualitative data in the monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation. Quantitative data can be helpful for assessing *what* happened, whereas qualitative data can help to shed light on *why* or *how* something happened.

**Activity: Develop data sharing agreements at the outset.**



Ensuring the availability of appropriate data was a key theme in expert contributions across many of the implementation approaches covered in this chapter. In order to ensure that existing data can be shared with all interested parties, experts suggest ensuring that data sharing agreements are made early on; having to put these in place later may lead to delays in implementation.

**Activity: Incorporate an evaluation structure from the outset to avoid data being sought retrospectively.**



Experts recommended that evaluation be conducted in parallel with strategy implementation in order to minimise the extent to which data are to be sought retrospectively from stakeholders.

**Activity: Implement the European Guidelines on Equality Data and associated resources.**



Equality data can be defined as any information that is useful for describing and analysing the state of equality (Makkonen, 2016). Valid, reliable, and comparable equality data are crucial for policymakers and the general public to be able to gauge the nature and extent of inequalities experienced by structurally vulnerable and marginalised groups and for policy makers to make policy decisions and to monitor and evaluate policy responses (Makkonen, 2016). In recognition of the importance of equality data and the need to improve its collection and use in Europe, in 2018, the EU High-Level Group on Non-Discrimination and Diversity introduced a set of guidelines on improving the collection and use of equality data. While non-binding, experts consulted as part of this study all agreed that these guidelines should be implemented to improve the monitoring and evaluation of national equality strategies in Ireland.

[Implementation Approach 12: Learning from experience](#)

Inequality will not be ‘solved’ in the lifetime of any one fixed-term national strategy. Given the complex and enduring nature of wicked problems like inequality, the goal for decision makers should be to ensure that there is ongoing coherent action to tackle its causes and mitigate its outcomes (Head, 2018). In the case of any wicked policy problem, there is no single “*best solution*”, but instead “*only provisional responses that are negotiated among relevant stakeholders*” (Head, 2017, p. 183). As such, any time-bound policy response aimed at tackling inequality for a given group in society will very likely be succeeded or replaced by another, and so it is important that learning from the development and implementation of one strategy is carried over into the development and implementation of the next.

Consulted experts were unanimous that learning from experience is important for the development and implementation of national equality strategies, and consensus was reached on the following set of associated activities.

### Learning from experience



**Activity: Set up formal systems to capture and share the learning and experience about the strategy implementation.**



Much can be learned from the process of implementing a national equality or human rights strategy or policy. It is important that strengths and limitations of the experience of implementation are formally documented and reflected upon, and that the learning be used to inform future implementation efforts. Capturing and sharing the learning can not only help to improve the implementation of future iterations of a given equality strategy but can also provide learning to others engaged in developing and implementing other whole-of-government strategies and improve the evidence base as to ‘what works’ when implementing whole-of-government initiatives.

Such efforts will involve capturing learning from all levels of involvement in the strategy development and implementation. One expert advised: *“The scope of such efforts should not be confined to those directly charged with responsibility for implementation but extend to those who were the object of their efforts.”*

Experts consulted provided advice on the types of learning that are likely to be important, with one expert specifying the importance of capturing: *“How challenges were dealt with and what would have been the consequences if the challenges were ignored and not dealt with.”*

Other experts advised on *how* the capturing and sharing of learning should be undertaken, with one advising the importance of “*research, academic benchmarking, publishing data*”, another recommending: “*Convening knowledge exchange events with learning written up in technical guidance.*”, while a further expert recommended that “*Short and snappy case studies [are] useful.*”. Regardless of the mechanisms, one expert emphasised that the most important thing is to “*Ensure that the lessons are captured and available.*”

**Activity: Benchmark against international best practice.**



In order to facilitate decision-making and to gauge the extent to which implementation of national equality strategies is being or has been effective, the expert panel agreed that it is important to use collected monitoring and evaluation data to benchmark practices and progress used in delivering on national equality objectives in Ireland against what represents international best practice.

**Activity: Facilitate peer-to-peer learning, team coaching, and learning networks to build a community of participants in equality policy.**



Experts endorsed the importance of deliberate, broad sharing of learning on equality policy and of building a community of participants in the area of equality policy. One expert, for example, emphasised how important it is that “*There is a culture of learning. There is an open and safe reflexive culture. That learning is required, planned and has time allocated.*”

**Activity: Create and maintain a repository of knowledge that can be used in successor or similar strategies.**



While capturing and sharing learning during or in the immediate aftermath of a given strategy is important, it is also important to ensure that this learning is not lost but instead that, as one expert commented: “*That learning feeds back into our work and improves what we do.*” Creating a formal repository of knowledge where facilitators and barriers to implementation can be maintained and added to over time, may help to improve future implementation efforts and avoid having to ‘reinvent the wheel’.

One expert recommended: “*Creating a living Compendium of good, promising practices.*” Similarly: “*Develop core national resources e.g., compendia of good practice, core OneLearning online training - upfront investment with multiple users that can be evaluated and updated.*” One expert advocated for the following approach: “*Seek European funding to develop an Equality Policy Centre of Excellence in Ireland.*”

### Most important considerations

While there was consensus (at least 80% agreement) among experts that each of the implementation approaches and activities above are important for the development and implementation of national equality or human rights strategy or policy, experts were also asked to specify which they felt were the *most* important factors to consider. Nine of the 12 experts provided a response to this question, and the main themes are summarised as follows:

One expert highlighted the importance of getting the early stages of strategy development right, arguing for an **evidence-based rationale** for the strategy and the importance of **ensuring capacity/readiness** to actually deliver:

*That there is a concrete reason, based on sufficient research, to start the process.*

*That the foundations are in place; funding, staffing (and other resources), and the necessary levels of structure.*

For one expert, a **strong action plan** with **appropriate prioritisation** and **adequate resources** was the crucial ingredient for effective implementation:

*Honestly - a strong, cohesive policy and action plan - with committed leadership is most important. The best policies often fail due to lack of buy-in, poor resource allocation, and a paucity of prioritisation within overarching strategy.*

**Securing buy-in** was also deemed to be the most important consideration by other experts. One expert responded that it was important to consider: “*How to bring everyone on board -*



*link strategic policy to realistic objectives and clear actions.*” Another expert mentioned the challenges associated with reaching consensus and securing buy-in, and noted how these can frustrate policy implementation:

*Where policies are contentious (and equality policies tend to be so, as they involve issues such as the redistribution of resources, addressing individual and systemic issues like racism) the policy design and implementation process is likely to be fraught with difficulties. This is not often acknowledged or addressed as part of the policy process, yet such areas of policy conflict present significant barriers to implementation.*

For another expert, **stakeholder engagement** was deemed to be the most important consideration when developing and implementing national equality strategies: “*Diversity at the table is critical from the onset. We must avoid groupthink by engaging diverse stakeholders to the table and ensuring that they are seen, heard and their contributions to the strategy are valued.*”

**Leadership** was mentioned by several experts, one of whom also spoke about **meaningful stakeholder engagement**, for example with respect to monitoring systems:

*Authoritative political leadership from a central department. Making best use of stakeholder time so that implementation structures etc are meaningful and not deadening reviews of traffic light documents. This is not a valuable or ethical use of civil society organisations' time.*

The importance of **organisational/institutional culture** was mentioned by one expert, who also mentioned accountability and the importance of addressing barriers such as resistance and information gaps:

*Identify a leader/champion for the strategy - give them adequate support and ensure accountability is built in. Identify resistance to the strategy and/or information/evidence gaps and address these. Pay attention to cultural issues.*

**Resilience and commitment** were mentioned as important by more than one expert. For example, one expert commented that the most important consideration was: “*Resilience to deliver and trust in leadership*”, while another highlighted the importance of: “*Clear commitment and follow through. Most strategies are launched to great fanfare and then disappear.*”

### Addressing intersectionality

As was discussed in Chapter 2, intersectionality refers to the ways that multiple sources of inequality, for example, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class, and other aspects of identity, overlap and create a unique experience of discrimination for an individual or group. Development and implementation of equality policies would not be complete without adequate responses to intersectional discrimination and inequality.

However, in practice, addressing intersectionality has proved a challenge for policy makers. Based on their experience and expertise, consulted experts were asked how best intersectional discrimination and inequality could be addressed as part of the development and implementation of government equality policy.

Seven experts responded to this question. Responses included acknowledgement of the challenges of effectively incorporating an intersectional approach into public policy. One expert, for example, cautioned “*Avoid a tendency for such terms to be co-opted to reinforce existing agendas, or to be swallowed up by the more routine and higher priority side of government.*” Another expert highlighted specific barriers to taking an intersectional approach to equality policy, which include the **availability of appropriate data** and failure of decision makers to **recognise and respond to intersectional needs**.

*Local (cross-(protected) ground and cross issue) coalitions can assist in an intersectional approach to policy implementation. The absence of even basic equality data, by protected ground, never mind data on the diversity of issues/needs within grounds, is a significant barrier to taking an evidence-based approach to intersectionality. Failure to recognise that there is a distinct identity for people at the intersection of different grounds, and to meet the specific needs that arise from this.*

Other experts echoed the **need to fully understand the distinct identities of people at the intersection of different characteristics**. For example, one expert commented that: “*Training is very vital. You can’t address what you are unaware of. So, engaging an expert to provide training on how government bodies can use an intersectional approach when developing and implementing policies is vital*”, while another advised: “*Avoid a long list of ‘vulnerable groups’. Look at how vulnerabilities overlap, but also how each is different - both in terms of needs and agency.*”

One expert mentioned the importance of **reviewing existing legislation, identifying synergies and shared priorities** and **engaging with stakeholder groups**:

*Equality Acts Review - intersectionality in the Equality Acts. Structured engagement between equality groups on the different strategies tackling common challenge around discrimination and inequality e.g., Cost of Living Crisis, pandemic transition, just transition. Mapping synergies between strategies and shared actions. Common 'public good' developments such as shared data infrastructure (see EU Equality Data Guidelines).*

Another expert advised that the key to effectively incorporating an intersectional approach to equality policy is **active engagement with stakeholders with lived experience**, writing:

*In my experience, addressing intersectional challenges involves engaging actively with those experiencing discrimination based on their identity/ies. It is possible to tailor policy responses that will encompass shared experiences (for instance, discrimination that may be experienced by Traveller people will often also be experienced by Global Majority people or members of the LGBTQIA+ community), whilst also addressing specific experiences which may affect a single community. The key is consultation and engagement.*

## Summary

This chapter has presented an account of what represents good practice in the development and implementation of national equality or human rights strategy or policy. This was informed by the reviewed implementation science and policy implementation literatures and the input provided from the expert panel convened for this purpose. Twelve higher-level implementation approaches were discussed, along with sets of associated activities. In the next chapter, the actual processes used by government to implement the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS will be discussed in light of each of the 12 implementation approaches.

## Chapter 5: Evaluation of the processes of implementation of the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS

This chapter outlines the main evaluation findings relating to the processes used by government to implement the Migrant Integration Strategy, National Strategy for Women and Girls, and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is consensus that twelve implementation approaches are particularly important for the effective implementation of national equality strategies. This chapter presents the evaluation findings on the themes identified in relation to each of these 12 areas. Findings are informed by the desk review of strategy documentation and the views of government department and state agency representatives and civil society representatives involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS. As the picture emerging from the written documentation received by the evaluation team was incomplete, it was necessary to rely on stakeholder testimonies to fill in gaps in how each of the strategies were implemented.

### Taking a whole-of-government approach

#### A vision for equality

As a starting point, the literature suggests, and experts agree, that when taking a whole-of-government approach to tackling inequality, it is important to create a clear medium- to long-term vision for equality to which the whole of government subscribes and that is anchored in key government documents. Such a vision helps to focus diffuse work across a range of policy areas towards a common goal.

The vision espoused in the NSWG is one of “*An Ireland where all women enjoy equality with men and can achieve their full potential, while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life*” (NSWG, p. 7), while the vision aspired to in the MIS is “*That migrants are facilitated to play a full role in Irish society, that integration is a core principle of Irish life, and that Irish society and institutions work together to promote integration.*” (MIS, p. 10). A stated aim of the MIS is “*To ensure that barriers to full participation in Irish society by migrants or their Irish-born children are identified and addressed.*” (MIS, p. 8).

In line with best practice, these vision statements are both clear and concise and provide some direction for future action. For the NSWG, there is an emphasis on achieving parity, safety and fulfilment of women. In the MIS, there is an emphasis on facilitating integration and a recognition of the need for collaboration between institutions and broader society to

achieve this. Integration is defined in the strategy as *'the ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity'* (p. 11). Both visions are also explicitly time bound. The NSWG vision is for greater equality to be achieved by the end of the Strategy, in 2021. This is acknowledged to be *'ambitious'* (p. 3). In line with best practice, the vision espoused in the MIS is aspirational yet realistic. The vision statement in the MIS text applied to the four-year period of strategy, and this medium-term vision is to be viewed as a step in a longer-term vision that *"Ireland thirty years from now will be a society in which migrants and those of migrant origin play an active role in communities, workplaces and politics. It sees the guiding principles for Ireland of the future as those of solidarity and shared identity as members of Irish society."* (p. 10).

The NTRIS text includes no explicit vision statement. The strategy text does discuss a shift in emphasis in policy relating to Travellers and Roma in Ireland from *integration* to *inclusion*. This change resulted from consultation with representatives from the Traveller and Roma communities and other stakeholders and is described as *"better capturing what we want to achieve for these communities in our society"* (p. 17). It can therefore be inferred that the vision of NTRIS is for Traveller and Roma communities to be fully included in Irish society. No definition of 'inclusion' is provided in the strategy text.

#### High government priority

Important to effective implementation of any whole-of-government strategy is that it is a high priority of government, with high status. There was consensus among the consulted experts that aligning equality strategy objectives with Irish legislation and with European and international commitments were helpful ways of ensuring that equality strategies are and remain a high priority for government.

Interviewees and survey respondents from government departments and agencies and from civil society organisations also recommended that equality strategies need to be better aligned with existing frameworks for equality that government departments are legally obliged to implement, such as the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. This alignment was seen as *"underdeveloped"* in the three equality strategies but was proposed to be a potentially effective way to progress actions and mainstream strategy objectives into the annual work plans of government departments and to ensure strategy implementation remained a high priority across the whole of government.

#### Clear roles and responsibilities across government

Defining clear roles and responsibilities across the government for implementing, monitoring and overseeing the equality objectives is important for effective whole-of-government

working towards delivering national equality strategies.

Responsibility for developing and coordinating the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS was clearly defined. This responsibility was initially located in entities within the Department of Justice and Equality. Responsibility for the MIS was located in the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (OPMI). Responsibility for developing and coordinating the NSWG lay with the Gender Equality Division in the Department of Justice and Equality, while responsibility for NTRIS was with the Traveller and Roma Inclusion Unit. Following restructuring of government departments in 2020, this responsibility was then located in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

Responsibility for implementing individual actions lay primarily with government departments and state agencies, who were also represented on strategy committees. However, the role of the coordinating teams in the Department of Justice and Equality and then DCEDIY included ongoing engagement with relevant departments, agencies and stakeholders to ensure that progress was on track.

#### Whole-of-government structures

For each of the three equality strategies, the primary structure for cross-government collaboration were the strategy committees: the NSWG Strategy Committee, the Migrant Integration Strategy Monitoring and Coordination Committee, and the NTRIS Steering Group.

#### *The National Strategy for Women and Girls Strategy Committee*

The NSWG Strategy Committee was appointed in 2017 and chaired by the Minister of State with responsibility for gender equality. Original membership of the committee consisted of 33 members, the Minister and the secretariat and included representatives of each government department, the HSE, Enterprise Ireland, the County and City Management Association, Ibec, ICTY, the National Women's Council of Ireland, the USI, the IFA, The Wheel and the Community Platform. The Committee was established to advise the (then) Department of Justice and Equality on the preparation and implementation of the NSWG, key issues for women and girls in Ireland, priority high-level objectives of the strategy, outcomes of the strategy, and actions to be taken. The Committee was also convened to provide information on relevant data, indicators, targets and means of monitoring progress for gender equality, and to assess whether further/ new actions or change of actions is required in response to changing needs. While the responsibility for developing targets and appropriate indicators to measure the outputs and impacts of the actions lay with the coordinating Department, the Strategy Committee was intended to advise on this.

#### *The Migrant Integration Strategy Monitoring and Coordination Committee*

The MIS MCC was established in 2014 under the Minister of State with responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration with an original membership of 30. Membership of the committee included representatives of government departments, key public bodies, local authorities and of civil society organisations. The committee was established to provide a coordinating mechanism with the remit to oversee implementation of the actions and to assess whether and what further action was required. The committee was tasked with reviewing implementation of all actions, agreeing indicators for monitoring progress, and making recommendations on actions needed in response to changing needs. The MIS actions were consolidated under five thematic sub-committees, with the organisation with responsibility for the most actions chairing the thematic subcommittees. Each subcommittee was tasked with leading on the development of progress indicators for the actions in its thematic area and the working arrangements of each subcommittee were to be decided by each lead organisation.

#### *The NTRIS Steering Group*

The Steering Group for NTRIS was established in 2014 and was described in the Strategy text as being responsible for implementation and monitoring of the actions. The Strategy text also states that the steering group would consider key performance and output indicators for each year of the Strategy's lifetime. Membership of the Steering Group comprised government departments, state agencies, and civil society groups representing Traveller and Roma communities.

For all three strategies, the committees were the main mechanism for reviewing strategy progress. Indeed, the committee format was the only whole-of-government structure for strategy implementation that was discussed in the interviews and surveys. Meetings were held quarterly, and attendance was mandatory from government department representatives to report on the progress of their designated actions.

*...so that was the method of doing the whole-of-government piece, because the key government departments, meaning the government departments that had actions that they were taking lead responsibility for delivering, were on that committee. And so that was the mechanism by which progress was reviewed... ..It was all resting on those monitoring committees.*

*(Interviewee, MIS)*

The disruptive effect of government restructuring and staff turnover

While initial roles and responsibilities in the three equality initiatives were clearly defined, restructuring of the departments part-way through the lifecycles of the strategies was

deemed to have disrupted implementation and caused some confusion. For example, the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (OPMI) was reported to have “*dissolved*” following the restructuring and associated staff changes, because there was no one left within the department to ‘own’ and focus on the initiative. As there was no statutory underpinning to the OPMI e, it “*kind of wound down and went away*”. It was never communicated to external or internal stakeholders as to why the initiative ended.

*The OPMI [Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration] was a child of a different era, you know? It was a previous Minister, it was a previous initiative, it was kind of just sitting and nobody was that focused on it anymore.*

*(Interviewee, MIS)*

There was a general feeling among interviewees and survey respondents that there had been a lack of continuity in roles and responsibilities over the course of the three strategies. Staff turnover and staff changes resulted in the loss of institutional memory and insights about the strategies. This was more prominent across NTRIS and the MIS than in the NSWG. While new staff were beginning to learn how the new department operated and to learn about the strategies, there was often no-one to familiarise them with the strategies.

*To me, anyway, because I was coming into it cold as well, of what had changed and then because the institutional memory had been lost, there wasn't always a person to ask well, what about that. You didn't necessarily have someone who would remember what had happened with it.*

*(Interviewee, NSWG and MIS)*

However, some stakeholders also believed location of responsibility for the equalities in the restructured DCEDIY had the potential to raise the profile of the equality strategies, as it had a narrower and more defined scope than the Department of Justice. *If anything, I think moving to a slightly smaller department maybe would have given it more profile except it was coming to the end of term at that point, but I think it probably would be higher profile really in the current department just because the Department of Justice is such a broad sweep.*

*(Interviewee, NSWG and MIS)*

## Stakeholder Engagement

There was consensus in the literature, among experts, and among stakeholders of all three national equality strategies that complex policy issues like inequality cannot be solved by



government alone. Instead, appropriately engaging a variety of different stakeholders is crucial for effective development and implementation of equality of human rights strategy or policy.

#### Initial consultation

Public consultations were held to gather stakeholder input for the development of each of the three equality strategies. These involved written submissions, public events, and direct consultations with civil society organisations.

In relation to the NSWG, a paper for public consultation was published from November 2016 until the end of January 2017. The consultation was launched on social media. Written submissions were invited on the high-level objectives and desired outcomes of the Strategy, and for the priorities for action over the next four years. In total, 95 written submissions were received. A series of public meetings with stakeholders and the wider public were held during December 2016 and January 2017, in Cork, Athlone, Dublin and Sligo.

In relation to the Migrant Integration Strategy, a public consultation call was made in March 2014 which closed in May 2015. Written submissions were invited from interested parties who wished to contribute to the work of a cross-departmental group on migrant integration. More than 80 submissions were received from individuals, organisations and groups providing services to migrants. Suggestions in the written contributions were collated and circulated to the relevant Departments and associated agencies for consideration. A series of face-to-face meetings were held with some of those who had contributed material. Each of the five consultation sessions lasted one day, involving a series of sub-meetings with members of the public. A total of 27 separate groups, one individual and a group of seven individuals met with the cross-departmental group. This segment facilitated the highlighting of, and in-depth discussions on, issues of particular concern and provided the opportunity to inform the cross-departmental group of personal lived experiences or those of the groups represented by the contributors.

The most extensive consultative process was undertaken in relation to NTRIS, with the Department of Justice and Equality holding a three-phase consultation process that lasted around a year and a half. Phase 1 began in mid-2015 with an open call to NGOs, Traveller and Roma communities and other relevant stakeholders to submit a written response to a suggested list of proposed themes which had been developed by the NTRIS steering group. The call asked stakeholders to review the proposed themes and indicate whether these were the correct themes, what their views were on each theme, and whether there were other themes that should be included. Within the list of themes, stakeholders were also asked to indicate which were the highest priority. Phase 2 (from February to June 2016) consisted of

roadshows in Sligo, Athlone, Limerick and Dublin for NGOs, Traveller and Roma communities and other relevant stakeholders. This phase gave stakeholders the opportunity to voice their opinions on proposed priority high-level objectives of the strategy. In total, 330 people attended these roadshows. A specific email address was created for observations to be passed on to the Department in addition to an online questionnaire. The steering group revised the themes and high-level objectives considering the views expressed by stakeholders in phases one and two. Phase three occurred between July and December 2016. This consisted of another series of roadshows in the same locations. These roadshows focused on drafting and discussing specific actions that would be needed to achieve the high-level objectives. Again, written submissions via email and questionnaire were welcomed.

Government representatives interviewed and surveyed as part of this evaluation viewed the public consultations as “*fairly extensive*” processes, focused on documenting the lived experiences, perspectives and issues raised in the consultations. Interviewees indicated that consultation processes also provided an opportunity to identify new groups and organisations working with communities in Ireland who could be affected by the strategies.

Government representatives with knowledge of all three strategies agreed that the NTRIS had the strongest consultation process in its development, “*a big-scale consultation right around the country*”. It involved a wide range of organisations, some of whom had prepared in advance the key issues that they wanted the consultation process to highlight. There was concern from one government representative that the duration of the consultation process for NTRIS and the extent of engagement that it generated had perhaps “*raised expectations [for the Strategy] that were going to be hard to meet*”. However, it was noted that the efforts that went into the consultation process for NTRIS had led to strong engagement from the Traveller and Roma organisations throughout the duration of the strategy.

In the formation of the MIS, there was a time lag between the consultation process and the finalising of the strategy content, which was viewed as regrettable. A government department interviewee noted that the process of stakeholder engagement provides momentum and insights that are needed at the time a strategy is being developed: “*I think you actually have to have everybody sort of moving together at the same time with a shared commitment.*”

Civil society representatives had mixed responses about the consultation process to develop the strategies. Some thought the process was “*robust*”, “*inclusive*” and “*had a real focus on ensuring diverse and marginalised voices came through*”. However, the consultation process for the MIS was not perceived to have sufficient geographical spread to include regional

representation of migrant communities. The need to consult children and young people was also a concern raised in a MIS committee meeting in 2021. A civil society representative for the NSWG felt, that while representative organisations were included in the consultation process, they were not resourced to further consult with the people they represent, to the extent that was needed.

The main source of frustration with the consultation process for civil society representatives surveyed was that there was not perceived to be a clear link between the outcomes of the consultation process and the actions contained within the strategy. Communication from the strategy co-ordination teams about the drafting of strategy content was viewed as “*poor*”. One organisation pointed out that the comments and suggestions they made on a NTRIS draft were not reflected in the subsequent draft, and there was no follow-up engagement to explain why their changes had not been accepted: “*They were heard, but suggestions were not always acted upon.*”

Civil society organisations were unsure about the role they had in how strategies were drafted and the involvement of government departments in the drafting of specific actions was not communicated. One civil society representative for the MIS noted that the final content of the strategy was perceived to be more weighted towards the input of government departments. It was felt that honest discussions with civil society organisations were needed in future about the role that they could expect to have in the drafting process for strategies.

### Representation

While initial consultation is crucial, it is clear from the literature and the expert consultation that stakeholder engagement should be ongoing throughout the lifetime of the strategies and that the right stakeholders are at the table. The primary way that ongoing stakeholder engagement was achieved was through the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders on the NSWG strategy committee, NTRIS steering committee, and MIS monitoring and coordination committee.

Government department and civil society representatives generally felt that there was a “*wide range of stakeholders around the table*” in the committees that were developed for each of the strategies. The strategy co-ordination teams had already established working relationships with many of the organisations represented on the committees and they could also connect with civil society groups through forums such as the Community and Voluntary Pillar, organisations like The Wheel, and the funding programmes that support smaller community organisations. An interviewee involved with developing the NSWG spoke about using the nine grounds of the Equal Status Act as a basis for mapping the different groups engaged with for the Strategy. However, it was noted that representation was an ongoing

concern, in terms of identifying groups and organisations that had not been reached for engagement with the Strategy: *“It’s a question that always has to be asked, who are we not getting there?”*

All of the national Traveller organisations were represented on the NTRIS Committee, but the Roma community was noted as under-represented, which resulted in fewer strategy actions for the community. This issue was raised with DCEDIY by one of the civil society representatives and additional organisations were included on the committee to widen representation from Roma communities, which was viewed by the civil society organisation involved as *“a momentous and positive step forward for Roma inclusion in Ireland”*. It was noted that the successor to NTRIS will need to ensure strong representation from the Roma community and include actions to address specific needs for Roma communities, such as accommodation challenges and anti-gypsyism as a specific form of discrimination.

For the NSWG, the National Women’s Council (NWC) was a co-ordinator of the civil society organisations represented on the Committee. A government department interviewee cautioned that while the NWC is connected with most organisations in the field, there are potentially organisations that they may not be connected to, who would therefore not have any representation on the Strategy.

There was no equivalent large-scale, umbrella body for civil society groups representing migrants who could support engagement in the same way on the MIS. While government department representatives felt there was a wide range of migrant groups represented on the Committee, they spoke about the challenges in trying to ensure the *“right”* communities were reached, particularly migrants without legal status.

*It’s [migrant support organisation] a thing people run in their spare time, so it’s a different kind of engagement, and that’s not, I think that’s something we haven’t quite cracked is, ensure that we’re communicating with all migrants and then particularly distant migrants who are maybe have illegal status or don’t speak English or don’t engage with Irish media or things like that so.” (Interviewee, NSWG and MIS)*

One of the civil society representatives felt that there was *“not enough voices and representation”* of migrants on the MIS Committee, and suggested involving representatives of particularly marginalised groups, such as LGBT migrants.

#### Ongoing collaboration

While representation is one important consideration, another is the nature of the role that is afforded to non-governmental organisations in the development, implementation and monitoring of national equality strategies. There was consensus in the literature and among

experts of the need to move beyond consultation towards collaboration with critical stakeholders.

Indeed, the participation of civil society organisations on the committees for each of the strategies was viewed as “*critical*” by government department representatives. The civil society representatives were seen as “*vocal*”, “*involved contributors*” at meetings, who provided knowledge and insights into what was happening “*on the ground*”. The committees were viewed as valuable spaces for government departments and civil society organisations to come together to build relationships and share expertise, and these interactions were perceived to be one of the main successes of the strategies. The committee meetings provided an opportunity for government departments to receive practical feedback from the civil society organisations about barriers to the access of services. Civil society organisations on the MIS were noted to have provided the committee with key information about the specific nationalities and migrant groups experiencing challenges around the country: “*They’re the ones doing the work out on the ground, they know what’s happening better than we do, you know?*” (Interviewee, MIS)

Interviewees spoke about how the presence of the civil society organisations representatives at the Committee meetings created a level of accountability for the government department representatives who were reporting on progress: “*They had to account for themselves not just in front of the Minister but also in front of independent organisations. And that meant something.*” (Interviewee, MIS)

It was noted that there were sometimes “*differences of opinion*” at the meetings between the government department representatives and the civil society representatives about whether progress had been made on an action; for example, if a department representative spoke about what had been done on an action, but a civil society representative did not think there had been impact on the ground. On the MIS committee, it was noted by government department representatives that they sometimes found it difficult to have “*honest conversations*” about progress with the civil society members present. The sense amongst the representatives that they were being held to account at the meetings led to a tendency to present their reports in a positive light, rather than discuss challenges or setbacks.

#### Supporting stakeholder engagement

Government department representatives who were interviewed or surveyed acknowledged how much work the civil society organisations had put into their role on the committees. It was evident at meetings that civil society organisations representatives had spent time researching issues and preparing input. For the NSWG, the National Women’s Council facilitated a separate meeting amongst civil society organisations in advance of the main

committee meeting, to co-ordinate the questions or comments from representatives that would be brought forward, which was felt to greatly benefit the efficiency of the committee meeting.

Government department and civil society representatives referred to ways that civil society organisations involvement in strategy committees could be further supported. It was recommended that going forward, documents for Committee meetings (e.g., progress reports) ought to be sent at least a week in advance, to allow enough time for them to be read before the meeting. Civil society organisations representatives should also be asked in advance about the inclusion of agenda items for the meeting.

*There is a need for parity of esteem for all representatives; this includes the need for timely circulation of reports and to ensure representatives are provided with the opportunity to seek inclusion of agenda items well in advance of the meetings.*

*(Civil society representative, NTRIS)*

A mid-term review report of NTRIS had identified that some members of the committee lacked an understanding of their role. One of the representatives for the Roma community on the NTRIS Committee had a designated support person to assist with navigating documents and procedures for the Committee. It was suggested by government and civil society representatives that there needs to be resources to support the participation and involvement of all civil society representatives on the Committee, as needed, as civil society organisations in Ireland have experienced reduced funding in recent years. There also needs to be resources to support them to consult with the people they represent in between meetings, and to support any follow-on work arising from meetings. The separate meetings of civil society groups prior to the Committee were viewed as a useful structure for co-ordinating input, but it was not funded by the strategy.

Strategies “owned” by government

While the civil society representatives were viewed as actively involved in the strategy committees, it was acknowledged that the Equality Strategies were government strategies. The focus of the committee meetings was on input from government departments about the progress of actions and there was no formal structure for the civil society organisations to have a monitoring role. Some of the civil society representatives felt that while there were many opportunities to share their views, the extent to which their inputs and suggestions were taken on board and informed implementation varied greatly.

*“We can raise issues, but the power of implementation and oversight does not rest with us.”*

*(Civil society representative, NTRIS)*

*“...it was difficult to get any changes implemented, for example, we proposed inclusion of housing and homeless related actions that had not been in the original strategy, but they were not included.”*

*(Civil society representative, MIS)*

Respondents felt that there was greater potential scope for civil society groups to provide advice on implementation of the actions within the strategies. Some of the well-established groups representing the Traveller community were noted to be skilled at translating problems into workable solutions for government departments; the progress on the Traveller Health Action Plan was attributed to this involvement.

Most of the civil society organisations on the committees were not directly involved in delivering actions (though some may have been indirectly involved via the projects they were running). It was suggested that strengthening the connection between the content of the strategies and the government funding programmes for civil society organisations may facilitate civil society organisations to implement strategy activities.

*...So if you look at that strategy, you won't see a single action that is owned by anybody other than a government department... ..And so, when we say that we need to have NGOs, really, as part of these solutions and really embedded in our responses to these problems, I think we really have to ask how much we mean that when we look at the strategies we produce... .. if that was working optimally, well then yes absolutely, the NGOs would have operational responsibility for elements of the strategy and that would be right and proper and that would make the implementation of the strategy so much stronger, or at least it could. But for that generation of strategies, no. That was certainly not – with the integration one, that was certainly not the case.*

*(Interviewee, MIS)*

#### Public communication about the strategies

While true collaboration should be aimed for with critical or key stakeholders, it is also important that the wider group of stakeholders and the general public are kept informed of developments.

Interviewees were asked about how the public and wider stakeholders were kept informed about the strategies and their progress. For the MIS, the Strategy text, membership of the committee, minutes of committee meetings (until May 2018), and the interim review of the Strategy were published on the website of the department which housed it (formerly DOJ, now DCEDIY). It was recommended that the minutes of the NTRIS meetings should also be published on the department website, to reassure organisations *“that there is a focus, that*

*there is stuff happening”.*

There was not perceived to have been much publicity about whether the strategies were being implemented. Interviewees noted that any press releases or Ministerial speeches that were made about relevant actions did refer to the strategy, but the subsequent coverage depended on how this was reported by journalists. At the time of the development of the strategies it was felt that there had not been the same focus in government departments around social media that there will be for future strategies. For the MIS, the funding schemes that were established under the strategy, such as the Community Integration Fund for community organisations, also promoted awareness about the strategy.

The committees were seen as the main method of communication about the strategies, as the meetings informed the civil society representatives about what was happening on a strategy, and they could then feed that back to the wider networks they represent. Information about relevant government events and funding schemes was also shared with civil society groups via the committee representatives. Provision of information to the wider public, which was identified as good practice by experts, appeared to be limited.



## Situation analysis, scoping and prioritization

An understanding of the situation, issues or context for women and girls, migrants, and Travellers and Roma were achieved through the extensive consultation processes described above that facilitated the sharing of their lived experiences of inequalities and the identification of priority areas for action. These processes leading to strategies that were far-reaching in their scope and aimed to be comprehensive in the themes they covered for each of the target groups.

Broad scope of the strategy objectives: “everything is a priority; nothing is a priority”

The literature suggests that government strategies that are broad in scope are often difficult to implement (e.g., OECD, 2018).

All three strategies were acknowledged by stakeholders to be wide in their scope, with each comprising dozens of actions. Some interviewees and respondents felt that the scope of the strategy they were involved with was appropriate and “*across the areas it needed to be*”, as the broad content reflected the extent of the consultation and engagement process. Others felt that the scope was too wide, which led to difficulty with “*getting a sense of*” the strategy and led to challenges with implementation: “*Pieces fell through the cracks as there was so much to do*” (Civil society representative, NSWG).

Interviewees discussed how improving inclusion for Traveller and Roma communities involved a huge range of relevant services and sectors and the NTRIS was, therefore, necessarily broad in its scope.

*It's like a rectification of everything that has been done badly for years and years... .. So, the scoping of the problem is everything. Think of any service that's offered, somehow that comes in to NTRIS because perhaps it wasn't done well before, and perhaps there's need to do things much better, and that's why NTRIS exists. But that has its own problems.*

(Interviewee, NTRIS)

## Prioritising alignment with existing government work

In terms of prioritising what would be included in the strategy, interviewees coordinating the NSWG spoke about the efforts that were made to link the content of the Strategy with existing strategies and policies within government departments, as the previous strategy for women and girls had not reflected enough of what was already happening within government departments. It was anticipated that if the Strategy actions reflected actions that a department was already committed to, there would be internal resources available to

support their progress. There were limited resources at the time the NSWG was being drafted, and it was viewed as a “*sensible*” approach to prioritise actions arising from the strategy that were aligned with high-level priorities within government departments and added value to work that was already being done. It was also claimed to provide reassurance to those working in departments that their existing programmes and policies were not being overlooked, as interviewees noted that there was sometimes resistance from other government departments to being involved with a strategy if it was perceived to be creating additional work.

*“The aims of the strategy mirrored the actions being developed and implemented in the sector.” (Government department representative, NSWG)*

Civil society representatives for the NTRIS felt that the Strategy did not identify connections with other national policies in domains such as employment, accommodation and health, to ensure that Traveller and Roma communities are targeted groups within mainstream policies. They recommended that the next iteration of the NTRIS should align with a range of strategies and plans, including the forthcoming ‘National Action Plan Against Racism’, the national employment strategy: ‘Pathways to Work’ (2021-2025), and the forthcoming National Equality Data Strategy.

One interviewee suggested that the risk of aligning strategies too closely with existing department workplans is the reduced scope for ambition. It was noted that there was a need to discuss with departments what they were planning to do in the area, but also what they could potentially do.

Interviewees and respondents pointed out that an action that was aligned with the programme for government, or was a high priority for a particular department, was more likely to get political level and sustained commitment. The NSWG was noted to have benefitted from strong commitment at political and official level, public support, strong lobbying from NGO groups, and a range of existing commitments on gender equality.

*There have been mentions of gender equality, mentions of strategies for women in programmes for government now for some time. So, that puts an issue high on the agenda... .. So, to a certain extent, we were pushing an open door, for this particular strategy, having that all-of-government focus in it.*

*(Interviewee, NSWG)*

It was suggested that the successor to NTRIS ought to be aligned with the 2020 EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, in order to draw from the learning across Europe on challenges and supports for Roma communities.

### Focus on broad social categories

In terms of the scope of each of the three equality strategies, the emphasis was on the social categories targeted by each strategy in isolation. Interviewees referred to gaps in identifying intersectionalities across and within strategies. The MIS did not identify specific intersecting groups, *“despite the fact that migrants are so diverse, the strategy speaks in very homogenous terms.”* (Interviewee, NSWG and MIS). Even migrant women as a group were not specifically referred to in the MIS, or in the NSWG. It was also noted that there was no intersection between the MIS and the NTRIS in relation to the overlapping issues faced by the Roma community and the wider population of vulnerable migrants. Some respondents felt that the NTRIS provided an opportunity to identify *“parallel issues”* faced by both the Traveller and Roma communities, while others noted that the issues faced by the two communities are *“totally different”*.

A civil society representative on NTRIS noted that the co-ordinating strategy team had made efforts to connect the actions in relation to Traveller women in the NTRIS and the NSWG. However, one of the interviewees spoke about how the same actions for Traveller and Roma women were discussed in both the NTRIS and NSWG meetings, due to overlapping commitments within both strategies.

Interviewees discussed whether there ought to be a single overarching strategy which sets out a vision for greater equality and then separate implementation plans for actions for each specific group, and possibly for specific intersectionalities.

*If it was me doing it, I would have an overall equality strategy, very high level, and then different actions under it, so each department have their equality strategy broken down into the different groups, they take ownership, and then they have to report into the higher level.*

*(Interviewee, NTRIS)*

It was cautioned that this could be *“politically tricky”* if civil society organisations feel that the equality strategy for those they represent is being removed. It was also noted that the EU and UN typically recommend standalone ministerial roles and strategies for gender equality.

Another potential solution suggested was to split the strategies thematically, e.g., a Traveller Education Strategy, Traveller Health Strategy, etc., though it was also cautioned that this may create more work for the representative groups who would be engaged with each one.

## Objective setting and action planning

### Processes for setting objectives and determining actions

Interviewees explained that the specific objectives for the strategies were determined through a) the consultation processes carried out with the public and civil society organisations, b) discussions with government departments and state agencies, c) review of existing programmes of work within departments and agencies; and d) consideration of emerging policy issues and recommendations within the broader international or European agenda: *“It was the consultation process, it was issues already coming up in policy and international fora, it was programme for government, you know. They all set, you know, highlighted the objectives”*. (Interviewee, NSWG, MIS and NTRIS)

Following the public consultation for the NSWG that ended in January 2017 and the subsequent appointment of the strategy committee in February 2017, that committee then met on three occasions in February and March of that year to develop strategy actions for the NSWG. In the end, the National Strategy for Women and Girls had six high-level objectives, 139 actions and 83 desired outcomes.

With respect to the Migrant Integration Strategy, a cross-departmental group on migrant integration was reconstituted in March 2014 and tasked with reviewing the activities already being undertaken by government departments and agencies relating to the promotion of the integration of non-Irish nationals. This group then prepared a draft overarching Migrant Integration Strategy, taking account of the policies and actions already being implemented. The group then consulted on this more broadly, as described above. The result was a Migrant Integration Strategy containing 76 actions relating to 12 higher-level themes.

The NTRIS steering group, comprising members from government departments and agencies and civil society groups, i.e., Traveller and Roma representative groups, designed an initial list of ten themes for NTRIS. This list was then refined, and objectives and actions determined, incorporating input from the consultation process described earlier. Some of the actions included in the strategy emerged from the stakeholder consultation, while others were continuations of actions in train or built upon actions already included in the previous strategy. The final NTRIS had ten themes, 44 objectives and 149 actions. It was the responsibility of the departments and agencies named as action leads for the specific action to decide on the timescales for implementation of their specific action. However, the steering group could highlight actions that it felt should be prioritised in light of competing priorities and constraints.

'Unwieldy' lists of actions

There was concern from some interviewees that the strategy documents were simply lists of individual actions, rather than containing a strategy for how the aims were to be achieved. For this reason, the focus of the strategies tended to be on delivering and reporting on actions, rather than on the overall vision for the strategy.

*It's just a list of actions. So, I think there's a real issue there. And that's probably a bigger conversation, what we understand by a strategy.*

*(Interviewee, MIS)*

*People don't tend to step back and look at the big picture very often. They're focused on the activities.*

*(Interviewee, NSWG)*

Many of the interviewees and survey respondents thought that the strategies contained too many actions to meaningfully be able to implement: "*it was just unwieldy to manage*", and to sustain the interest of all those involved in the committees. One interviewee noted that this was a common challenge with whole-of-government strategies that involve many groups in the consultation process- that they are so wide in scope and include so many actions, that it is difficult for their objectives to be realistically achieved.

*Similar to other large national strategies, so many actions to report on, so many stakeholders around the table, difficult for any single interest to feel entirely satisfied by the process - which is a weakness of national joined up strategies - they can be so wide that no one (stakeholder interests) believes they have been satisfactorily served by the strategy, or that it has met the needs they identified at the outset. Serving such a breadth of interests and needs is a key challenge for future 'national' / 'joined up' strategy development.*

*(Interviewee, NSWG)*

Some of the actions within the strategies were viewed as minor activities, while others had the potential to be "*transformational*", with long-term impact; but it was noted that consideration was not given to which actions were the most strategic or needed to be prioritised, at least in the initial development. Strategies were believed to be less effective if the list of actions they contain is not succinct and key priority actions have not been identified. This was stressed by stakeholders in relation to each of the three strategies.

*Too many actions to be achievable - could have been condensed and more directed at specific outcomes.*

*(Civil society respondent, NSWG)*

The NTRIS Committee agreed an annual action plan that prioritised specific actions each year, which was perceived to increase momentum for some actions.

Government department interviewees suggested that successor strategies ought to involve shorter strategy documents (approx. 4-10 pages), that focus on a smaller set of key priorities agreed with stakeholders, with separate plans for each action that are reviewed annually.

#### Negotiating actions with departments

The proposed content of the strategies had to be negotiated with the different government departments before they were finalised, which was perceived to result in the *“neutralising of wording and specifics in the Strategy”* (Civil Society representative, NTRIS). A civil society respondent who was involved with the MIS felt that the actions in the strategy that were specific were those that met the needs and plans that government departments had already identified. One of the interviewees acknowledged that the ambition from the stakeholder engagement differed from what the government departments would agree to, *“and you end up with something in between, and that’s the negotiation process that is required.”*

#### Clarity needed on actions

Many of the actions contained within the strategies were noted to be written in *“vague”* or *“high-level”* terms, which led to *“poor and repetitive reporting”*. The vagueness was attributed to the last-minute negotiations with departments in the final drafting of the strategies, where the wording was changed on actions so that the Department would not be tied to specific activities. This made it difficult for the committees to determine whether actions had, or had not, been implemented. Some actions were never fully progressed as *“it wasn’t immediately clear what was really supposed to be done”*.

For other actions, the level of work associated with their delivery was said to have been underestimated, which delayed their implementation. Government respondents differed on whether they thought the aims and objectives of the NSWG were *“realistic”* within the timeframe and resources involved. Some actions on the NSWG were viewed as *“aspirational”* and *“over ambitious”* in the context of not having the resources or capacity to assess what exactly was to be done.

#### Strategies were *“static”*

Each of the strategy texts indicated that they were intended to be flexible, *“living”* documents. For example, the NSWG claims to be *“A living document, which is influenced by its context and will evolve as circumstances change over the period to 2020”* (p.7). The NTRIS states that it *“should be regarded by all as a living document which will be subject to*

*regular monitoring as well as amendment (where appropriate)” (p.7). Similarly, it is claimed in the MIS text that the Strategy “has been designed to evolve in response to new challenges and emerging issues that may arise over its lifetime. A set of actions are set out for implementation. The process also allows for additional actions to be added or for existing actions to be adapted to respond to changing circumstances.” (p. 9).*

It was felt by stakeholders that, towards the end of the equality strategies many of the original commitments had become outdated, as there were shifts in a department’s approach, or the wider societal context had changed during the period of the strategy. Interviewees and respondents referred to the flexibility, or lack thereof, within the strategies. It was noted, for example, that the field of women’s health had experienced significant, often unforeseen, changes during the lifetime of the NSWG, which necessitated flexibility within the strategy commitments for the Department of Health. The Women’s Health Action Plan had a wider remit than was originally envisaged by the NSWG and was “*comprehensively resourced to include many of these new and emerging developments*”. However, in other aspects of the NSWG it was noted that there was no scope for reflection on emerging initiatives from the EU and how they may have impacted on the actions within the Strategy during its lifetime.

Government department and civil society representatives for the NTRIS and the MIS noted that there was no mechanism to add actions to the strategies over time, as needs changed, or new issues arose, e.g., the impact of the housing crisis for migrants.

*The Strategy was very limited to focusing just on those actions that were agreed at the time. And I think that there wasn’t then scope for other actions to be added, or for departments to alter their approach.*

*(Interviewee, NSWG and MIS)*

The committee model that brought together government and civil society representatives did facilitate, in some instances, a response to urgent emerging needs, for example, to deal with the financial situation of migrants without legal status during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Developing performance indicators, targets and measures

The literature suggests that indicators should take place around the time of objective setting and action planning (OECD, 2018) and before the strategies are launched. Stakeholders also believed that it is important to develop a set of indicators alongside the development of the strategy instead of after the strategy has already been launched: “*So that at the time of publication you actually have your indicators.*”

This did not take place for any of the three equality strategies. There was overall agreement

among interviewees and survey respondents that there was a lack of meaningful and adequate performance and outcome indicators for all three strategies. Various challenges were identified with regard to identifying and measuring indicators across the three strategies.

The NSWG committee did attempt to identify indicators, but those identified were felt to be neither pragmatic nor useful. Firstly, there were too many indicators identified which meant that many did not add value to the implementation and monitoring of the strategy.

*...to try to identify indicators for all of the activities, we did run into the sand a lot on that, ended up with a 200-page document with at least that many indicators, some of which had data, some of which did not, and it was a very frustrating process because we couldn't see where it was adding any value at all to what anybody was doing.*

*(Interviewee, NSWG)*

One interviewee noted the importance of distinguishing between an 'action' and an 'outcome'. When developing an outcomes framework, stakeholders should be aware of the necessary elements that an outcome must contain i.e., a measurable component. Some stakeholders had ideas for actions they wished to implement and attempted to adapt them into outcomes, although the fit was not always right. This meant that the outcomes were not meaningful to measuring progress. *'Now, a lot of times people came to us with actions they wanted to do already and just tried to retrofit that... So, some of the outcomes are not phrased as outcomes for me. Some of them are phrased as actions.'*

*(Interviewee, NSWG)*

An early task of the MIS monitoring and co-ordinating committee was to develop a set of performance indicators. However, this was a time-consuming process, and it was difficult to gain agreement and consensus on the inclusion of indicators. There were tensions between the inclusion of 'ambitious' yet realistic indicators.

*So, you have a brand-new committee coming together, you have a set of actions already agreed and adopted by government, and you're asking that brand new committee which is a mix of government and non-government people to agree indicators for those actions. So, just impossible. And again, the reason for that is that the government representatives on the committee take a very defensive line. They don't want to be having to make hostages to fortune, and be tied to things that maybe they won't be able to deliver, and their minister would be giving out to them, so there's a defensive line adopted by them. Whereas the NGO members of the committee adopt this really ambitious line of, we want to be able to measure this that*



*and the other, and we will commission research, and we'll do surveys, and we'll expend a whole load of money measuring how we're doing. And you know, so you just have a total mismatch.'*

As mentioned above, developing a set of performance indicators for MIS was a time-consuming task. The committee finally decided that they could not '*spend the whole four years of the Strategy talking about indicators*' and an agreement had to be reached. Hence, a set of indicators was finally agreed upon, however, stakeholders were not satisfied with these and as a result they were rarely used to measure outcomes: "*We eventually agreed a set of indicators that were really ropey, like they're very inconsistent, all over the place, it was basically whatever we could get people to agree to.*"

Interviewees felt it was important that indicators are pragmatic and useful and not burdensome for those using them to measure progress. Interviewees cautioned that large numbers of indicators may not be effective or beneficial for measuring progress, as they may not be utilised by those implementing the actions.

*There is a very real risk that people disappear down the rabbit hole of indicators as well. I mean, there is experience of other government strategies that end up with hundreds of indicators, and it becomes a whole industry in itself to track these indicators and that's not helping anyone either.*

*(Interviewee, MIS)*

Respondents suggested that indicators for individual equality strategies should be guided by and aligned with the National Equality Data Strategy, when its development is complete. This may ensure a "*common approach*" and "*common understanding*" of measuring impact for the populations targeted by the strategies.

More specific to the MIS, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) produce an integration monitor every two years which monitors integration using EU recognised methods for areas such as education, housing, employment and social inclusion. Members of the MIS committee believed that it is important for the Strategy indicators to link up with the ESRI integration data.

## Ensuring effective leadership

### High-level endorsement of strategies

The principles of the NSWG and the NTRIS were perceived by interviewees and survey respondents to have been endorsed and driven by key ministers and senior civil servants. It was noted that the MIS did not have a strong political push at the outset, which was

perceived to have hampered its development. The Ministers within the department that currently houses the equality strategies were viewed as committed to strategy implementation. The Ministers engaged with other government departments to secure “*buy-in*” on specific actions. Each meeting of the monitoring committees was also chaired by the Minister, which was perceived to give the committee a “*high profile*” and to ensure accountability of reporting.

*And, as Chair, the Minister is well happy to let hard questions be asked, and departments to – he won't necessarily jump in and defend them and protect them from that, and he will tell them to go off and look into something, and maybe to come back on it afterwards.*

*(Interviewee, NTRIS)*

#### Leadership of the coordinating department

Survey respondents from government departments spoke positively about the work by the DCEDIY team in managing and supporting the strategies, particularly the extent of co-ordination involved amongst all the different stakeholders. The team were seen as “*supportive*” of the work in departments, and respondents noted that the DCEDIY team had an “*impressive*” knowledge of each sectoral area. While some respondents felt there was good ongoing engagement with stakeholders from the DCEDIY coordinating teams, others would have welcomed more engagement and communication between meetings.

#### Leadership in other departments and agencies

The same degree of high-level leadership on the strategies was not perceived to have been available within the different departments and agencies involved in its implementation. Formal ‘champions’ were not created for the strategies, but interviewees referred to how there were a number of informal champions, individual representatives from government departments who were particularly engaged and committed, “*beyond the basic requirements*”.

The DCEDIY team responsible for each strategy had no control over who would represent each department on the Committee. For many departments this tended to be someone in a co-ordinating role, who liaised with different units within their department for action updates and communicated any progress to the strategy committee. The level of engagement from this co-ordinator was viewed to be highly dependent on the individuals involved, in terms of their interest and commitment to the issue, which was seen as a “*vulnerability*” of Strategy implementation. Staff turnover was also a risk when there was one “*go-to person*” within a department who was closely engaged with the strategy work.

*I think this is something I should say about the leadership, is that a lot of it is personality*

*driven. It's not embedded in the way that we do things. So, we're still at high risk of somebody moving and it's just the... What was a very successful structure suddenly collapsing behind them.*

*(Interviewee, NSWG)*

There were benefits observed to involving department co-ordinators on the committees, as they were skilled at identifying “synergies” across departments and putting committee members in contact with people in relevant departments. However, it was also noted that these co-ordinators often did not have policy knowledge on the actions that they were reporting on, in terms of the changes that were needed to the delivery of services. One survey respondent who played this coordinating role recounted being asked questions at committee meetings about aspects of their department that they could not answer. Interviewees mentioned that when the committee was being established departments were asked to involve representatives at Principal Officer level, but over time many of the departments had come to be represented by those with less expertise in an area.

*Those problems are endemic when you have these big whole-of-government strategies – how do you really get the right person in the room who has the knowledge?*

*(Interviewee, MIS)*

It was recommended that, for future strategies, high-level leadership within all of the departments and agencies involved needs to be secured, so that a department's work on the strategy can be embedded within their own programme of work. Furthermore, if the strategy committee is to be a committee of experts, the departments need to be represented by those who know how to make policy changes happen.

## Securing adequate resources

### Budgets and funding mechanisms

Accurate estimates of the funding allocated to each strategies over their lifetime could not be ascertained from written documentation reviewed by the evaluation team, and nor could stakeholders provide this information. Opinions regarding budgets and costing differed across the three strategies, as well as between government department/agency and civil society groups. It is important to note that although DCEDIY had a small budget for the implementation of the strategies, allocating funding to the implementation of actions was largely the responsibility of individual government departments and agencies. Hence, perceptions of budgets were different depending on the department or agency responsible for the action. One million EUR was allocated in 2017 for NTRIS strategy implementation,

after which time a decision was taken that no further funding would be made available by the Department of Justice and Equality; instead, the strategy would be implemented from 2018 onwards using existing funding allocations from other government departments. In 2018, Dormant Accounts Funding was made available to progress NTRIS actions, however this was 'one off' funding not intended to be sustained over the lifetime of the Strategy.

NSWG and NTRIS government department and agency group survey respondents were largely satisfied with the budgets for implementing actions and believed they were “*sufficient*” and an “*adequate amount*”, especially if their sector had a limited number of actions on the strategy. Other respondents felt that more budget and resources would have helped with implementation.

There were certain actions within the NSWG relating to women’s health and education that received a large amount of funding and resources due to the high political priority of these areas.

*The Women's Health Action Plan has a lot of specific funding allocations and is making wonderful progress.*

*(Government department representative, NSWG)*

*Given the high priority placed on gender equality in education, overall resourcing was at a high level.*

*(Government department representative, NSWG)*

Conversely, the civil society survey respondents for the NSWG, NTRIS and MIS were not satisfied with the funding and budgets available for the implementation of actions. While the government department and agency groups discussed budgets within their own department, civil society groups appeared to have focused on allocated budgets for the implementation of the strategy as a whole within the coordinating department. Here, it was stated that there was “*no clear budget allocation*” and “*little or no resources*” for the implementation of the strategies. The policy units within DCEDIY were noted by respondents to have had a ‘*very small budget*’ for the implementation of the strategies and there was no central funding mechanism allocated for implementation. There was also no mechanism in place to keep track of the funding and resources allocated to the implementation of the strategy across all different departments and so it was not possible to evaluate whether they were adequately resourced:” There’s *definitely a weakness with regards to tying up the funding and even within the different departments and just getting an overall picture like of what is spent...*”

Government departments and agencies received funding from the Dormant Accounts Fund

(DAF) to implement some of their actions. As this was a once-off payment, it was challenging to mainstream the pilots funded by the DAF.

*The issue now will be to mainstream all these 'pilots' from the DAF and if additional resources will be provided or if they are seen to come from existing level of service which could be problematic, i.e., to find sufficient funding for all these projects and to scale them up to become national projects.*

*(Government department representative, NTRIS)*

Interviewees and survey respondents believed that actions should be costed during the development of a strategy and a dedicated budget and core funding allocated to the strategy implementation. They also highlighted the importance for whole-of-government strategies to be supported by whole-of-government mechanisms and structures, such as budgets.

*A major weakness of the strategy is that there were no costings provided whatsoever and no mechanism even mentioned, as far as I recall, as to how costings would be arrived at...But I would be saying if we are really serious about whole-of-government working, we should stop shying away from whole-of-government budgets.*

*(Interviewee, MIS)*

#### Adequacy of available resources

Although some government departments and agencies were satisfied that they had the capacity to implement the actions they were responsible for, the vast majority of stakeholders believed that there was a serious lack of capacity and resources to effectively implement the strategies.

Resources were depleted during the restructuring of the departments, and stakeholders acknowledged that there were more resources and capacity for implementation at the beginning of the strategies. This hampered implementation of some actions:

*I think there was a huge capacity issue in the unit for the actions that belonged to the whole department, because obviously the whole department changed. There was a lack of capacity. There were actions that were put in and, you know, they weren't really completed.*

*(Interviewee, NSWG and MIS)*

There was also agreement that the co-ordination of the strategies took up a lot of capacity within the policy unit of departments and it was a time-consuming task that took away from implementation of actions. One of the civil society respondents for NTRIS stated that there was "a need for increased administrative support for the NTRIS Steering Group".

## Instituting implementation structures and teams

No national level structures were instituted to attend solely to implementation issues, and it did not appear that there were implementation teams in departments or agencies responsible for delivering actions. While the various strategy committees tended to include implementation issues in their stated remit, there were mixed views as to whether this happened in practice, with a sense that the sole function of the committees was monitoring. There were mixed opinions among interview and survey respondents about whether there was enough time and opportunity at the committee meetings to discuss strategy implementation progress in sufficient detail. Some felt there was “*plenty of opportunity*” to discuss the various actions. However, others felt that the meetings focused solely on updates about action progress, without sufficient time to discuss the “*challenging*” and “*complex*” issues that were actually affecting implementation. Respondents noted that they would have appreciated further discussion about how a particular action was working and what kind of a difference it could make. One interviewee also commented that limiting the committee meetings to discussing whether specific actions were happening, provided no opportunity to discuss other work going on within departments that may contribute towards progressing the overall goals or vision of the strategy.

## Responsibility for implementation

While a strategy was considered by stakeholders to give a “*mandate*” to the co-ordinating department (DCEDIY) to attempt to progress action in a particular area, it was also noted that there is limited authority for one government department to drive the implementation of a policy that is the responsibility of another. The teams coordinating the strategies did not have the ability to make decisions on how implementation would be resourced, or how actions would be progressed. Interviewees referred to the absence of power to affect change when it came to strategy implementation, which depended on getting the “*right*” people within departments to get the actions progressed.

*“What I have learned is we can’t do it if we don’t have the authority to do it”.*

*(Interviewee, NSWG, MIS and NTRIS)*

It was suggested that for successor strategies, involving a role in strategy implementation for the Department of the Taoiseach may assist in progressing actions, as that department has the power to hold cabinet subcommittees. This echoed a recommendation made during the expert consultation.

Interviewees noted that a key challenge for implementation of the strategies was getting departments and agencies to take responsibility for implementing actions. Although housing

was a key issue for the groups affected by the strategies, for example, there were mixed responses amongst the respondents and interviewees about how involved that department was in strategy implementation. Departments were seen as more likely to take ownership for actions that were already part of their existing priorities. Where actions were not progressed, it was often left up to those co-ordinating the strategy to progress them: “...you’ll find the Department of Justice and Equality put in against an awful lot of actions where we couldn’t get somebody to pony up and do something.” (Interviewee, NSWG)

Where an action was assigned across multiple departments or agencies, there was typically a lack of ownership and accountability was very “weak”. One interviewee noted that the nature of the issues being dealt with by the strategies were the “so-called wicked problems” (social or cultural problems that are interconnected with other problems), leading to “responsibility diffused across the system”. The MIS initially had quite a few actions assigned across multiple departments or agencies, which was revised at the point of its mid-term review, as it was realised to be a “mistake”.

“I would not say for every single action we knew the person to pick up the phone to”  
(Interviewee, NWSG and MIS)

It was recommended that for successor strategies, a single lead department be identified for each action, and also that a *named individual* within each department is assigned full responsibility for implementation within that department. The designated leads need to be held accountable, but also need to be open about the challenges they face with implementation. It was also recommended that future strategies work to establish stronger ownership for the strategies by all departments across government rather than just DCEDIY, and that it is communicated to departments that they have a larger role in the strategy than just working on individual actions. It was suggested that ownership may increase if a strategy became more embedded within the policy units of a department, rather than only with those in co-ordinating roles.

For the three equality strategies, it was up to each individual department to assess their own readiness for implementation of the actions that they had responsibility for, and to manage how the actions were progressed. Civil society representatives on NTRIS pointed out that many of the actions within that strategy were not clearly specified in terms of timelines, which were “at the discretion of the relevant departments / agencies”. The co-ordinating unit for the strategies were often not aware to what extent the actions were contained within the business plans of the various different departments: “Implementation was devolved onto the individual action holders”. (Interviewee, NSWG, MIS and NTRIS)

While some respondents and interviewees thought the monitoring committee meetings made departments feel accountable for implementation progress, others indicated that it was unclear whether there was any follow-up accountability after the meetings, or any real concern for what would happen to actions that were not progressing. It was recommended that stronger measures may need to be put into place on successor strategies to improve accountability. Suggestions included sanctions for departments where there are consistent shortcomings in implementation; more formal reporting structures, such as a parliamentary committee on Human Rights and Equality, or the Minister reporting strategy progress annually to the Committee for DCEDIY; or an annual participatory public forum where accessible progress reports about the strategies are presented.

#### The role of sub-committees

Survey respondents and interviewees noted that sub-committees for those with shared knowledge and expertise were a good way to progress actions in specific areas, e.g., by housing, health, education. For the NSWG, a sub-committee involving multiple government departments progressed action on period poverty. Interviewees spoke about how sub-committees need to be given authority to advance work on actions, so that they are “*taken seriously*” by government departments. They also cautioned that the use of sub-committees does not create so many further structures within each strategy, that it becomes another administrative burden if the same representatives are attending each.

#### Creating an implementation plan

There were no implementation plans for the strategies at the outset, which made it difficult for those involved to assess how realistic the aims, objectives and actions were. Interviewees and respondents noted that the actions were listed in the strategies with equal weighting, without reference to the level of complexity associated with each and how straightforward each would be to implement. Initial planning focused on those actions that were viewed as easier to carry out, and not enough analysis was done on other actions from an early point in the process. It was felt that strategy actions would have had more opportunity to be realised if they had been clearly articulated and an explanation provided for each of what was going to be done and how.

*I'd make sure when we were in at the beginning that we had... for each of the actions that somebody had written down for us 'This is exactly what I plan to do.' Just a short summary for each action 'This is what I plan to do. This is how I propose to measure it. This is approximately how much effort it's going to need, and this is where I need to coordinate it across departments.*



*(Interviewee, NSWG)*

*It's easy to write on paper the goals and expectations but it needs clearer explanation of how to implement to achieve these.*

*(Civil society respondent, NTRIS)*

In relation to the MIS, there was a recommendation in the Progress Report to the Government Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration in 2019 that implementation plans be developed for any actions that had fallen behind published timelines. It is not clear that this recommendation was acted upon.

In relation to NTRIS, the lack of detailed information on the implementation of actions included in the Strategy text led to a recognition among stakeholders that an implementation plan or plans were needed. Calls for the creation of implementation plans were made in multiple Steering Group meetings in 2017. In July 2018, a draft implementation plan for 2019 was developed by Traveller organisations which was then approved by the NTRIS Steering Group. This implementation plan incorporated good implementation planning practice, focusing on key priority areas, including the action text, action lead, and steps to be implemented to achieve the actions, and a section for progress updates.

Respondents and interviewees recommended that for successor strategies, there needs to be consistency in departmental approach to implementation planning. It was suggested that each department could be provided with a framework for how to design an implementation plan, which would include identifying potential barriers and solutions for implementation. There is consensus in the implementation literature and among the experts consulted as part of this study that this implementation planning needs to happen early in the lifetime of the strategies.

### Developing staff capacity

No interviewees or survey respondents mentioned efforts to strengthen staff capacity to develop or implement national equality strategies, and no reference to any could be found in the strategy documentation.

Areas where staff capacity may need to be built were identified, however. There was noted to be some confusion among government department/agency respondents in their understanding of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty: *"It's there in writing but people are really not sure exactly what it means to how they do their job"*. Interviewees suggested that a key role for the DCEDIY co-ordinating team for future strategies ought to include interpreting national and international equality frameworks and requirements, and

planning for how they can work in practice for government departments. A stronger role was recommended for DCEDIY in “*laying down principles*” of equality and clarifying for departments the obligations they need to adhere to.

### Cultivating a supportive climate

Interviewees noted that there was a “*suite of parallel equality strategies*” and questioned the feasibility of this in practice. The overlaps between the strategies, or between the strategies and other policies, created administrative burden for those who were responsible for reporting on each and required their attendance at multiple meetings.

*So that just meant there was this kind of strategy fatigue among counterparts in other government departments and that made it hard to keep a positive culture around the thing.*  
(Interviewee, MIS)

It was recommended that future strategies have greater focus on how the strategies and their timelines are connected and how reporting could be streamlined. It is likely not just that there are multiple parallel equality strategies in operation that contributes to this ‘strategy fatigue’, but that there are several other whole-of-government strategies emanating from other government departments that also require action.

*There is limited band width in terms of engaging on these various reviews while dealing with competing demands from other departments to engage on reviews of their strategies. It would be useful if the DCEDIY could give some consideration to the scheduling of its engagement across the system and the timing of when the new strategies will be published.*

*(Government department representative, NSWG, MIS and NTRIS)*

As discussed earlier, championing of the equality strategies was felt to depend on the interest and commitment level of individuals as opposed to a general culture that was supportive of the whole-of-government equality work.

### Monitoring and evaluation

The monitoring function of the committees

As mentioned earlier, the committees were the primary mechanism through which strategy

progress was monitored, and monitoring comprised the bulk of the business of the committees once the strategies were launched. Some interviewees referred to the value of the committee structure in regularly reminding departments of their commitments and encouraging accountability. It was noted that the committees provided an opportunity for the Minister to question departments about why progress had not been made on particular actions.

As mentioned earlier, some survey respondents felt that the meetings tended to focus on getting status updates on the many strategy actions, with little opportunity for deeper probing. Sometimes the committee meetings contained allocated time for presentation from a speaker about a particular issue, or a significant update on an action. This was felt to provide greater opportunity for the committee to engage directly with the details of a particular action. The NSWG had sometimes included a thematic discussion as part of the monitoring meetings, but this ended when the committee meetings were held online due to COVID-19. The NTRIS meetings in 2022 contained focused thematic discussions on specific action areas.

*Maybe what should be used instead is a more targeted meeting from time to time, a bit like has been happening recently. So, the last meeting was unemployment. The previous one was on education. So, everybody is lined up. If you have the reports on the actions and they're circulated well in advance so that everyone around the table is fairly up to date on where things stand, you can have a more meaningful engagement then with more time to devote to the working through on that particular issue.*

*(Government department representative, NTRIS)*

Some of those interviewed or surveyed felt that there were too many members on the monitoring committees: *"Very hard to 'lean in' if there is no room at the table"* (Government department representative, NSWG). The idea of thematic subgroups was suggested by some to be more effective, as the relevant government department and civil society representatives could then report to a smaller monitoring committee as needed. Such an approach was taken by the MISMCC.

#### Traffic light reporting system

All three equality strategies used a 'traffic-light' system to report progress on strategy actions, with green representing that an action was on track, amber indicating minor problems or delays, and red indicating one or more major difficulties. Black was used for actions not yet started, and blue for actions completed. The status of each action was entered by action leads into a master Excel spreadsheet.

Some interviewees and respondents viewed the traffic-light reporting mechanism as useful, straight-forward and clear. One outlined the reason for their usefulness was that they were effective at providing a “*snapshot*” of progress at a particular time-point and bringing issues to attention for further discussion with the minister or within the department. Although there was an acknowledgement that the information they produced was limited, they were seen as the easiest method to provide a quick overview of actions to the committee.

*‘Easier to zoom in from all the detail of progress reported at every meeting whether things were on track or not, so that’s basically how progress is being reported or information is being collected to provide to the committee in as easily a digestible way as possible from meeting to meeting’.*

*(Interviewee, NSWG)*

However, other interviewees and respondents noted the challenges with the traffic light reporting system. It was not viewed as an effective tool for showcasing progress. Firstly, there was no standardised definition or mutual understanding regarding what constituted ‘progress’ and what was meant by an action being ‘on-track’ was “*open to interpretation of the implementing department/agency*”. Challenges with using the template where actions were cross-departmental or inter-agency in nature were also raised in a NTRIS Steering Group meeting: “*In such cases, Black doesn’t necessarily mean nothing being is being done*” (NTRIS Steering Group meeting, October 2017).

Several respondents found that the spreadsheet format of the traffic light reports was not user-friendly, as it was viewed as difficult to navigate, “*over complicated*”, and “*overcrowded*”.

*“In some ways overly complex. Some people don’t like spreadsheets and find just a spreadsheet very difficult to manage. Some people had long stories to tell, and it doesn’t fit into short update”.*

*(Interviewee, NSWG)*

The colour-coding of actions and lack of sufficient built-in space in the spreadsheet for a narrative description meant that the reports were “*very brief*”, lacked an “*outcome-focused*” perspective and did not provide meaningful information regarding the status of implementation and progress of the action.

*“It doesn’t give enough information and it doesn’t kind of link back to the objectives and it doesn’t really show the impacts.”*

*(Interviewee, NTRIS)*

Moreover, the lack of richer narrative and description meant that the traffic light reports did not tell a story of progress throughout the lifecycle of the strategy. In particular, for government department representatives who became involved with strategies at a later point and depended on the traffic-light progress reports to get up-to-speed on implementation, it was difficult to make sense of the progress that had occurred and *“piece together the past”* from these reports. *“So, people came in new and just had these static traffic lights and had to try and piece together the past from them... for someone just coming in, they can’t see what happened in the Strategy”.*

*(Interviewee, NSWG and MIS)*

#### Lack of disaggregated data

For the NTRIS, the lack of an ethnic identifier made it difficult to measure the progress and impact of the Strategy as there was no mechanism to identify the number of individuals from Traveller and Roma communities who were benefiting from work delivered by the government departments and agencies.

*“This lack of data or no ethnic or equality data has a significant impact on monitoring of NTRIS actions and being able to identify the number of Travellers who were benefiting from work taking place/being delivered on in Departments/Agencies.”*

*(Civil Society Representative, NTRIS)*

*“There is no ethnic data to measure progress on the action items. Without the ethnic identifier in place, there is no evidence of progress/regress.”*

*(Civil Society Representative, NTRIS)*

Stakeholders believed that it was crucial for ethnic identifiers to be built into service delivery data to capture who is accessing and benefiting from services provided by departments and agencies. All service providers should ensure that they capture this information to assist government departments and agencies to measure impact and progress of strategy actions.

*“If you're not capturing who is accessing the service and who is not and if you're not asking the questions, you're never going to get that data back.”*

*(Interviewee, NTRIS)*

#### Difficulty assessing impact

The quality and adequacy of performance indicators and data appeared to have differed depending on the department or agencies involved. Certain departments and agencies responsible for implementing specific actions appeared to have satisfactory indicators to

measure progress against. However, there was no set of indicators that could measure the cumulative impact of a strategy.

For example, one department responsible for implementing NSWG actions, mentioned that *“It was easy to monitor and track progress for actions related to [our] department using the higher-level indicators”*. Moreover, the Department of Health had its own indicators and *“mechanisms for tracking women's health indicators”* in relation to the NSWG.

Stakeholders acknowledged that performance indicators are unevenly available across departments and agencies, and it was suggested by a small number of survey respondents that there should be the development of a set of indicators that measure the higher-level impact of a strategy, focusing on the cumulative effects of a strategy rather than at the level of action.

*“We would suggest developing a method of assessing the cumulative impact of the NSWG rather than atomised action specific / Department or Agency specific reporting.”*

*(Government department representative, NSWG)*

*“We would suggest developing a method of assessing the cumulative impact of the NTRIS.”*

*(Government department representative, NTRIS)*

While higher-level or cumulative indicators of progress or impact are also helpful, the implementation literature and the expert panel concur that it is important to have action-level indicators, targets, and measures.

Failure to identify indicators prior to the development and launch of a strategy means that the strategies were not designed in a way that facilitated progress to be measured. During the drafting of successor strategies, it was acknowledged that data considerations will need to be central to planning. This includes surveying the *“availability and applicability”* of data, identifying what data will be required to monitor progress, and identifying data gaps and methods to address and mitigate these during the strategy design phase.

*If somebody comes back to us and says, well—How much of that strategy ever got implemented, and how do you know what difference it made? Then you just be up-front about it and say well, actually we don't know. Because it was never designed to enable us to know that. Which is the truth, you know? The truth is that strategy wasn't designed for somebody to be able to come in at the end and go, did this work? How well did it work? What did it achieve? What worked and what didn't work and what will we do next time. Like, the strategy document itself was not designed to enable those questions to be answered at the end of the four years.*

## Learning from experience

### Scope to capture learning

Interviewees and respondents felt that ongoing learning and reflection ought to have been built into the implementation of the strategies. They noted that it would have been useful if interim reviews, in consultation with civil society organisations, had looked at what had been learned to date and how that could be applied to the remaining period of Strategy implementation, particularly in terms of refining actions and re-evaluating what was possible to achieve. One of the interviewees discussed the interim review that was conducted for the MIS and how it was a useful way of identifying which parts of the strategy were not happening and where additional support was needed. The NSWG and NTRIS had originally both aimed to produce annual progress reports. Only one annual report was produced for the NSWG, with the others reported to be in draft form, and no annual reports were reported to have been produced for NTRIS.

Capacity was felt to be a challenge to conducting the ongoing review work needed on strategies. One of the interviewees also noted that the prevailing attitude on the strategies tended to be about moving forward and progressing, rather than reflecting: *“It’s more of a case of all right don’t worry about looking backwards just keep going forwards.”*

*(Interviewee, NSWG, MIS and NTRIS)*

Two of the interviewees who worked on NTRIS had asked the civil society organisations and departments for feedback, and it was noted that the civil society organisations had put a lot of work and effort into providing that feedback.

Civil society respondents suggested that a learning session for stakeholders would be useful before the next strategies are developed. An in-person (or online) session was preferred to providing written evaluation submissions.

## Conclusion

This chapter discussed the processes used to implement the Migrant Integration Strategy, the National Strategy for Women and Girls, and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy as they relate to the 12 main implementation approaches identified as representing good practice. Processes were described based on the desk review of strategy documentation and input from different stakeholder groups. Areas of good practice and areas for improvement were identified. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the processes used by government to implement the Migrant Integration Strategy, the National Strategy for Women and Girls, and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. The evaluation identified areas of good and promising practice, areas for possible improvement, as well as contextual factors which affected strategy implementation. Here, the main lessons emerging from the evaluation are synthesised, conclusions are drawn, and recommendations for future practice are made.

### A note on intersectionality

The literature reviewed as part of this study indicated that there are two primary reasons why equality policies fail to realise their ambitious visions. The first of these is a failure to apply sufficient attention and effort to the implementation phase of the policy cycle. The second is a failure to adequately address intersectionality in the development of public policy. The focus of the present study was on the former of these factors, i.e., on the processes used by government to implement the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS. Nonetheless, experts and stakeholders provided their perspectives on how intersectionality is or should be addressed in national equality strategies in Ireland. Findings on this topic were mixed. Some participants argued for maintaining separate equality strategies for different target groups, while the possibility of one overarching equality strategy within which intersectionalities could be addressed was also suggested.

There was a general sense that the MIS and NTRIS did not adequately address the diversity of experiences within the populations they targeted. For example, some stakeholders reported that despite the wide diversity in the migrant experience, migrants were largely represented as one homogeneous group in the MIS. Similarly, there was a view that the differences between Traveller and Roma experiences were not adequately addressed in the NTRIS.

Experts discussed challenges to adequately addressing intersectionality in public policy in Ireland, including a lack of available data to understand the challenges experienced by those with overlapping minority identities and a lack of awareness on the part of decision makers about the need to take an intersectional approach. The reviewed literature suggested that even policy makers who recognise the importance of intersectionality have struggled with realising its promise, given a lack of methodological clarity on how such a perspective can be effectively incorporated into various phases of the policy cycle (Hankivsky and Cormier, 2019). It was beyond the scope of the present study to find a solution to the complex issue of



incorporating intersectionality into policy, but the evaluation findings indicate that this is an area requiring further exploration and consideration.

**Recommendation 1:** Further research should be carried out to explore how an intersectional approach can be effectively incorporated into various phases of the policy cycle.

#### Importance of Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

There is clear consensus in the literature reviewed, among the experts consulted, and among governmental and civil society representatives who participated in this evaluation, that stakeholder engagement is of central importance when developing and delivering national equality strategies. Members of communities targeted by equality strategies are the best experts on the lived realities of structural inequalities and on the impact of discriminatory practices on a host of life outcomes, and this was acknowledged and expressed repeatedly and strongly by participants in this evaluation.

Stakeholders were consulted in the development phases of the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS, and the processes of consultation were generally well regarded by stakeholders. There was an overall sense that the consultations were thorough and that a broad cross-section of views were sought and heard. Representatives and members of the communities targeted by the strategies contributed to comprehensive analysis of the issues and inequalities faced by those groups and their role in prioritising main themes and objectives for the strategies was highly valued by the government representatives consulted in the evaluation. However, there was perceived by civil society groups to be a disconnect, at times, between the results of the consultations and the actual actions included in the final strategy texts. This “*dilution*” was acknowledged by those with responsibility for coordinating the strategies, who explained that it resulted from final negotiations about specific strategy actions with the departments and agencies who would be tasked with implementing them. Experts spoke of the importance of transparent criteria for what would be included and not included in an equality strategy and for clear communication to stakeholders on why decisions about inclusion and exclusion were made. Civil society groups reported feeling that this transparency was lacking in relation to the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS.

**Recommendation 2:** Stakeholder consultations for future national equality strategies should seek to build on the successes of the consultations for the NTRIS, MIS and NSWG, which were felt to be thorough and to capture a broad cross-section of views.

**Recommendation 3:** Efforts should be made to ensure that key learnings emerging from stakeholder consultations are accurately reflected in national equality strategy texts or, when they are not, there should be transparent communication with stakeholders regarding how

and why such decisions were made. Initial consultations are just one way in which stakeholders can and should be engaged in public policy. The literature suggests, and experts and stakeholders agree, that stakeholder engagement must not end at this point, but should be maintained throughout the lifetime of the strategies. The primary way that this was achieved for the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS was through the strategy committees on which civil society groups were represented, along with representatives of various government departments and agencies. The prevailing view among stakeholders was that there was a good level of representation of different sectors on these committees and that the right people were 'at the table'. This was seen as one of the main successes of the strategies. In relation to NTRIS, there was initially felt to be insufficient representation of Roma communities on the NTRIS Steering Group, but after being raised as an issue by civil society groups, this was then addressed. In relation to the MIS, there was felt to be greater scope to ensure that the heterogeneity of migrant experiences was reflected both in initial consultations and on committees. It was acknowledged by both government and non-governmental stakeholders that participation in the policy process was more challenging for migrant representative groups in general, and for smaller groups in particular, than for better-resourced and longer-established representative groups like the NCWI and Pavee Point. The literature, experts, and consulted stakeholders all spoke of the importance of supporting the capacity of seldom-heard and marginalised groups to participate fully in initiatives like national equality strategies. Identifying these voices is an important first step, and then resources should be allocated to ensure their inclusion.

While there was an overall sense of satisfaction with the level of *representation* on strategy committees, the actual role of civil society representatives on the committees was variously reported as unclear, limited and lacking in influence. Civil society representatives had no formal role in strategy implementation or monitoring, other than to receive monitoring updates. An expert warned that "*deadening reviews of traffic light documents*" were not a valuable use of stakeholders' time. The literature is clear, and experts agree, that it is important to move beyond merely consulting and informing non-governmental stakeholders towards more collaborative arrangements. It was acknowledged by various stakeholders and by experts consulted, however, that equality strategies are "*owned by government*".

**Recommendation 4:** Resources should be allocated to support the capacity of seldom heard and marginalised groups to participate fully in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national equality strategies.

**Recommendation 5:** Civil society representatives should have a more formal and influential role in strategy implementation and monitoring, moving towards more collaborative

arrangements or co-ownership of strategies.

#### Role of Committees in Whole-of-Government Strategies

The literatures on implementation generally and on implementing whole-of-government strategies specifically refer to multiple types of structures that may be important when implementing large-scale initiatives. These include decision-making or steering bodies, technical or advisory groups, and implementation teams. In relation to the development and implementation of the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS, there appears to be very strong reliance on the steering/strategy committees to serve multiple purposes. Given that these committees met quarterly and had large memberships, they may not be well suited to serve all of these functions. Given the strong theme emerging from the literature, experts and stakeholders that there needs to be very clear roles and responsibilities when implementing whole-of-government strategies, it may be beneficial to consider whether dedicated structures with explicitly-defined terms of reference may improve implementation processes in future.

**Recommendation 6:** It may be helpful to reconsider the reliance on steering/strategy committees to serve multiple purposes, as they may not be well-suited to fulfilling all necessary functions. Consideration should be given to the creation of dedicated structures with explicitly-defined terms of reference, such as decision-making or steering bodies, technical or advisory groups, and implementation teams.

#### Challenges in Incorporating Emerging Issues and Maintaining Dynamism

One stated role of civil society representatives on the committees was that they would alert those in charge of coordinating and implementing the strategies of emerging issues or challenges for the communities they represent, so that these could then be incorporated into the strategies or into the business of the committees. While one successful example of this was cited (identifying financial needs of particular migrant groups during the COVID-19 pandemic), the prevailing view was that while representative groups raised issues in committee meetings that they felt warranted attention, these were rarely acted upon. All three strategy texts claimed that the strategies were designed to be dynamic, and that it was anticipated that new actions would be identified and implemented throughout the strategy lifetimes. This did not materialise; rather, the strategies were felt to be “*static*” by stakeholders, and the ability for representatives of target groups to influence their trajectories was very limited.

This inability to incorporate new or emerging issues facing communities into the existing strategies was likely to be related to the very large number of actions that they already contained. Indeed, the lists of strategy actions were described as “*unwieldy*” by consulted

stakeholders. The reviewed literature suggests, and experts concur, that government strategic plans should focus on a limited number of key priority objectives and associated actions. While potentially politically difficult to say 'no' to some things identified as meriting action by stakeholder groups, long lists of vague actions make for an unfocused strategy that is very difficult to implement.

**Recommendation 7:** Ensure that each equality strategy is dynamic, i.e., that there are clear mechanisms through which emerging issues or challenges can be responded to throughout the strategy cycle.

**Recommendation 8:** Large, unfocused strategies are difficult to implement. Future strategic plans should include a limited number of key priority objectives and associated actions.

#### Challenges relating to capacity and commitment

Interviewees from the teams coordinating the strategies and consulted experts identified that a major challenge of whole-of-government working is to ensure that various departments and agencies across the whole of government actually deliver on the actions assigned to them in strategies. Experts spoke of the need to ensure buy-in and commitment from the departments and agencies assigned responsibility for implementing actions. However, representatives from those departments and agencies spoke about "*strategy fatigue*" and highlighted how they are committed to delivering multiple actions not only across multiple national equality strategies, but also myriad other whole-of-government initiatives. Reducing the overall number of actions in a given equality strategy will reduce the number of actions that any individual department or agency is responsible for implementing. This is likely to help with commitment and buy-in and ensuring focus and accountability in implementation.

In addition to ensuring capacity to properly develop, coordinate and implement national equality strategies from the perspective of staff time and the availability of adequate resources, there may be a need to focus on the development of staff expertise to work in the area of equality policy. Some evaluation participants reported their experience of some civil servants working in the area of equality having underdeveloped understandings of equality and related concepts. Aiming for diversity among the teams responsible for planning, coordinating and implementing equality strategies was also highlighted, including the need to ensure an EDI lens is applied to both hiring and leadership practices. Full implementation of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty was recommended by experts and stakeholders.

**Recommendation 9:** 'Strategy fatigue' should be combatted by reducing the number of actions that any individual department or agency is responsible for implementing. This is

likely to help with commitment and buy-in and ensuring focus and accountability in implementation.

**Recommendation 10:** Concerted efforts should be made to ensure the availability of adequate financial resources and staff time to properly develop, coordinate, and implement national equality strategies.

**Recommendation 11:** Diversity among the teams responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing equality strategies should be aimed for, and an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) lens should be applied to leadership practices.

#### Issues with Indicator Sets for Progress Assessment

A major theme emerging from the interviews, qualitative surveys, and reviewed committee meeting minutes, was the unsatisfactory identification, development and use of indicators of progress. In the absence of such indicators, it was acknowledged to be impossible to assess the extent to which the strategies have been implemented. Indicators sets were not identified or developed before strategies were launched. Instead, strategy committees were tasked with advising on or developing (depending on the strategy) indicator sets after objectives and actions had been determined and published. Attempting to identify appropriate indicators retrospectively was acknowledged to be a lengthy, involved and challenging process by those involved in the MIS and the NSWG committees, with unsatisfactory outcomes in both cases. While this was framed by interviewees and survey respondents as “*the indicator issue*”, we argue that it is inextricably linked to the processes of objective setting and action planning. Limiting the number of objectives and actions in a strategy to a clear and focused set of priorities will make the identification and/or development of appropriate indicators a much more straightforward process. We echo the recommendation of the OECD (2018) that for every objective included in a strategy, 3-5 outcome or impact indicators should be identified and that for every action, at least one output indicator should be identified. Again, the ability to do this efficiently and well depends heavily on the nature of the objectives and actions, to which indicators should be directly tied. Experts were clear that strategy actions should be clear, specific and measurable. However, many of the actions included in the MIS, NSWG and NTRIS were vaguely worded, and it was not immediately clear what tasks or activities would be necessary to achieve them (or how their progress could be measured). Rectifying this by only including clear and specific actions should make the identification of indicators straightforward. If no indicator of progress (with a baseline and target value) can be identified for an action, and if it is not possible to develop one (e.g., through the collection of new data), then it is advised that that action not be included in the strategy text.

Developing indicator sets in parallel with action planning is strongly recommended when developing successor or future national equality strategies.

**Recommendation 12:** Indicator sets should be identified or developed before equality strategies are launched, rather than retrospectively.

**Recommendation 13:** For every objective included in a national equality strategy, 3-5 outcome or impact indicators should be selected; for every action, one output indicator should be identified. If no indicator of progress (with a baseline and target value) can be identified for an action, and if it is not possible to develop one, then that action should not be included in the strategy text.

#### Importance of planning for implementation

As with indicators, it is important that an implementation plan be produced in parallel with any future equality strategy development. It is recommended that each lead department or agency<sup>7</sup> be tasked with preparing an implementation plan for the action(s) assigned to them, using a common template, which could then feed into a master implementation plan. Each implementation plan should include the action text, a breakdown of the specific tasks necessary to complete the action (with associated timelines), identification of who is responsible for each of these tasks, as well as who has overall responsibility for the action. The plan should also outline the inputs necessary (e.g., euro amounts; numbers of working days) to deliver the action and could also include risk assessment information. Limiting the number of objectives and actions in a strategy should mean that this type of implementation planning should be feasible for every action in a strategic plan. It was noted by several stakeholders that the actions included in the strategy texts were typically not costed in advance. It is recommended that actions in future strategies be costed so that the feasibility of actions can be assessed before they are committed to. Experts also recommended estimating the potential benefits of actions as well as costs and also mentioned the importance of modelling the cost of inaction, where possible.

**Recommendation 14:** An implementation plan should be created in parallel with any future equality strategy development. This plan should be based on input from all departments and agencies tasked with implementing strategy actions and feedback on these implementation plans should be sought from civil society representatives.

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<sup>7</sup> The strategy texts identified the department or agencies responsible for actions. It is recommended that, in future, multiple departments or agencies are not assigned responsibility for any individual action. Where it is unavoidable that multiple entities are involved in implementing an action, one lead entity should be identified.

### Need to maintain a focus on implementation

Various stakeholders praised the commitment, knowledge and leadership of the teams coordinating each of the strategies in the DCEDIY. The challenges involved in leading and coordinating groups of diverse stakeholders were acknowledged, and the DCEDIY teams were felt to have managed these in an impressive manner. Greater administrative support for those coordinating the committees is recommended to allow for greater focus and attention on issues of these teams on issues relating to actual implementation of actions. Working closely with line departments on implementation is an important function of the central coordinating department (OECD, 2018a). This attention may include bilateral communication with departments and agencies in cases where implementation of actions may have stalled for various reasons. There were questions raised by stakeholders about the extent to which follow-up action was taken when actions were designated as 'amber', 'red' or 'black' in traffic light reviews.

**Recommendation 15:** Greater administrative support should be provided to teams coordinating the strategies in the DCEDIY to allow for greater focus and attention on issues related to actual implementation of strategy actions.

**Recommendation 16:** Outside of the committee meeting structure, the strategy coordination teams should engage in bilateral communication and troubleshooting with departments and agencies in cases where implementation of actions have stalled. An update should then be given to the wider committee membership.

### Impact of disruptions on strategy implementation

While the coordination of the committees by the DCEDIY teams was deemed to be effective, the restructuring of government departments in 2020 was reported by multiple stakeholders as causing considerable disruption to the implementation of strategies. One reported consequence of the restructuring of government departments was the perception that it led to a depletion in the resources available for strategy implementation. It was a common perception that strategies were better resourced at the outset, but that the availability of resources waned over time. While representatives of departments and agencies provided mixed responses regarding whether they had the resources and capacity to deliver the actions assigned to them, there was consensus that there was not an adequate whole-of-strategy budget to attend to implementation issues. It was noted by experts and stakeholders that whole-of-government strategies need to be underpinned by whole-of-government mechanisms and structures, especially whole-of-government budgets.

However, the main source of disruption attributed to government department restructuring was the associated staff changes that resulted in the loss of institutional memory and of rich



insights into and knowledge of the strategies. When invited to participate in this evaluation, several strategy committee members contacted the evaluation team directly to indicate that they had become involved too recently to be able to provide meaningful input. Government department representatives who had become involved in strategy coordination or implementation at a later stage but who did agree to participate, described difficulties in “*getting up to speed*” on the strategies. They also described how it was not possible to piece together the trajectories of the strategies from meeting minutes or traffic light monitoring documents.

While department restructuring and other reasons for staff movement are beyond the control of those with responsibility for strategy coordination, several suggestions can be made for how the associated disruption could be mitigated in future. These include better recording of the various stages of strategy development and implementation, including information on decisions taken and reflections on what went well, what challenges were experienced, and how these were handled. Such a repository of knowledge would be useful when there are personnel changes on strategy committees, which are unavoidable, but also to ensure that the learning from one strategy’s development and implementation is incorporated into similar initiatives in the future.

**Recommendation 17:** A comprehensive repository of knowledge on the various stages of strategy development and implementation should be created, including decisions taken and reflections on what went well, what challenges were experienced, and how these were handled. In the context of high turnover of equality strategy committee members, this repository could minimise the disruption of losing institutional memory.

#### Appropriateness of the monitoring system

In relation to the incorporation of learning from strategy implementation, the extent to which monitoring information was used to inform adaptive decision making throughout the lifetimes of the strategies was something stakeholders felt was underutilised. There were mixed views on how effective the traffic light monitoring systems employed by all three strategy committees were. Many felt that the system was superficial, while others felt it was an efficient system given the very large numbers of actions to be monitored. If fewer actions were to be included in future strategies, as recommended here, it should be possible to move beyond the monitoring “*snapshot*” offered by the traffic light system, towards fuller narrative accounts of progress that allow for strategic input and troubleshooting, drawing on the valuable expertise on strategy committees that may have been underutilised in the past.



**Recommendation 18:** Consideration should be given to moving beyond the monitoring “snapshot” offered by the traffic light system towards fuller narrative accounts of progress that allow for strategic input and troubleshooting by stakeholders.

**Recommendation 19:** There should be greater use of monitoring information to inform adaptive decision making throughout the lifetimes of the strategies.

#### Learning from evaluation

In addition to monitoring, evaluation is an important source of information for learning and accountability in public policy. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth committed to a comprehensive independent evaluation of the processes used to implement the Migrant Integration Strategy, National Strategy for Women and Girls, and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.

Using an implementation framework was central to the approach taken to this evaluation of the processes of implementing national equality strategies. The framework served as a guide to assessing the various components of the implementation processes of the MIS, NSWG and NTIS. The framework helped to identify areas of strength and weakness in the implementation process and provided recommendations for improving the process. By adapting a set of implementation frameworks and toolkits into a bespoke framework, the evaluation was able to establish good and promising practices in implementing national equality strategies. This bespoke framework allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the implementation process, as it was tailored specifically to the context of the evaluation. Furthermore, using an implementation framework provided a structured approach to the evaluation, which helped to ensure that all relevant factors were considered. The framework helped to ensure that the evaluation was comprehensive, and that the evaluation criteria were clearly defined. This allowed for a more rigorous evaluation process, which resulted in more meaningful and actionable recommendations.

The framework was developed following a review of the relevant literature and also incorporated the views of experts. It is hoped that the learning from the evaluation can be used to build upon the areas of good practice identified when future equality strategies are developed, implemented and evaluated. Effective implementation is essential to realise the promise of equality policy, which is the shared goal of all stakeholders. The evidence-informed and expert-validated framework of implementation approaches and activities presented in this report should offer a useful stepping-off point towards the realisation of that goal.

**Recommendation 20:** Action should be taken to operationalise the evidence-informed and expert-validated framework of implementation approaches and activities developed as part of this evaluation. Doing so should improve the implementation of future national equality strategies, helping to realise the promise of equality policy.

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## Appendix 1: List of expert panel members

Name	Role/Affiliation
Adaku Okafor	Inclusion and Diversity Specialist. Founder/Director - PhoenixRize People Development Solutions
Dr Catherine Day	Former Secretary General of the European Commission and Chair of the Irish Citizen’s Assembly on Gender Equality
Dermot McCarthy	Former Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach
Dr Helen Johnston	Senior Policy Analyst, National Economic and Social Council
Dr Iris Elliott	Head of Policy and Research, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
Olwen Dawe	Independent Equality, Policy, and Strategy Consultant
Patrick Bergin	National Forensic Mental Health Service at Health Service Executive
Prof Paul Cairney	Professor of Politics and Public Policy in the Division of History, Heritage, and Politics at the University of Stirling
Rachel Mullen	Co-Founder. The Values Lab
Susan Fraser	Humanitarian Unit, Development Cooperation Division (DCD), Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
Tony O’Donovan	Child Welfare Advisor. Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
Yvonne Furey	Head of Service Delivery. Department of Justice.



## Appendix 2: Lists of strategy documents reviewed

### The Migrant Integration Strategy

The Migrant Integration Strategy: A Blueprint for the Future  
MIS Monitoring and Coordination Committee ToR and Membership (2017-2018)  
The Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020: Progress Report to Government Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration 2019  
Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2021: Final Report (Working Draft 22.06.2022)  
MIS Monitoring and Coordination Committee ToR and Membership (2017-2018)  
MIS Monitoring and Coordination Committee Membership (2019-2021)  
MIS Monitoring and Coordination Committee meeting minutes 27<sup>th</sup> June 2017  
MIS Monitoring and Coordination Committee meeting minutes 4<sup>th</sup> October 2017  
MIS Monitoring and Coordination Committee meeting minutes 31<sup>st</sup> January 2018  
MIS Monitoring and Coordination Committee meeting minutes 17<sup>th</sup> May 2018  
MIS Monitoring and Coordination Committee meeting minutes 20<sup>th</sup> February 2019  
MIS Monitoring and Coordination Committee meeting minutes 19<sup>th</sup> June 2019  
MIS Monitoring and Coordination Committee meeting minutes 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020  
MIS Monitoring and Coordination Committee meeting minutes 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021  
MIS Monitoring and Coordination Committee meeting minutes 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021

### National Strategy for Women and Girls

Towards a new National Women's Strategy 2017-2020: Outcomes of the Public Consultation Meeting notes December 2016-January 2017  
National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020: creating a better society for all  
Progress report 2018-2020 (final draft)  
Progress report 2021-2022 (draft in progress)  
Strategy Committee Working document on Key Indicators at the Strategy level, and potential action-level indicators (Jan 2019).  
NSWG Traffic Light Status Report October 2021, Supplementary Notes  
Traffic light progress reports for each Strategy Committee meeting  
Strategy Committee meeting minutes 13<sup>th</sup> July 2017  
Strategy Committee meeting minutes 26<sup>th</sup> September 2017  
Strategy Committee meeting minutes 25<sup>th</sup> January 2018  
Strategy Committee meeting minutes 13<sup>th</sup> June 2018  
Strategy Committee meeting minutes 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018  
Strategy Committee meeting minutes 5<sup>th</sup> February 2019  
Strategy Committee meeting minutes 11<sup>th</sup> June 2019  
Strategy Committee meeting minutes 7<sup>th</sup> November 2019  
Strategy Committee meeting minutes 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020  
Strategy Committee meeting minutes 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020  
Strategy Committee meeting minutes 15<sup>th</sup> April 2021

## National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy

Public Consultation Document for Phase One, Mid-2015.

National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017

2017 Annual Report

Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies

In Ireland: Assessing progress in key policy areas of the strategy October 2018

National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy Mid-term Review 2021

Consultation with NTRIS Committee members on the shape of the successor strategy

Traffic Light Progress Reports

NTRIS Steering Group meeting minutes 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2017

NTRIS Steering Group meeting minutes 18<sup>th</sup> October 2017

NTRIS Steering Group meeting minutes 16<sup>th</sup> January 2019

NTRIS Steering Group meeting minutes 10<sup>th</sup> April 2019

NTRIS Steering Group meeting minutes 16<sup>th</sup> October 2019

NTRIS Steering Group meeting minutes 12<sup>th</sup> November 2020

NTRIS Steering Group meeting minutes 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021

NTRIS Steering Group meeting minutes 28<sup>th</sup> June 2021

NTRIS Steering Group meeting minutes 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2021

NTRIS Steering Group meeting minutes 30<sup>th</sup> March 2022