

Equality Commission response to the proposed Delivery Plan for Programme for Government Indicator 27 (% engaging in arts / cultural activities in the past year)

In January 2016, the Commission set out a number of priorities¹ for delivery via the work of government over the 2016-21 mandate. In our July 2016 response to the Programme for Government Framework consultation, we had sought an additional measure / indicator on increasing the participation of under-represented Section 75 groups in public life. We further recommended that the existing measure should be extended or supplemented to ensure that participation in leisure / sporting activities is also considered. Additionally, we recommended that all indicators are tracked across all Section 75 categories.

We have also recommended that the Programme for Government include actions to: increase the participation of women in political / public life and decision-making; and, promote the participation of underrepresented Section 75 groups in public life including people with disabilities; lesbian, gay and bisexual people; older people and minority ethnic groups.

The following considers the delivery plan content (version downloaded on 25 November 2016) against the key inequalities and policy priorities highlighted by the Commission in January 2016.

We hope that this information, in tandem with our response to the consultation on the draft PfG, will be of assistance in the further development of the delivery plan.

1. Increase the participation of women in political / public life and decision-making, including peace-building.

- a. We are disappointed that there is no particular focus in the draft PfG on the participation of women in political/public life and decision making, including peacebuilding. In addition, we note that there is no reference to, or recognition of, the fact that the Northern Ireland Executive has already agreed targets for the appointment of women to public bodies². We recommend that this is addressed in a revised delivery plan.
- b. We would also highlight that ensuring women's effective participation at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life is a specific element of the UN Sustainable Development Goals³, which the Executive has indicated that the outcomes and indicators of the PfG will support.

Supporting information⁴

- c. Action is required to increase the participation of women in political and public life, the judiciary and economic decision making; and promote the participation of women in peace building.

¹ ECNI (2016), Equality Priorities: [Programme for Government and Budget Recommendations](#)

² See *CPANI (2016) Annual Report 2015/16* at p8.

³ See UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contained in [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), 2015. In particular, see Goal 5 on "gender equality", which includes the need to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life".

⁴ ECNI (2016) [Gender policy priorities and recommendations – summary](#)

- d. Women remain under-represented in all spheres of political life; at Westminster, in the Assembly and in local government; for example, while 66% of MEPs are women, only 11% of MPs, 28% of MLAs and 25% of councillors are women⁵.
- e. Women are also under-represented in terms of public appointments; with 40% of public appointments being held by women⁶. Further, women remain under-represented in the judiciary⁷ and in economic decision making⁸. We note that in March 2016 the Northern Ireland Executive agreed targets for the appointment of women to public bodies⁹ and we await the outcome of the proposed actions designed to deliver the target outcomes. We recommend that the delivery plan includes actions to address and progress these issues.
- f. An *Inquiry* (NIWEP, 2014) found that women face barriers to participation in peace building and post conflict reconstruction, as well as in other areas of decision making¹⁰. Barriers include the lack of affordable, accessible and appropriate childcare, the heavily male-dominated political institutions, and pressures that ensured their voices were silenced in local communities¹¹. Again, we recommend that the delivery plan includes actions to address these issues.

2. Promote the participation of underrepresented Section 75 groups in public life including people with disabilities; Trans people; lesbian, gay and bisexual people; older people and minority ethnic groups.

- g. We consider that there is further potential for the Indicator 27 delivery plan to draw together and set out actions more aligned to supporting a range of commitments across the PfG. We also recommend that there should be a more comprehensive treatment of *participation* - to include public life activities and positions.
- h. For instance, we welcome the fact that the delivery plan for Indicators 26, 31 and 35 highlights the beneficial impact of widening social and cultural participation on respect, reconciliation and shared space, including the “*increased involvement and visibility of minority groups in public life and decision making*”¹². It is, however, unclear how indicator 27 delivery plan actions contribute to this wider PfG outcome e.g. we do not see actions designed to increase the visibility of minority groups in public life and decision making.

⁵ NISRA (2015) [Women in Northern Ireland](#), Department for the Economy and updated to reflect NI Assembly elections in May 2016

⁶ Figures as at 31 August 2015. This represents an increase from 32% in 2000. However, across the 115 public bodies in Northern Ireland, only 19 have women chairs and seven have women vice chairs. NISRA (2015) [Women in Northern Ireland](#), Department for the Economy.

⁷ Women made up only 25.4% of the total permanent and deputy judiciary as at August 2015, [OFMDFM Gender Equality Statistics 2015](#). This figure does not take account of the recent appointment of 2 female High Court Judges in November 2015.

⁸ A study (RaISe 2015) of the boards of the top 100 private companies in Northern Ireland has indicated that only 15.4% of board members are women. RaISe (2015) [Women on Boards of the top 100 companies in Northern Ireland](#).

⁹ In particular, that by 2017/18 there should gender equality for appointments made in-year; and by end- year 2020/21 there should be gender equality for all appointees in post, reflected both in board membership and at chair level. As cited in CPANI (2016) [Annual Report 2015/16](#) p8.

¹⁰ See NIWEP (2014) [An Inquiry into the position of women in Northern Ireland since the Peace Agreement, summary report](#)

¹¹ Ibid

¹² At paragraph 17 thereof

- i. We note that the draft PfG does not expressly include an *indicator* on increasing the participation of specific under-represented Section 75 groups in public life. We recommend that the delivery plan includes actions to address associated issues. We however welcome that the delivery plan for Indicator 42 (disability indicator) sets out a range of actions to improve the participation of people with disabilities in public and community life. We note that they include setting up a regional disability forum to monitor implementation of the delivery plan; development of a disability sport action plan; working with the Commissioner for Public Appointments to increase the number of people with disabilities in public appointments; improving opportunities to participate in community life; improving outdoor recreation opportunities; and seeking to ensure the actions associated with the *Active Ageing Strategy* reflect the needs of people with disabilities.
- j. In contrast to these range of actions, we consider that the actions associated with the proposed indicator 27, and indicators 26, 31 and 35, do not appear to show a clear commitment to advancing participation in public /political life for the range of Section 75 categories (unlike indicator 42 with potential benefits for those with disability, and potentially older people due to the linkage between them). We recommend the inclusion of delivery plan actions to address these points.

Supporting information

- k. The Commission has made a number of recommendations for implementation by the Executive and others to increase the participation in public life of a range of Section 75 groups. These include:
- Gender¹³ – to increase the participation of women in public life and on boards, including through the development of a cross-departmental strategy to implement the 2014 recommendations of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland.
 - Gender identity¹⁴ – to increase the participation and visibility of Trans people in public life, for example, by promoting Trans role models and tackling the high level of prejudicial attitudes towards Trans people.
 - Age¹⁵ – to put in place effective measures to secure active participation of younger and older age groups in all areas of public life and address identified barriers.
 - Age¹⁶ – to take steps to encourage younger people to apply for public appointments; and to explore and address any institutional barriers to their appointment.
 - Sexual orientation¹⁷ – to increase the participation of LGB people in public life and the visibility of LGB people in society.
 - Disability¹⁸ – to ensure accessible information and outreach to encourage participation; to remove access barriers; to provide appropriate support services; and to provide training and capacity building opportunities.
 - Ethnicity¹⁹ - to take appropriate action to support integration and foster community cohesion through both the revised Racial Equality Strategy and United Community strategies. We also recommend that the Executive undertakes a range of initiatives

¹³ ECNI website – www.equalityni.org/Gender

¹⁴ ECNI website – www.equalityni.org/Gender

¹⁵ ECNI website – www.equalityni.org/Age

¹⁶ ECNI website – www.equalityni.org/Age

¹⁷ ECNI website – www.equalityni.org/sexualorientation

¹⁸ ECNI website – www.equalityni.org/disability

¹⁹ ECNI website – www.equalityni.org/race

aimed at encouraging migrants, asylum seekers and refugees to take an active role in political and public life.

- I. We recommend the inclusion of delivery plan actions to address these points.

3. Scope of the delivery plan – range of participation

- k. Although we note that the proposed indicator 27 (engagement in arts and cultural activities) was not widened to include sport as we had recommended, we welcome the fact that the delivery plan for this indicator includes a focus on increasing participation in sport.
 - I. We further note that the delivery plan indicates that participation in sport will be measured at *programme* not population level; and that there are proposed actions to promote the participation of disabled people and women in sport and promote cross-community youth sport (via TBUC). We further welcome proposed actions designed to improve cultural engagement amongst groups with lower levels of engagement.
- m. We recognise that the delivery plans in relation to disability and respect/ reconciliation/ sharing include actions for some groups, but not more widely across the range of Section 75 groups. We recommend action to address these gaps.

Supporting information

- n. Diversity in public life with greater participation of people from all types of backgrounds including those protected by the equality laws enhances the policy-making process. It provides for greater accountability along with having more representative groups of people influencing and shaping the decisions that affect their daily lives.
- o. It is also vital for people's sense of status and belonging as well as helping to counteract negative attitudes and behaviours that different groups might experience. For example, the Commission's last equality awareness survey²⁰ highlights that older and younger people, disabled people, women, members of lesbian, gay and bisexual, Trans and ethnic minority communities all experience varying levels of negative attitudes.
- p. Participating in public life can also provide opportunities for individuals to make a valuable and recognised contribution to Northern Ireland society. The public profile involved can lead to people from specific groups acting as positive role models for others thereby encouraging a wider diversity of people to participate in political, public and civic life.

4. We recommend that all PfG measures are tracked for the impact across Section 75 categories, and that gaps in equality data are addressed

- p. While the Continuous Household Survey, the main data collection tool for this indicator, provides data across Section 75 groups, it does not collect data for those aged under 16. We welcome the recognition of the limitations of the Continuous Household Survey as a measure, and that qualitative assessment will be incorporated into the indicator.

²⁰ ECNI (2012) Do you Mean Me? Discrimination: Attitudes and Experience in Northern Ireland, ECNI, Belfast

However, we would welcome detail on how measurement will be made more robust across the Section 75 categories.

- q. We welcome the recognition (at paragraph 5.7) that ‘more analysis and research will be required over the lifetime of the delivery plan to provide the Department with a better understanding of how young people interpret and participate in cultural activity.’

Supporting information

- r. A recurring theme when considering participation in public life is the lack of data for a number of Section 75 categories. In 2007²¹, the Commission provided monitoring guidance to public authorities on the data collection process and its application to the policy context.
- s. Our research shows that where data exists there remains persistent and considerable under-representation of many groups in public, political and civic life. This leads to a further marginalisation of such groups and a range of services that do not give expression to the experiences of people in those groups.
- t. Data issues relevant to participation in public life for the specific Section 75 categories include: -
- a complete lack of data for marital status, dependent status and sexual orientation;
 - Specific data gaps for gender identity, political opinion, and religion;
 - Limited disaggregated data on multiple identities;
 - Lack of disaggregated data collected on minority ethnic groups beyond the classification of ‘minority ethnic’ resulting in the experiences of refugees and those seeking asylum not being captured. Furthermore, and the lack of disaggregation of the ‘white’ category by nationality thereby excluding the experiences of Eastern European migrants and other minority ethnic group such as Irish Travellers being determined;
 - Similarly, data currently collected on persons with disabilities is not disaggregated beyond the classification of ‘disability’. There is little data concerning the experiences of those with different disabilities for example, physical, mental or learning disabilities.
- u. We recommend that the delivery plans sets out actions to address these issues.

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²¹ ECNI (2007) *Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities*.