

What is an Equality Impact Assessment?

An equality impact assessment (EIA) is a tool for identifying the potential impact of an organisation's policies, services and functions on its clients and staff. It can help staff provide and deliver excellent services to clients by making sure that these reflect the needs of the community. By carrying out EIAs, an organisation may also ensure that the services that it provides fulfil the requirements of anti-discrimination and equalities legislation.

What is the purpose of an EIA?

EIAs offer an opportunity for staff and teams to think carefully about the impact of their work on local people and other members of staff. They can then take action that will promote equality for all. On the whole, EIAs should make sure that equality is placed at the centre of policy development and review, as well as service delivery.

The equality impact assessment process focuses on:

- initial screening
- scoping and defining
- information gathering
- making a judgement
- action planning
- publication and review.

Equality Impact Assessments can achieve the following:

- increased participation with customers and therefore more transparency in relation to policy and service development
- changes to the culture of decision making
- a more proactive approach to the promotion of equality, at the heart of policy.

EIAs in brief

How are they carried out?

The EIA process is one that includes developing or reviewing:

- policy
- strategy
- procedure
- function
- project
- reviews
- services
- organisational change.

At the end of the process there will be a summary report published to let people know the outcome of the assessment.

When are they carried out?

The Race Equality Scheme, Gender Equality Scheme and the Disability Equality Duty are all statutory requirements that set out the timetable for conducting Equality Impact Assessments for all existing functions, policies and services of the public sector. This timetable sets out when the Impact Assessment will need to be conducted. However, in line with the statutory requirement, statutory bodies must conduct impact assessments as soon as a relevant new policy, function or service is considered. It should be an integral part of policy development.

For those third sector organisations with a Service Level agreement (SLA) this may also be a requirement. For other third sector organisations, it may be a matter of best practice.

Who carries them out?

Ownership and responsibility for an Impact Assessment lies at service level. Service managers and frontline staff are important in the assessment process. They will be involved in implementing actions and changes that the assessment identifies as necessary. It doesn't have to be an equalities officer who carries out the EIA. When considering the equalities implications it is necessary to involve others who may offer challenge to views or some evidence of impact.

Why do we carry them out?

The EIA process is not just a legal requirement, under a number of acts including the Race Relations [Amendment] Act 2000. It actually helps to improve policies, strategies, procedures, functions, projects, reviews and organisational change for the whole community and not just minority groups.

Who are the target equality groups?

EIAs can be used to focus on specific equality strands. This can help promote equality of opportunity for a particular group. For instance, certain sections of the community may be known to experience more disadvantage than others. They may be adversely affected by a policy or service or omitted from the benefits of a policy or service. This needs to be carefully considered in the context of the EIA process.

There are a range of different equalities target groups. The EIA focuses on these groups to try to find out whether or not they are benefiting from a strategy, policy, service, project or function. These groups stem from the existing legislation in the United Kingdom that covers discrimination. The groups and target areas include:

- age
- sexuality
- faith or belief
- race
- ethnicity
- disability
- gender.

The groups are not homogeneous and people within these groups have different and individual needs. Many will be members of several of the targeted groups. Their experience of unlawful discrimination can involve a variety of factors.