



NORTHERN IRELAND
HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION

Strategic Plan 2022 - 2025

Foreword

I am pleased, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, to introduce this strategic plan for the period 2022-2025. This plan sets out our strategic objectives and our priorities for the next three years. It includes our commitments and how we will achieve them. This plan has been produced following extensive consultation with stakeholders, whose challenge and support have proved invaluable. I want to take this opportunity to thank each and every person who has given their time and insight so generously; the work of the Commission would be ineffective without them. This plan also reflects the healthy debate between staff and Commissioners. I extend my sincere thanks to them for their welcome and support.

This plan is informed by the statutory mandate, set out in our founding legislation, the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and by the UN Paris Principles which set the international standards for national human rights institutions.

The Commission has been tested operationally and financially. Resources are limited – more than ever. We have had to make difficult choices over the short term but we remain optimistic and ambitious. We mean to redouble our efforts to deliver real change despite these challenges. The Commission’s primary role is to make sure government and public authorities protect, respect and fulfil the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland. We realise that not every person has always enjoyed their rights equally. We intend to redress that, by identifying those who have been underrepresented and better meet their needs. Ultimately, we want to see a culture of human rights which delivers practical outcomes, which are enjoyed by everyone regardless of their immutable characteristics or status.

We want to empower people so that they understand what their human rights are and what they can do if their rights are violated or abused.

The Commission has, since the last plan, been mandated with additional powers and duties. Article 2(1) of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland is meant to prevent a diminution of the rights protected in the relevant chapter of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement as a result of United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union. Moreover, if certain European Union equality laws are changed after 1 January 2021 to improve the protection of human rights, then Northern Ireland must keep pace with those changes. The Commission is charged with oversight of those commitments. We do that alongside the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, and through the Joint Committee of representatives of the Human Rights Commissions of Northern Ireland and Ireland. The Commission is also designated, with the Equality Commission, under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons as the independent mechanism tasked with promoting, protecting and monitoring implementation of the Convention in Northern Ireland. We have assumed those additional duties while facing a reduction in resources. Despite that, we intend to discharge these obligations to their fullest and hold the UK government to account.

We hope this plan can go some way to realising our vision: a society with human rights values and standards at its heart to achieve equality, peace and justice.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'A. Kilpatrick'.

Alyson Kilpatrick
Chief Commissioner

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Strategic Plan 2022-2025

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (the Commission) plans to influence a society where human rights are protected in practice, including for those who are vulnerable or marginalised. Our work will reach across Northern Ireland and to those who need it most, when they need it. We will achieve our objectives by the most efficient use of public resources and in close collaboration with partners and stakeholders. We will mark our progress by the real impact we make to the community and to individuals.

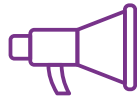
Our Vision

A society with human rights values and standards at its heart to achieve equality, peace and justice.

Our Mission

To protect and promote the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland.

Our Principles



Independence

We value and protect our independence; we act professionally and with integrity; and we make all our decisions based on objective evidence.



Participation

We empower people to participate to the fullest extent possible in decisions that affect their human rights.



Effectiveness

We will advocate for, and work to ensure that human rights protection is built into all law and practice; so that it is guaranteed for everyone and meaningful remedies are available.



Inclusion

We will oppose any form of discrimination or prejudice. Any group of people who face discrimination will be supported.



Partnership

We will work to achieve the greatest impact through partnership with the community and other stakeholders.

Our Strategic Objectives for 2022-2025

1

To keep under review law and practice and advise government for the benefit of everyone across Northern Ireland.

2

To ensure that rights protection is not diminished as a result of the United Kingdom having left the European Union; and, where required, ensure that Northern Ireland keeps pace with changes in European Union equality laws.

3

To build a society in which human rights are better understood, protected and valued, making a positive impact upon the delivery of services.

4

To work in partnership with other human rights and equality bodies to maximise human rights protection.

5

To be a learning organisation, improving our skills to achieve the greatest impact.

Our Priorities

We have identified a number of themes that require closer attention. In the course of achieving our strategic objectives we will pay particular attention to the following:

Impact of poverty on quality of living

This will include, in particular:

- (i) Housing and homelessness
- (ii) Health and social provision

Victims' Rights

This will include, in particular:

- (i) Victims of domestic and sexual violence
- (ii) Proposals for dealing with the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict

Access to Justice

This will include, in particular:

- (i) Rule of law
- (ii) Discrimination and inequality

How We Will Achieve Our Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 1

To keep under review law and practice and advise government for the benefit of everyone across Northern Ireland.

- (i) We will monitor and report on law and practice that impacts upon the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland. This will include the production of an Annual Statement and engagement with the United Nations and Council of Europe treaty examination processes and the United Nations Human Rights Council.
- (ii) We will advise the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Executive of legislative and other measures which ought to be taken to protect human rights.
- (iii) We will advise the Northern Ireland Assembly on whether legislative Bills are compatible with human rights, including when advice is requested following a valid Petition of Concern.
- (iv) We will advise the Westminster Parliament on whether legislative Bills affecting Northern Ireland are compatible with human rights and engage with relevant United Kingdom government departments.
- (v) We will advise public authorities by responding to consultations and policy reviews when the Commission can add value and when considered necessary or expedient to do so.
- (vi) We will undertake, contract or provide financial or other assistance for research; and, conduct investigations that the Commission considers necessary or expedient.

How We Will Achieve Our Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 2

To ensure that rights protection is not diminished as a result of the United Kingdom having left the European Union; and, where required, ensure that Northern Ireland keeps pace with changes in European Union equality laws.

- (i) We will monitor and report on law and practice impacting upon the objective by, for example, Annual Statements with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.
- (ii) We will advise the Secretary of State and Northern Ireland Executive of legislative and other measures which ought to be taken to ensure the objective is met, upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate.
- (iii) We will advise the Northern Ireland Assembly on whether legislative Bills are compatible with this objective upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate.
- (iv) We will promote understanding and awareness of this objective; and for this purpose, the Commission may undertake, contract or provide financial or other assistance for research and educational activities.
- (v) We will bring any appropriate matters of relevance to the attention of the Specialised Committee on issues related to the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland of the European Union Withdrawal Agreement.
- (vi) We will consider using our legal powers to initiate judicial review proceedings in respect of an alleged breach (or potential future breach) where the Commission considers rights protection diminished as a result of the United Kingdom having left the European Union and where Northern Ireland fails to keep pace with changes in European Union equality laws; or intervening in legal proceedings, whether for judicial review or otherwise, in so far as they relate to an alleged breach (or potential future breach).

How We Will Achieve Our Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 3

To build a society in which human rights are better understood, protected and valued, making a positive impact upon the delivery of services.

- (i) We will support individuals seeking legal assistance from the Commission and this may include initiating or intervening in proceedings involving law or practice relating to the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland.
- (ii) We will promote understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights in Northern Ireland; and for this purpose, may undertake, commission or provide financial or other assistance for educational activities.
- (iii) We will develop a strategy focused on direct engagement with the community to support the Commission's strategic priorities and their implementation in wider society. This will include partnerships such as the Northern Ireland Business & Human Rights Forum and the Northern Ireland Sport and Human Rights Forum.
- (iv) We will engage directly with young people in schools with a particular focus on promoting understanding of our strategic priorities and empowering them as right-holders.

How We Will Achieve Our Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 4

To work in partnership with other human rights and equality bodies to ensure the maximisation of human rights protection.

- (i) We will develop and implement a programme of work with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission focused on issues on the island of Ireland. This will be delivered through the joint committee of the two Commissions created in accordance with the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and will be in addition to our work under strategic objective 2.
- (ii) We will work in partnership with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to deliver the mandate of the designated Independent Mechanism under Article 33 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This work will also include collaboration with the Scottish Human Rights Commission and the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Great Britain on issues that affect the protection and promotion of the rights of disabled people in Northern Ireland.
- (iii) We will engage with the other National Human Rights Institutions in the United Kingdom on issues of common interest that align with the Commission's priorities and affect the protection and promotion of human rights in Northern Ireland.
- (iv) We will cooperate with the UN and any other organisations in the United Nations system, the regional institutions and the National Human Rights Institutions of other countries that align with the Commission's priorities and those affecting the protection and promotion of human rights in Northern Ireland. This will include, in particular, engagement with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions and the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions.

How We Will Achieve Our Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 5

To be a learning organisation, improving our skills to achieve the greatest impact.

- (i) We will advocate for the Commission's effectiveness as a National Human Rights Institution and seek support from the UK government to successfully complete the United Nations re-accreditation process and retain A status compliance with the Paris Principles.
- (ii) We will maximise continuous professional development by encouraging and facilitating ongoing learning opportunities for each staff member and Commissioner.
- (iii) We will review the Commission's response to the Covid-19 pandemic to learn lessons and improve our future performance.



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