



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

Strategic Plan

2019-2022

Foreword

This is the Commission's strategic plan for 2019-2022. The plan was produced after considering an external survey on awareness of the Commission and the public's views of priorities, conducting stakeholder meetings in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry, consultation with the public on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and through our website alongside extensive discussions with and between staff and Commissioners. I would like to personally thank all the organisations and individuals who gave up their time to provide us with their feedback.

The strategic plan builds on important work undertaken both locally and internationally. It also recognised recent developments including the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union following the referendum in June 2016, significant attacks on human rights and international institutions, and the continued development of digital communications and the challenges it poses for freedom of speech and privacy rights. Whether playing a formal role as part of joint mechanisms to protect human rights under the EU draft withdrawal agreement or not we will seek to ensure that human rights protections are developed and not diluted after the UK leaves the European Union.

Closer to home, the political uncertainty created by the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly continues to impact on both our work and wider human rights issues. We are falling behind both the rest of the United Kingdom and Ireland on a number of key rights and the danger of Northern Ireland becoming 'a place apart' when it comes to entitlement to rights is in nobody's interest.

Northern Ireland remains an unequal society with both considerable wealth and poverty. The value of a human rights analysis was illustrated recently through the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty Philip Alston's report on poverty in the UK. Human rights remains a contested space in Northern Ireland both publicly and politically. The Commission believes that effectively dealing with the past comprehensively is one route to a more peaceful and prosperous future. The Commission's role is to illustrate in practical terms the value and importance that international and domestic human rights standards bring to the

lives of everyone in Northern Ireland. It is ensuring that rights are real and practical not theoretical and illusory. With that in mind, the Commission intends to engage in the debate around protecting human rights in a digital age where technological advances often move quicker than oversight, accountability and legal protections. This is a global issue, nonetheless, it is important that the Commission raises awareness locally. Continuing to build a culture of rights in Northern Ireland is a key part of securing a brighter future for both us and the next generation. Our strategic priorities have been chosen with this in mind.

Our Vision

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

Our Mission

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

Our Principles

The principles that underpin our work are:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Participation - | people should be involved in decisions affecting their human rights. |
| Accountability - | There should be effective monitoring of how human rights are implemented and meaningful remedies available when things go wrong. |
| Non-discrimination and Equality - | all forms of discrimination must be prohibited, prevented and eliminated. People facing the biggest barriers to realising their rights should be prioritised. |
| Empowerment - | everyone should understand and be able to fully exercise their human rights. |
| Legality - | policies and services should be grounded in enforceable domestic and international human rights laws. |
| Partnership - | in developing a culture of human rights the Commission will work with other organisations across a wide spectrum of society. |

Our strategic priorities for 2019-2022 are:

- (a) Building a culture of rights
- (b) Protecting human rights as a consequence of leaving the European Union
- (c) Tackling Poverty, and promoting health and well-being
- (d) Meeting domestic and international human rights standards and good governance
- (e) Protecting human rights in a digital age

Who we are and how we work

Established under the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement we play a central role in upholding human rights standards and responsibilities. We are Northern Ireland's centre of excellence on human rights.

We work locally and internationally to hold government, public authorities and other organisations to account. We also work in partnership with these organisations and wider civil society to achieve our aims.

We will continue to build effective relationships through community engagement to understand the everyday issues affecting people's lives. We will further develop our communications through social media and other tools. We will seek to take strategic legal cases to advance human rights commensurate with our policies and resources.

We will also work assiduously to ensure we have a mandate in line with the United Nations principles that apply to fully recognising the legitimacy of National Human Rights Institutions including restoring the original intention to have powers to take legal cases in our own name.

How we operate

The Commission reports on its performance to the United Nations through the periodic re-accreditation process, to the Northern Ireland Office as our sponsor branch as well as to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We operate with six part time Commissioners and one Chief Commissioner who are appointed by the Secretary of State. The Commission has 14 staff. We currently have a budget of just over one million pounds.

Chief Commissioner: Les Allamby

Commissioners: Helen Ferguson
Helena Macormac
Paul Mageean
John McCallister
Eddie Rooney
Graham Shields

Chief Executive: Dr David Russell

Our Core Activities

As the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) in Northern Ireland, the Commission has a range of duties and responsibilities including contributing to the monitoring of international human rights treaties. The core aspects of our daily work are fundamental to fulfilling this role. This work is key to our compliance with the United Nations Paris Principles on the role of a National Human Rights Institution including being independent and pluralist.

Our statutory functions include:

- Advising the Westminster government, the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, and key agencies on legislation and compliance with human rights frameworks
- Promoting understanding and awareness of human rights through education, training and research
- Monitoring international human rights treaties and reporting to the United Nations and Council of Europe
- Providing legal assistance work including taking strategic legal cases
- Conducting investigations on systemic human rights issues
- Working in partnership with other national human rights institutions in the United Kingdom, the Equality Commission and in the Joint Committee with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

Each year, the Commission reviews progress by government and public authorities with human rights laws and standards through our Annual Statement published in December. The Annual Statement strongly informs our future work priorities. Our annual 'Human Rights Lecture' gives an opportunity to promote learning and discussion. The Annual Statement and lecture will continue throughout the life of this Strategic Plan. We will focus on the effect of the lack of a Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly and its impact on progressing human rights issues within our annual statements while this continues to apply.

Under the EU Draft Withdrawal Agreement the Commission, Equality Commission and the Joint Committee of the Commission and Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission will form dedicated mechanisms to monitor, supervise, advise, report on and legally enforce the UK's commitment to ensure no diminution from the relevant rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity section of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement alongside advising on the continuing development of these rights.

Our Strategic Priorities for 2019-2022

The strategic priorities for 2019-2022 are:

(a) Building a culture of rights

We will continue to promote the value of human rights through developing education materials including films and animations. We will work with government, public authorities, private sector and others on training and other initiatives to develop human rights based approaches to delivering services. We will continue to support and service the business and human rights forum and work with partners to promote human rights through sport. We will also:

Actions

Continuing with community engagements, support for civic society initiatives and other partnerships to promote human rights. We will also:

- deliver a series of initiatives and products through films, animations and visual arts, supported where appropriate with educational materials;
- develop and deliver and develop training and supporting materials in alliance with the Northern Ireland Civil Service, public and private authorities and others;

- undertake further work with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman to support a human rights based approach to complaints handling;
- embed human rights protections through, for example, work on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and preserving the Human Rights Act;
- support the Business and Human Rights Forum to develop a Northern Ireland Action Plan for Human Rights;
- work with the Department of Finance to implement human rights approaches to public procurement;
- work with the sporting organisations to promote human rights including developing a 'Charter on Human Rights and Sport'.

Outcomes/Impact

The Commission will be able to demonstrate human rights based approaches taken as a result of our work. The Commission will be able to demonstrate a wider public awareness of our work and its values.

(b) Protecting human rights as a consequence of leaving the European Union

The Commission will actively engage in minimizing the human rights impact of leaving the European Union whether through the role of a dedicated monitoring mechanism or otherwise.

This will include working in partnership with the Equality Commission (NI) and alongside the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) through the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement Joint Committee. To this end, we will:

Actions

- continue to work with IHREC in the joint committee and alongside the Equality Commission (NI) and others to ensure the strongest possible human rights protections in any final withdrawal agreement;
- deliver the role of monitoring, supervision, enforcement and development of rights under the final withdrawal agreement;
- prepare the organisation to operate as a dedicated monitoring mechanism from the end of December 2020 onwards.

Outcomes/Impact

The Commission will be able to demonstrate tangible achievement to protect human rights contained within the Equality, Safeguards and Rights section of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement through our work.

(c) Tackling Poverty, and promoting health and well-being

The Commission recognises that being in poverty impacts on educational outcomes, physical and mental health, access to housing and other measures of well-being. Destitution and poverty affects significant numbers of people both in and out of work in Northern Ireland. The Commission will continue to focus on economic and social rights recognising their importance to people's everyday lives in Northern Ireland. To this end, we will:

Actions

- undertake specific initiatives in an area of social and economic rights encompassing one or more areas, namely, the impact of working age poverty, housing need and homelessness and tackling the multiple disadvantages that

looked after children face;

- monitor and follow-up the recommendations of the Travellers Accommodation enquiry;
- commission a cumulative impact assessment on the effect of all tax and social security changes from 2010-2022 with a view to examining the need for further mitigations to changes to social security entitlements.

Outcomes

The Commission will be able to identify particular improvements to economic and social rights as a direct result of its work.

(d) Meeting domestic and international human rights standards and good governance

The Commission will continue to play a pro-active role in giving evidence to the UN Treaty monitoring bodies' periodic review of the United Kingdom government obligations to human rights standards that it has signed up to. We will also play a full part in both the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and European Network of National Human Rights Institutions. We will also seek to play a positive role in ensuring there is effective local accountability and oversight of human rights obligations. We will continue to ensure a human rights compliant based approach is taken to deliver the institutions contained in the Stormont House Agreement, alongside maintaining our active interest in outstanding legacy and other issues. We will continue to respond to Parliamentary committees in London and Belfast on the human rights issues arising from their work on legislation, policy and practice.

Actions

In particular, we will:

- respond and give evidence and analyse the UK submissions to UN Treaty monitoring body reports due between 2019 – 2022, for the following Conventions;
 - Convention against Torture
 - Universal Periodic Review
 - Convention on Civil and Political Rights
 - Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimination
 - Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
 - Convention on the Rights of the Child
- publish an Annual Statement on human rights and pursue any issues marked as 'red' with a view to ensuring human rights obligations are met;
- actively engage in ensuring human rights compliant institutions are implemented in line with the Stormont House Agreement and to focus on other outstanding legacy requirements;
- commission research, for example, on good governance and human rights embracing the current arrangements for devolved government;
- continue to work with the Equality Commission to promote the implementation of the concluding observations of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities through the Independent Monitoring Mechanism.

Outcomes

The Commission will be able to demonstrate specific improvements that we have contributed to through our work.

(e) Protecting human rights in a digital age

The Commission recognises the challenges posed through the development of social media including access to data and its use by governments, businesses and social media companies. The legal framework for regulating the use of data when dealing with security, counter terrorism and other issues through the Investigatory Powers Act is in its infancy and it is too early to tell the impact of the legislation in practice. Elsewhere social media and the lines between freedom of speech and hate crime, the impact of cyberbullying, the right to privacy on personal data remain live issues. Despite wide public debate, an understanding of the role of rights and the implications of technological developments remains largely unclear.

The Commission acknowledges the enormity of the issue and will undertake to explore a greater awareness and understanding of the ramifications of technological advances and what they mean for the rights of individuals.

Actions

In particular, we will:

- develop awareness raising initiatives covering the issues around competing rights engaged between freedom of speech and cyber bullying, intolerance, hate speech and crime;
- commission research on privacy and rights issues and their interplay with digital advances.

Outcomes

The Commission will be able to demonstrate its contribution to fostering greater awareness and engagement on the human rights issues created by advances in digital technology.

www.nihrc.org | info@nihrc.org | +44 (0)28 9024 3987
Temple Court, 39 North Street, Belfast, BT1NA

