

Northern Ireland 2026

Information from: Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

NHRIs' establishment, independence, effectiveness and resilience

International accreditation status and SCA recommendations

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) was last [re-accredited with A-status in October 2023](#).

The SCA recommended that the NIHRC continue its engagement with relevant national authorities, in line with their public commitment, to ensure an adequate and appropriate level of funding as well as long term financial sustainability to enable it to carry out the full breadth of its mandate in an efficient and effective manner.

Furthermore, the SCA reiterated its previous recommendation that the NIHRC advocate for appropriate modifications to applicable administrative procedures to ensure that its functional independence and financial autonomy are guaranteed.

The SCA recommended that the NHRI continue to advocate for pluralism, including minority representation, in its composition and staffing.

Finally, the SCA encouraged the NIHRC to continue to access all places of deprivation of liberty, including without prior notice. It encouraged the NIHRC to effectively monitor, investigate, and report on the human rights situation in places of deprivation of liberty in a timely manner, and to undertake systematic follow-up activities and advocate for the consideration and implementation of its findings and recommendations to ensure the protection of those detained.

Follow-up to recommendations on NHRIs and relevant developments

NHRI Follow-up on the SCA recommendations concerning their institution

The [UK Government Spending Review 2025-2029](#) provided a positive outcome on the matter of funding and goes some way toward addressing the matters

raised by the Sub-Committee on Accreditation in 2023. Additional funding of £3.5 million has been made available over the period of the Spending Review. This will improve finances and do so progressively by 2028, when the Commission's accreditation is due to be reviewed again.

The settlement will enhance both the ability to deliver statutory functions and adherence with the UN Paris Principles. However, at no point over the lifetime of the Spending Review will the Commission have reached a level considered sufficient to fund the staffing, infrastructure and institutional capacity required to fully perform its functions or discharge the responsibilities as envisaged. This conclusion is consistent with the findings and recommendations of the two independent [reviews](#) completed in [2022](#) and 2024.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission continues to work constructively toward a sustainable solution with the Northern Ireland Office (NI Office) with the aim of achieving full implementation of a minimum budget as set out in the Independent Reviews and to address the other remaining issue highlighted during the reaccreditation process. It acknowledges the significant progress made through the Spending Review, recognising the current context of public spending constraints and the ongoing need for those in receipt of public funds to demonstrate further efficiencies and effective savings, where possible.

Regulatory framework and mandates

The national regulatory framework applicable to the NIHRC has not changed since January 2025. Aside from the mandate of NHRI, the NIHRC carries out the mandates of CRPD national monitoring mechanism and monitors the implementation of Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework.

The NIHRC, alongside the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, pursuant to section 78A(1) and 79B(1) of the [Northern Ireland Act 1998](#), respectively, are required to monitor and report on the implementation of [Windsor Framework Article 2, formerly known as the Protocol on Ireland/NI, to the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement](#). Windsor Framework Article 2 requires the UK Government to ensure that no diminution of rights, safeguards and equality of opportunities contained in the relevant part of the [Belfast \(Good Friday\) Agreement 1998](#) occurs as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

Challenges in implementing the multiple mandates of the NHRI

The NIHRC's ability to deliver statutory functions and adherence with the UN Paris Principles has been impacted by its level of funding and financial autonomy. Progress is being made, however, recognising the current context of public spending constraints, ensuring adequate funding and long-term sustainability will be crucial going forward.

In the context of the NIHRC's role in overseeing the implementation of Windsor Framework Article 2 rights and equality protections post-Brexit, the Commission monitors EU law developments that may be relevant to Northern Ireland. As such, the NIHRC welcomes all opportunities for engagement with bodies such as ENNHRI, to maximise its awareness of upcoming EU laws of relevance to rights and equality protections. The Commission has faced challenges in implementing this oversight mandate on two fronts. Firstly, due to a lack of consideration of Windsor Framework Article 2 in Explanatory Memoranda/Notes or Human Rights Memoranda/ impact assessments accompanying relevant NI Executive, and UK Government Bills, and secondly, due to a limited response from the NI Executive to the majority of the recommendations in the Commission's last Annual Report on the Implementation of Windsor Framework Article 2. Both issues are further explored below.

NHRI structural challenges, threats and resilience

Structural challenges in the last year

In terms of structural challenges faced in 2025, the NIHRC cited insufficient or inadequate resources and structural challenges with financial autonomy, including in budget determination processes.

The concerns identified by the Sub-Committee on Accreditation continued to impact on the Commission's work over the last year, though the hope is that these will be addressed through the ongoing implementation of the independent review recommendations.

Lack of adequate follow up to NHRI recommendations

In the NIHRC's [Annual Statement 2025](#), there continues to be many recommendations identified as having little to no progress towards implementation. The Annual Statement uses a traffic light system to categorise the implementation status of recommendations under each area. Out of 111 monitored areas in 2025, the Commission identified 14 'red' issues where there was little to no progress made, with the remaining 97 issues identified as 'amber', meaning significant steps are still required to implement outstanding recommendations. There were no issues identified as 'green' in the Annual Statement 2025 for having been implemented in-year. The Commission does not have the power to compel follow up of recommendations in the Annual Statement or to lay the report before the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, due to ongoing concerns with the lack of adequate follow-up to Annual Statement recommendations, the Commission added an additional tag to clearly identify where there was no in-year progress at all towards implementation. In 2025, there were 9 areas identified as having no progress.

Under section 78A(3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Commission may require the UK Government via the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland or the NI Executive Office to reply in writing to recommendations contained in their annual report on the implementation of the Windsor Framework Article 2. In 2024, the Commission, jointly with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, published its [Annual Report on the implementation of Article 2 of the Windsor Framework 2023-2024](#). The Commissions were disappointed not to receive a formal response from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, or the NI Executive Office, within the reporting period (March 2025). In July 2025, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, wrote separately to the Commissions responding to their recommendations in the 2023-2024 Annual Report. In November 2025, the NI Executive Office issued a short response to the Commissions' 2023-2024 Annual Report, addressing a limited number of recommendations.

Threats in the last year

Online attacks or defamatory campaigns against the institution and its work

The NIHRC continues to operate within an environment that is increasingly hostile to human rights. Its involvement in areas such as immigration and Northern Ireland legacy interventions has attracted significant public reaction. Content shared on social media particularly posts featuring staff and the Chief Commissioner has generated some of the strongest and most concerning responses. In 2026, a decision was taken to remove the ability for users to comment on Facebook posts due to the nature of the comments and the associated level of risk. In 2025, an [advertising campaign](#) aimed at raising awareness of the importance of protecting human rights following Brexit had to be withdrawn from Facebook. This followed a surge of racist and hateful commentary in response to posts related to refugees and asylum seekers. The NIHRC's social media channels require ongoing and careful monitoring. Images of staff and the Chief Commissioner have been targeted by inappropriate and abusive commentary, including disturbing references to anatomy and the posting of unrelated and offensive imagery.

Abusive lawsuits or charges against the leadership or staff

In October 2025, [legal action](#) was commenced [against](#) the [NIHRC](#) in relation to comments made by the Chief Commissioner about the human rights compliance of the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery's process and procedures. A hearing to determine whether the case can progress is due to take place in September 2026.

Response to Threats seeking to undermine the independence and effectiveness of the NHRI

Internally, the NIHRC has a policy for Managing Unacceptable Behaviour from

Members of the Public, which sets out procedures for reporting incidents of verbal abuse, threatening behaviour or physical assault. This includes guidance for imposing proportionate restrictions, when to consider reporting incidents to the police service and when legal action may be appropriate. The NIHRC also provides pastoral support to any staff member or Commissioner who is the subject of abusive or threatening behaviours.

In terms of external protections for individuals within the NIHRC, the [Defamation Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#) protects against false statements that harm or tend to cause harm to that person's reputation directly.

NHRI's recommendations to national authorities and regional authorities

1. The Commission continues to recommend that the NI Office and HM Treasury implement all the Sub-Committee on Accreditation and independent review's recommendations, including providing adequate and secure resources with sufficient flexibility and stability to enable the Commission to consistently fulfil its statutory functions, in line with its role as an A-status institution under the UN Paris Principles.

Northern Ireland 2026

Information from: Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Human rights defenders and civil society space

Challenges for human rights defenders and restrictions to civil society space

Assessment of the situation of HRDs and their enabling environment

The NIHRC assesses the situation of HRD and their enabling environment as being restricted.

Control by paramilitary groups

Paramilitary groups continue to exist and exert coercive control over some communities in Northern Ireland. In 2025, the Independent Reporting Commission [reported](#): "This coercive control can take many forms, including intimidation, financial extortion, sexual exploitation, creating

communities where people are afraid to speak out, and stifling alternative voices and leadership". Paramilitary [flags](#), murals and [graffiti](#) are frequently [displayed](#) in public areas to intimidate and demarcate territory. In addition, there are often targeted, sectarian-motivated [attacks](#) on local businesses, homes and, on one occasion in 2025, a [nursery school](#).

Use of traditional local names and street signs

Despite commitments in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, the use of traditional local names and street signs in a minority language remains a contested issue across Northern Ireland. Examples of bilingual street and [road signs](#) being [defaced](#) and [vandalised](#) [continue](#) to be commonplace and often reported in the [local press](#). In 2025, loyalist paramilitary organisations [threatened](#) to burn Belfast council facilities following a Council decision relating to dual signage at facilities and bilingual logos on uniforms and vehicles. A judicial review was taken against a Minister for a [decision](#) to put up bilingual [signage](#) at Belfast's new Grand Central train station.

Hate motivated incidents and crimes

In 2024/2025, there were 3,297 recorded hate motivated incidents and 2,135 recorded hate crimes, an increase from 3,070 recorded hate motivated incidents and 1,956 hate motivated crimes in 2023/2024. In 2024/25, the number of racist hate crimes and incidents reached their highest levels since recording began in 2004/2005. Reports of 'organised' hate crimes in Northern Ireland, particularly racist hate crimes continued. This included a [period](#) of [sustained racially motivated disorder](#) in [Ballymena](#) in June 2025, where masked [groups](#) targeted the properties and businesses of minority ethnic people with petrol bombs and masonry. In July 2025, a [bonfire](#) in County Tyrone was set [alight](#) with a boat containing effigies of migrants on top of it, alongside a banner displaying the anti-immigration slogan, 'Stop the Boats'.

This series of high-profile [racist attacks](#) have left many migrant and minority ethnic [families](#) in Northern Ireland [fearful](#) of public spaces. Some families reported feeling too [frightened](#) to remain in Northern Ireland and the number of children missing school in the wake of these incidents increased due to safety concerns.

Threats or attacks on journalists

Between 2019 and 2025, there were over 70 incidents of threats or attacks on journalists and *"there have been no prosecutions related to threats to journalists from paramilitaries, which make up the majority of such threats"*. Consequently, [Amnesty International states](#) that *"Northern Ireland is the most [dangerous place](#) in the UK to work as a journalist"*.

In 2025, the [Law Society of Northern Ireland](#) established a [Solicitor Safety](#)

[Group](#) in response to incidents of harassment, threats, and intimidation directed at its members while carrying out their professional duties. Barristers and lawyers across the UK published a [joint statement](#) to reiterate concerns about the growing hostility, noting that “[b]arristers, solicitors and judges have been subjected to violence, death threats and rape threats. Some have faced threats to their family members”.

Structural challenges for CSOs and HRDs

Barriers in access to law/ policy making and meaningful public consultation

Civil society organisations also experience challenges and barriers in relation to public consultation processes. While public consultations are routinely conducted across all NI Executive Departments, there are ongoing issues regarding resource-intensive consultation processes where outcomes can be significantly delayed (potentially resulting in outdated information) and/or [final strategies](#) that do not adequately reflect stakeholder views (explanations typically cite resource constraints).

For example, in 2025, civil society groups [expressed](#) significant [disappointment](#) with the long-awaited draft [Anti-Poverty Strategy](#), which did not contain measurable targets, a commitment to resourcing or many actions identified as necessary by civil society organisations engaged throughout the process.

The NIHRC’s [Annual Statement 2025](#) highlights a number of strategies that have undergone significant consultation but remain outstanding (not exhaustive): the Gender Equality Strategy; the LGBTQI+ Strategy; the Traveller Child in Education Framework; and the Supporting Newcomer Pupils policy.

Lack of adequate funding for CSOs and HRDs

Civil society organisations in Northern Ireland are experiencing a severe funding crisis that threatens the sustainability of frontline services. In December 2025, the sector was notified of a [64% cut](#) to community-based support funding as the UK government transitions from the Shared Prosperity Fund to the Local Growth Fund. The [Northern Ireland Affairs Committee wrote](#) to the UK Government to [warn](#) that the cut will mean thousands of people missing out on employment support services and hundreds of job cuts in the voluntary and community sector. The Chair of the Committee further [warns](#) that the loss of these programmes and services “*will have knock on effects on health, employment and crime rates that could be felt far into the future*”.

The NIHRC is aware that the Home Office has confirmed it will [end grant funding](#) for organisations supporting EU citizens and their families engaging with the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) from 31 March 2026. In announcing the funding cut, the Home Office cited reduced application volumes, simplified processes for converting pre-settled to settled status and automated

extensions for pre-settled status.

However, the Independent Monitoring Authority (IMA) which monitors the implementation by UK public bodies of EU citizens' rights has verified that Northern Ireland has a significantly higher level of unsuccessful EUSS applications than other UK nations and that the majority of these refusals have been for Romanians and Bulgarians. Roma living in Northern Ireland come primarily from these two countries.

The Commission is aware of [concerns](#) within civil society organisations, that are already significantly under resourced to provide specialist immigration advice, that Roma communities in Northern Ireland are disproportionately affected by the funding cut as they require significant support in engaging with the scheme and are vulnerable to exploitation of rogue street advisors. Support groups have highlighted that the detrimental consequences for Roma who apply late and/or who have their application refused, and specifically for the most vulnerable (i.e. women and those with diminished mental capacity or mental health difficulties within the Roma communities), is further complicated in Northern Ireland versus the rest of the UK because of the open land border with Ireland.

Laws and/or policies which negatively impact on right to association or assembly and to protest

In 2025, [research](#) conducted by Rights & Security International found “excessive ‘security’-focused treatment of the right to protest” in Northern Ireland, which may have a “discouraging or ‘chilling’ effect”. It found instances where people avoided staging peaceful protests that they would have had a human right to hold. The report concludes that “the policing of protests in Northern Ireland systematically breaches the European Convention on Human Rights, particularly the Article 11 right to freedom of assembly”. It contends that “these breaches are so serious and systemic that would-be protesters could and should challenge them in court”.

Threats to CSOs and HRDs

Verbal attacks on CSOs and/or HRDs

As noted above, non-state actors continue to intimidate, threaten and exert coercive control over communities in Northern Ireland. Between 2019 and 2025, there were over 70 incidents of [threats or attacks on journalists](#) and “there have been no prosecutions related to threats to journalists from paramilitaries, which make up the majority of such threats”.

Surveillance by state actors

In terms of state surveillance, an independent review (the [McCullough Review](#))

into the use of surveillance by the Police Service of Northern Ireland on journalists, lawyers, non-governmental organisations, NI Policing Board and Police Ombudsman of Northern Ireland found *“various concerns in relation to some specific authorisations as well as some inconsistencies in standards of processing, record-keeping and management of confidential or privileged information unexpectedly obtained from Covert Human Intelligence Sources”*. However, the independent review *“found no basis for concerns that the Police Service of Northern Ireland surveillance of journalists or lawyers is widespread or systemic”*.

In relation to the Police Service of Northern Ireland’s monitoring of journalists Barry McCaffery and Trevor Birney’s, the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, Brian Leveson, raised [concerns](#) that his inspectors were not being notified of covert activity conducted against journalists in Northern Ireland, particularly activity that had the intention of identifying a journalistic source. The Chief Constable confirmed that *“no reason or record can be located to explain why this was not highlighted to the Investigatory Powers Commissioner as intended”*. The Chief Constable also provided assurances that the Police Service of Northern Ireland’s central record of surveillance authorisations had *“been enhanced to prevent this occurring again”*.

In 2025, the MI5 [admitted](#) unlawfully obtaining communications data from journalist Vincent Kearney’s phone on two occasions in 2006 and 2009. Vincent Kearney is pursuing legal inquiries to *“establish as much detail as possible about the nature of the two instances of unlawful intrusion, and whether MI5 was responsible for anymore”*. The [McCullough Review](#) did not cover the covert surveillance activities of the MI5 in Northern Ireland. Human rights organisations Amnesty International and the Committee on Administration of Justice have written to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to ask him to establish a public inquiry into covert surveillance in Northern Ireland by MI5 and the establishment of the Covert Commissioner for Law Enforcement for Northern Ireland.

Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation

In 2024, the [Department of Finance](#) reviewed the operation of the [Defamation \(Northern Ireland\) Act 2022](#), however no amendments were recommended as there had been too few defamation cases taken under the Act for its effects to be properly assessed. During the review, the [NIHRC raised concerns](#) that the Act does not include a specific provision to address Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation. The Department of Finance intends to further monitor defamation law in Northern Ireland, including whether specific measures for Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation may be required.

National frameworks to support and protect human

rights defenders and civil society organisations

Initiatives, frameworks, or policies for the protection of HRDs

There are no specific laws on protecting the rights of human rights defenders. However, the UK, including Northern Ireland, has a human rights framework in place on which human rights defenders are able to rely. This includes the Human Rights Act 1998, the UK ratified UN and CoE treaties, Windsor Framework Article 2 and several piecemeal pieces of legislation that protect equality and employment rights.

The UK has a [National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security](#). This mentions specific measures for Northern Ireland for the first time in 2023. The Employment Rights (NI) Order 1996 and the Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 also include protections for ‘whistleblowers’ in an employment setting.

Legal aid is available in Northern Ireland. The Commission is not best placed to provide information on emergency response systems or safe houses.

Gaps in the protection of HRDs nationally

Lack of hate crime legislation

There is the need for specific legislation to deal with hate crime in Northern Ireland, but this has been delayed. Due to the lack of a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly between February 2022 and February 2024 and a general lack of resources, there is a reduced legislative programme from that first intended for the Northern Ireland Executive’s 2022-2027 mandate. Consequently, in 2025, the Department of Justice no longer intends to bring forward a long-awaited and stand-alone Hate Crime Bill for Northern Ireland. Instead, in 2026, the Department of Justice is proposing to introduce to the Northern Ireland Assembly a statutory aggravation model for hate crime offences in a Sentencing Bill and provisions to address the impact of hate crime on victims through a Victims Bill. The NIHRC recommends that the Department of Justice promptly develops, implements and monitors robust hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland, guided by the [Marrinan Review’s recommendations](#) and the [Department of Justice’s consultations](#). The Department of Justice and the Executive Office should ensure that any new legislation complements existing and future strategies on race and community relations. It should also address online hate crimes and hate crimes committed by organised groups.

Blasphemy and blasphemous libel remain common law offences

The common law offences of blasphemy and blasphemous libel remain on the statute books in Northern Ireland and, whilst a prosecution has not occurred since 1855, an individual may be [subject](#) in law to prosecution for committing

either of these offences. In 2021, the Minister of Justice, Naomi Long MLA, [stated](#) that regarding these offences she was "*committed to freedom of and from religion and am fully supportive of removing such archaic and unused offences from the law*". In 2022, the Minister of Justice [reiterated](#) her support for introducing legislation to that effect. In 2025, there has been no legislative progress on removal of blasphemy as an offence.

Paramilitarism and its impact on communities

As outlined above, there is an ongoing need to ensure that work to tackle paramilitarism and address the impact has on communities is given high priority. In 2025/2026, the [Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime](#) continues to receive £16 million in ring-fenced funding. However, the Executive Programme is due to end in March 2027. The NIHRC recommends that the Northern Ireland Executive and UK Government allocate sufficient and sustained long-term resources to the programme to end paramilitarism. Also, that consideration is routinely given to how the Northern Ireland Executive's broader work can contribute to tackling paramilitarism, where appropriate.

Budget constraints

The Northern Ireland Executive has been experiencing significant budget constraints, which is limiting the actions it is able to take and the funding it is able to provide to civil society organisations and others. The NIHRC recommends that the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Department for Communities take all appropriate measures to sustain resources in third sector organisations and safeguard the effective provision of support and advice on social security, employment, and housing to those who require it most. In addition, the NIHRC recommends that the NI Executive, alongside NI Departments, considers a formalised policy for future public participation processes. This includes taking learning from Social Inclusion Strategies Co-Design processes and considering examples of best practice of other processes of effective participation. The principle of effective participation should be at the core of any such policy.

Activities of NHRIs to support civil society space and human rights defenders

NHRI initiatives in 2025 to promote civil society space and human rights defenders

The NIHRC regularly engages with human rights defenders and civil society organisations in Northern Ireland. This does not involve specific support, though any individual is able to seek human rights information through the [NIHRC's human rights information clinic](#). It may also be possible, subject to

an internal decision-making process, for the NIHRC to take strategic litigation or to undertake an investigation into a human rights issue raised with the NIHRC. Otherwise, the NIHRC utilises the information that it is provided from civic society organisations to inform its advice and positions for submission to national policy/legal consultation processes and international treaty examination processes.

NHRI actions to protect civil society space and human rights defenders

In terms of initiatives taken to **protect** civil society space and HRDs, the NIHRC cites monitoring, complaints handling, legal assistance and recommendations to national authorities.

The NIHRC reports on issues raised by civil society and human rights defenders in its human rights advice in a domestic, regional and international setting, this includes international human rights monitoring work. The NIHRC runs a human rights information clinic, which civil society and human rights defenders can engage with for information on complaints handling and the options available. The NIHRC has the powers to take strategic litigation and to undertake human rights related investigations, of its own motion. All of the NIHRC's advice involves developing recommendations and positions on the issues raised. The NIHRC is mandated to promote understanding and awareness of human rights. This includes through research and educational activities, this can involve providing capacity building to civil society and human rights defenders. The NIHRC can provide support to whistleblowers.

The NIHRC and ECNI [submission to the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee inquiry](#) on Strengthening Northern Ireland's Voice in the Context of the Windsor Framework, recommended that the UK Government and EU officials ensure ongoing timely and structured engagement with NI civil society including equality and human rights stakeholders, on matters including Windsor Framework Article 2. This engagement should include those working on rights and equality on a cross-border basis. The [Committee report](#) recommended, consistent with this, that *"the co-chairs of the Specialised Committee establish a formal programme of engagement with equality and human rights stakeholders, including the NIHRC and ECNI..."* (para 196). The [response](#) of the UK Government to the Committee's report, has advised of work in train "to enable more thorough discussion" (at 6) and indicated it was *"open to holding further engagement as necessary."*

The most important needs for the institution to advance the protection of HRDs nationally

The NIHRC's mandate and powers enable it to respond to protection needs raised by human rights defenders, both nationally and internationally. However, the NIHRC's ability to develop specific initiatives or programmes in

this area is impacted by its overall level of funding. The Commission would welcome the provision of resources to allow it to embark on engagement with civil society to build resilience and capacity to ensure they were better placed to respond to threats, including online threats. As noted above, progress is being made. However, recognising the current context of public spending constraints, ensuring adequate funding and long-term sustainability will be required to further develop the NIHRC's activities in this area.

NHRI's recommendations to national and regional authorities

1. [The NIHRC recommends](#) that the UK Government and the NI Department for Communities take all appropriate measures to sustain resources in third sector organisations and safeguard the effective provision of support and advice on social security, employment, and housing to those who require it most.
2. [The NIHRC recommends](#) that the NI Executive ensures that views expressed during the public consultation process are meaningfully considered and that the Anti-Poverty Strategy is amended, as is necessary and reasonable, to ensure that it is effective in practice and human rights compliant.
3. [The NIHRC recommends](#) that the NI Executive, alongside NI Departments, considers a formalised policy for future public participation processes. This includes taking learning from Social Inclusion Strategies Co-Design processes and considering examples of best practice of other processes of effective participation. The principle of effective participation should be at the core of any such policy.
4. The NIHRC continues to recommend that the Department of Finance works with the NI Executive and NI Assembly to introduce legislation to tackle Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation, in line with its obligations under international human rights law and align NI law, on a voluntary basis, with EU law which strengthen protections.
5. The NIHRC continues to recommend that the Department of Justice promptly develops, implements and monitors the necessary legislative change, including robust hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland and abolition of the common law offence of blasphemy and blasphemous libel.
6. The NIHRC continues to recommend that the Department of Justice ensures that there is effective, human rights compliant protection in Northern Ireland that promotes and protects lawyers' legal professional privilege and journalists' ability to report on issues of public importance. The Department of Justice and Police Service of Northern Ireland should ensure that journalists and lawyers have an effective remedy for the purposes of stopping and preventing intimidation or

reprisals for doing their job.

7. The NIHRC continues to recommend that the NI Executive and UK Government allocate sufficient and sustained long-term resources to the programme to end paramilitarism. Also, that consideration is routinely given to how the NI Executive's broader work can contribute to tackling paramilitarism, where appropriate.

Northern Ireland 2026

Information from: Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Democracy - checks and balances, disinformation, and other topics

Disinformation

Based on the NIHRC's human rights monitoring and reporting, the right to privacy is identified as being significantly impacted by the spread of disinformation.

Actions taken by the Institution to address Disinformation

In 2024 and 2025 there were a series of incidents involving racially motivated disorder and violence in Northern Ireland, which appeared to be facilitated online – either through the sharing of arrangements for protests or by fuelling tensions with the spread of racist stereotypes and misinformation. In June 2025, the Commission published a [briefing paper](#) to identify the relevant international human rights standards that should inform the response of public authorities to online misinformation and disinformation and its particular effect on racial and ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland. The briefing paper made a number of recommendations to the NI Executive and NI Assembly including the development of a multi-agency strategy that coordinates with initiatives across the UK and Ireland regarding online mis- and disinformation; and the development of initiatives that promote media literacy and encourage fact-checking online sources to build a higher resilience to mis- and disinformation.

In addition, the NIHRC invited Dr Orna Young, the co-founder of Northern Ireland's dedicated fact-checking service, FactCheckNI, on its 'Shared Goals' [podcast](#) in order to highlight the impact of misinformation and disinformation on human rights and society.

In 2025, there was evidence of paramilitarism being linked to racist or xenophobic incidents and crimes in Northern Ireland. The NIHRC highlighted

the issue in its [Annual Statement 2025](#) and recommended that the NI Executive and UK Government, working with the Police Service of Northern Ireland, take effective steps to address paramilitary links to racist, xenophobic and coercive control incidents and crimes in Northern Ireland. This includes investigating, prosecuting and punishing such incidents and crimes and ensuring an effective remedy for victims and survivors. It includes developing specific programmes aimed at challenging and neutralising racist, xenophobic and controlling views, perceptions, misinformation or disinformation, and building sustainable good relations. It should also involve the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and other relevant bodies, building enduring relationships and undertaking meaningful engagement with affected individuals and representative organisations.

Measures taken to follow-up on the recommendations and findings on countering disinformation issued by European actors

The NIHRC considers any human rights related recommendations that are specific to the UK, particularly Northern Ireland. In particular, the NIHRC utilises recommendations from the Council of Europe regarding its reports on the UK. This includes reports and recommendations from the Committee of Ministers, GRETA, Istanbul Convention experts, Framework Convention experts, COMEX, Lanzarote Convention experts and European Committee of Social Rights. However, these monitoring bodies have not made any recommendations in relation to countering disinformation in Northern Ireland.

NHRI's recommendations to national and regional authorities

1. The NIHRC recommends that the NI Executive should coordinate the establishment and ongoing actions of a multi-agency strategy to address online misinformation and disinformation. This should include the meaningful consultation of relevant stakeholders and investment in initiatives that promote media literacy and encourage fact-checking online sources to build a higher resilience to misinformation and disinformation.
2. The NIHRC recommends that the NI Executive and UK Government, working with the Police Service of Northern Ireland, take effective steps to address paramilitary links to racist, xenophobic and coercive control incidents and crimes in Northern Ireland. This includes investigating, prosecuting and punishing such incidents and crimes and ensuring an effective remedy for victims and survivors. It includes developing specific programmes aimed at challenging and neutralising racist, xenophobic and controlling views, perceptions, misinformation or disinformation, and building sustainable good relations. It should also

involve the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and other relevant bodies, building enduring relationships and undertaking meaningful engagement with affected individuals and representative organisations.

Law-making processes

Significant challenges affecting law-making processes

Lack of funding

As set out above, a key challenge to the law-making process in Northern Ireland is the instability and systemic underfunding of the civil society sector, which severely undermines its capacity to facilitate the participation of affected groups. In 2026, the community and voluntary sector are facing a 64% reduction in support from the UK Government – this could create a critical barrier to meaningful engagement, as organisations may experience a loss of personnel and may be forced to prioritise emergency frontline services over intensive consultation processes. It is foreseeable that this will particularly impact the ability of smaller organisations to consistently engage in public consultations, including those representing women and LGBTQI+ individuals.

Concerns regarding procedural integrity of consultation processes

The NIHRC already has concerns regarding the procedural integrity of consultation processes which could result in ‘consultation fatigue’ among civil society. In many instances, final policy decisions appear to remain wedded to original departmental positions despite robust feedback, potentially leading to disillusionment and withdrawal of civic participation.

Limited use of impact assessments, including human rights impact assessments

Finally, there is a lack of systematic and rigorous impact assessments. While a [Human Rights Impact Assessment \(HRIA\) proforma](#) is available via the Executive Office, its application across departments is inconsistent and non-statutory. Although Section 19 of the Human Rights Act requires Statements of Compatibility, the accompanying analysis – both at the NI Executive and Westminster levels – frequently lacks the depth required to ensure high-quality, rights-compliant legislation.

In relation to the proper scrutiny of the UK Government’s binding commitment to rights and equality in Northern Ireland after EU withdrawal, the NIHRC continues to highlight the issue of a lack of Windsor Framework Article 2 impact assessments accompanying relevant NI Assembly and UK Government legislation. There is limited evidence that early consideration of the rights and equality protections under Windsor Framework Article 2 has been systematically embedded in policy and legislative development and processes

in Northern Ireland or at a UK level.

There have been a number of UK Government and NI Executive legislative proposals and consultations which the NIHRC considers should have been accompanied by Windsor Framework Article 2 impact assessments but were not. For example, at a Northern Ireland Executive level, these include the Department for the Economy [consultation on the Employment Rights Bill \(2024\)](#), and the Department for Communities [consultation on the Gender Pay Gap Information Regulations \(2025\)](#). While both consultations are directly relevant to the Windsor Framework Article 2 dynamic alignment obligations in relation to the EU Pay Transparency Directive and the two EU Directives on binding standards for equality bodies, neither engaged with these measures. At a UK Government level, at the time of writing, the [Explanatory Notes](#) published alongside the new [NI Troubles Bill](#) (addressed elsewhere in this report) include no reference to Windsor Framework Article 2. Paragraph 25 deals with ‘Legal Background’, making reference to a legal challenge to the [NI Troubles \(Legacy and Reconciliation \) Act 2023](#), which was heard [before the UK Supreme Court](#) in October 2025. A decision is awaited. The findings and issues cited in the ‘legal Background’ relate exclusively to the ECHR, despite the fact that compliance with Windsor Framework Article 2 is central to many of the grounds of appeal put by the UK Government to the Supreme Court in that case. The approach contrasts with the requirement under the latest revised ‘[Guide to Making Legislation](#),’ published by the Cabinet Office, which states that the Explanatory Notes to primary legislation “should also set out in [the legal background] section of the notes any obligations relating to Article 2 of the Windsor Framework”.

In November 2025, the Chair of the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee [wrote to the Minister of State for the Home Office](#) asking for confirmation that the UK Government makes a discrete analysis of Windsor Framework Article 2 in relation to new legislation, and asking, if so, ‘why is it not Government policy to publish this analysis so that it can be considered by Parliament and the public?’.

The NIHRC continues to recommend that the UK Government and NI Executive ensure that documents accompanying Bills and legislation (Explanatory Memoranda/Notes, Human Rights Memoranda/ impact assessments) set out detailed consideration of compliance with Windsor Framework Article 2 rights and equality protections. This should include reviewing all provisions of EU law engaged under Windsor Framework Article 2 relevant to the legislation or policy being assessed, including EU law which underpins relevant ECHR rights.

Lack of training and guidance on Windsor Framework Article 2

Related to this, the NIHRC remains concerned that comprehensive training and guidance on Windsor Framework Article 2 has not yet been rolled out across UK

Government and NI Executive departments.

As noted above, in February 2025, the Cabinet Office published its updated [guide to making legislation](#) which includes a reminder that the UK Government's obligations under Windsor Framework Article 2 must be considered when departments draft primary or secondary legislation that applies in Northern Ireland and advises that any questions about how best to consider Article 2 should be referred to the relevant team in the Northern Ireland Office (para 12.5). However, the guidance provides no further information as to those obligations or how they are to be considered. The NIHRC is concerned that this relies on an existing level of knowledge of Windsor Framework Article 2 among officials. Further detail would be required to ensure that officials are adequately informed to identify where legislation may engage Windsor Framework Article 2.

NHRIs actions or initiatives to address challenges identified in the context of law-making processes

Monitoring the legislative process and issuing recommendations

The NIHRC [responds](#) to as many high-level policy and legislative consultations as resources permit. This includes providing detailed written advice to the NI Executive, NI Assembly and UK Parliament, specifically flagging where there are concerns regarding the government's human rights analysis of its proposals. Through its publications, the NIHRC consistently recommends conducting human rights impact assessments as a matter of best practice. The NIHRC also facilitates direct engagement with government departments during the early stages of policy development, before proposals are drafted. However, this requires government departments to proactively seek the NIHRC's advice, and these requests are not consistent.

Training to public authorities

The NIHRC also delivers training to civil servants on the practical application of the Human Rights Act. This includes technical guidance on completing human rights impact assessments with the aim of embedding a culture of rights-based law-making within the civil service and ensuring that human rights considerations are integrated from the outset of the policy cycle.

Raising public awareness and addressing the relevant actors on the importance of the Windsor Framework Article 2

The NIHRC has continued to highlight the need to embed consideration of Windsor Framework Article 2 rights and equality protections at an early stage. Where appropriate the NIHRC has raised this issue in all relevant responses to UK Government and NI Executive legislative proposals and consultations. It has also engaged with UK parliamentary committees in respect of their oversight

role in the law-making process. It has done so at engagement events in Westminster in January 2025 to build awareness and knowledge of Windsor Framework rights and equality protections, and via written engagement on specific Bills. For example, in August 2025 the [NIHRC wrote to](#) the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee highlighting concerns regarding the Government's Crime and Policing Bill, and in particular the Commission's longstanding recommendation that Human Rights Memoranda / impact assessments on Bills and statutory instruments that may engage Windsor Framework Article 2 rights and equality protections, should set out detailed consideration of compliance. This led to an exchange of correspondence between the Committee Chair and the Home Office in [September](#), [October](#) and [November](#) 2025, the result of which was that the Government gave a more comprehensive analysis of its Windsor Framework Article 2 considerations, (in relation to that Bill) than it had ever previously published.

Measures taken nationally to follow-up on the findings or recommendations on strengthening law-making processes, including participation, by European actors

The NIHRC considers any human rights related recommendations that are specific to the UK, particularly Northern Ireland. In particular, the NIHRC utilises recommendations from the Council of Europe regarding its reports on the UK. This includes reports and recommendations from the Committee of Ministers, GRETA, Istanbul Convention experts, Framework Convention experts, COMEX, Lanzarote Convention experts and European Committee of Social Rights. These expand a broad range of issues that are highlighted within the NIHRC's 2025 Annual Statement and its responses to domestic consultation processes.

NHRI's recommendations to national and regional authorities

1. The NIHRC recommends that the UK Government and the NI Executive ensure that all legislative and policy proposals are subject to rigorous human rights impact assessments and extensive public consultation processes. The principle of effective participation should be at the core of every law/policy-making process to ensure that views are meaningfully considered and demonstrably influence policy outcomes. Where views cannot be reflected in final proposals, there should be open dialogue on the reasons for this and whether consideration has been given to any mitigating measures.
2. The NIHRC recommends that the UK Government and the NI Executive take all appropriate measures to sustain resources in third sector organisations, including through the replacement of short-term funding cycles with ring-fenced, multi-year funding to ensure stability and

predictability.

3. The NIHRC continues to recommend that the UK Government and NI Executive ensure that documents accompanying Bills and legislation (Explanatory Memoranda/Notes, Human Rights Memoranda/ impact assessments) set out detailed consideration of compliance with Windsor Framework Article 2 rights and equality protections.

Northern Ireland 2026

Information from: Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Other challenges to the rule of law and human rights

Structural human rights issues which reflect persistent challenges for the rule of law

Reform of the UK's Human rights framework

The human rights framework in the UK, including Northern Ireland, continues to go through a period of persistent challenge. In 2022, the previous UK Government introduced the [Bill of Rights Bill](#) to the UK Parliament, which faced significant criticism for proposing to repeal and replace the Human Rights Act 1998 and reduce the influence of the European Court of Human Rights within the UK. In 2023, the previous UK Government confirmed that it was not proceeding with the Bill of Rights Bill, instead seeking to reform the UK's human rights framework through a piecemeal approach, such as the [Illegal Migration Act 2023](#) and [the NI Troubles \(Legacy and Reconciliation\) Act 2023](#). The NIHRC responded to both Bills in [2022](#) and [2023](#).

In 2024, the current UK Government made a [commitment](#) to “uphold human rights and international law” and expressed that it “values international law because of the security it brings”. It further committed that the UK “will unequivocally remain a member of the ECHR”. In terms of the piecemeal approach of the previous UK Government to reforming the UK human rights framework, the current UK Government committed to “repeal and replace... [the NI Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023]”. In 2025, the NI Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 remained in place. However, the Act has been subject to several legal challenges in the [High Court in Northern Ireland](#) and the [Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland](#) which found violations of human rights in relation to provisions that were incompatible with the ECHR and provisions that breached Windsor Framework Article 2 protections. The

NIHRC [intervened](#) in both the High Court and the Court of Appeal case addressing both ECHR and Windsor Framework Article 2 concerns. The Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland confirmed that Windsor Framework Article 2 has direct effect and can be relied on in court. The Court also held that the High Court's disapplication of the offending provisions was the "correct remedy" for a breach of Windsor Framework Article 2, in accordance with Article 4 of the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement, as incorporated by section 7A of the EU Withdrawal Act 2018.

The NIHRC welcomed the provisions of the draft Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 (Remedial) Order 2025 which will amend the 2023 Act to remove the conditional immunity provisions. This removes the incompatibility with the EU Victims' Directive identified by the court and addressed the breach of Windsor Framework Article 2. However, the UK Government appealed the Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland's decision including on grounds relating to whether Windsor Framework Article 2 enjoys direct effect and whether disapplication of the offending provisions was the "correct remedy" for a breach of Windsor Framework Article 2. In October 2025, the UK Supreme Court considered the appeal and the NIHRC intervened in the case. The UK Supreme Court's ruling is awaited (see [NIHRC Annual Statement page 48-49](#)). In addition, the UK Government has introduced the NI Troubles Bill 2025 to repeal and replace the 2023 Act. The outcome is awaited.

In 2025, the UK Government introduced to the UK Parliament a proposal for a Remedial Order to amend section 9(3) of the 1998 Act to allow damages to be awarded to compensate a person for a judicial act that is incompatible with Article 8 of the ECHR. This is to address a finding by the ECtHR that section 9(3) of the 1998 Act currently violates Article 13 of the ECHR (right to an effective remedy). In October 2025, the Joint Committee on Human Rights considered the UK Government's proposals and concluded that, "It is not tenable to continue making piecemeal amendments to section 9(3) in response to the facts of individual cases. The remedial order should therefore be amended either to create principled exceptions to section 9(3), or to remove the provision in its entirety and make the necessary consequential changes."

By mid-2025, there was a notable shift in the UK Government's publicly stated positions on the ECHR and Human Rights Act 1998. For example, the Lord Chancellor, Shabana Mahmood MP, focused on the need to reform the ECHR when [speaking](#) to the CoE.

Asylum and immigration system and the ECHR

In late 2025, the UK Government introduced the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act for the purposes of "modernising the asylum and immigration system". At Bill stage, the NIHRC highlighted concerns regarding the compatibility of the now Act with Windsor Framework Article 2 protections for

victims of human trafficking and modern slavery, as well as the fact that many concerning provisions introduced by the previous UK Government in the [Illegal Migration Act](#) remain in place. In particular: section 12, which diverts certain powers to authorise detention from Judges to the Home Secretary; section 29, which prevents some people from accessing modern slavery protections; and, section 59, that renders asylum and human rights claims inadmissible if they are made from certain countries. In addition, the 2025 Act did not amend the [Nationality and Borders Act 2022](#), which set the foundation for the previous UK Government's approach to diminishing the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants who arrive to the UK by irregular means.

Following this, the UK Government delivered a joint [statement](#) to the Conference of Ministers of Justice of the CoE alongside 26 other States. It seeks to 'rebalance' ECHR Article 8 and limit the scope of ECHR Article 3 in immigration cases. The Committee of Ministers are invited to prepare a 'draft political declaration' on the ECHR and migration. This declaration is expected to be adopted at the next formal session of the Committee of Ministers in May 2026.

Pressure to leave the ECHR

There continues to be [pressure](#) from the Conservative Party and Reform UK for the UK to leave the ECHR completely. Several civil society organisations in Northern Ireland have raised concerns regarding the UK [leaving](#) the ECHR.

The incorporation of the ECHR into UK law, including direct access to the courts, is a key commitment of the UK Government under the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998, as appended to the British-Irish Agreement 1998. The UK's commitment to the ECHR is also pivotal to criminal justice provisions of the [UK EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement](#) which are explicitly conditional on the UK's continued adherence to the ECHR including domestic application.

The NIHRC has [highlighted](#) that the UK Government's commitment to the non-diminution of rights post-EU withdrawal contained in Windsor Framework Article 2 encompasses the full range of rights set out in the ECHR, to the extent that they are underpinned by EU law.

NHRI's recommendations to national and regional authorities

1. The Commission continues to recommend that the UK Government recognises the Human Rights Act 1998 as a constitutional statute and ensures any legislative developments adhere to and build on the Human Rights Act, as part of further progress in the promotion and protection of human rights.

2. The Commission continues to recommend that the UK Government, particularly the NI Office, actively engages with and expeditiously implements its commitment to legislate for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, as set out in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998.

Other persisting challenges or key developments for the rule of law in 2025

Challenges concerning the justice system

In 2025, the NIHRC continued to monitor a number of concerns in relation to the justice system in Northern Ireland. For example, the following issues are highlighted through the NIHRC [2025 Annual Statement](#) and relevant domestic policy responses:

- **Delays in court proceedings:** In 2024/2025, the average time taken for a criminal case to be dealt with across all courts in Northern Ireland was 189 days. There are particular concerns regarding sexual crimes, which on average take twice as long as other offences to reach the end of the criminal justice process in Northern Ireland. In 2024/2025, sexual offence cases in Northern Ireland took an average of 630 days to complete. In 2019, the [Gillen Review Report](#) into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland highlighted a number of factors contributing to these delays, including disclosure issues, under-funding and inefficient coordination between criminal justice agencies. In 2025, the Department of Justice consulted on several issues aiming to improve both the efficiency and speed of the criminal justice process. This includes sentence reduction for early guilty pleas and proposals for out-of-court disposals to divert more cases involving low-level offending away from the criminal courts. The outcomes of the consultations remained awaited.
- **Access to legal aid:** Between 2023 and 2025, there were several [strikes](#) by barristers and solicitors in Northern Ireland protesting against “wholly unreasonable delays” in receiving legal aid payments and disputes over legal aid fees, and remuneration for asylum and immigration cases. In 2025, a 16 per cent uplift in fees for criminal, civil and family legal aid was implemented. Most services have resumed, but barristers and solicitors in Northern Ireland continue to refuse to take on new cases concerning trials for murder, serious sexual offence, retrials and multi-complainant cases. In 2025, the Department of Justice also established a [programme of work](#) to consider and implement the findings of recent independent reviews in respect of civil and criminal legal aid. While welcoming the uplift in legal aid fees in Northern Ireland, representatives of the [Bar of Northern Ireland](#) said it should be viewed “as a floor for fees rather than the ceiling”. There were also

ongoing concerns regarding access to justice and legal services in rural areas of Northern Ireland due to cuts to courts' opening times, availability of custody suits and access to legal aid.

- **Closed material procedures:** The [Justice and Security Act 2013](#) makes provision for closed material procedures in civil cases allowing for the introduction of sensitive security evidence to proceedings involving the UK Government, without disclosure to the claimant. A recent [independent report](#) on the operation of these provisions noted the additional cost associated with the closed material proceedings system, resulting in increased litigation time and costs which is particularly significant in Northern Ireland where it is frequently applied to legacy cases.
- **Non-jury trials:** There is a presumption of trial by jury in all cases before the NI Crown Court. However, under the [Justice and Security \(NI\) Act 2007](#), non-jury trials can take place in exceptional circumstances. Following a statutory test, the Director of Public Prosecutions may decide a trial should take place without a jury where there is a risk that the administration of justice might be impaired if the trial were to be conducted under normal procedures. This legislation is temporary and must be renewed every two years by way of an order approved by the UK Parliament. The UK Government continue to consider the legislation necessary due to the threat from terrorism and the persistence of paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland. In 2024, 10 out of 1,500 NI Crown Court cases were conducted without a jury. In 2025, the Justice and Security (NI) Act 2007 was extended for an eighth time, enabling the use of non-jury trials in Northern Ireland until July 2027.
- **Access to justice:** It is well [documented](#) that women and marginalised gender groups are particularly affected to challenges to accessing the justice system in Northern Ireland. This focuses particularly on the lack of specialised support and services to assist victims and survivors throughout the criminal justice system. Also, a lack of specialised training for staff and legal professionals throughout the course of a victim or survivor's journey through the criminal justice system, to ensure specific needs are taken into account and that victims and survivors feel listened to and supported. In 2025, the NIHRC welcomed the continued use of Remote Evidence Centres; the [extension](#) of the Sexual Offences Legal Adviser Scheme to March 2027; and the [launch](#) of the Child Sexual Offences Legal Adviser Scheme, which is also due to run until March 2027.

Dynamic Alignment with EU Law Developments

The NIHRC remains concerned that there has been no indication from the NI Executive or the UK Government of the timeline for the transposition into NI law of amendments to equality directives as required under the UK Government's dynamic alignment obligations post-Brexit.

The UK Government commitment in Windsor Framework Article 2 and Article 13 includes an obligation to “keep pace” with any changes made to the six equality directives listed in Windsor Framework Annex 1 which improve the minimum levels of protection available, after the UK’s exit from the EU (1 January 2021). This keeping pace obligation includes monitoring and complying with relevant current and future CJEU case law across these different areas and different equality and non-discrimination grounds. The [EU Gender Equality \(Employment\) Directive](#) (Directive 2006/54/EC), which is listed in Annex 1, aims to implement the principle of equal treatment and equal opportunities in employment, including through working conditions and pay. In 2023, the EU legislated to strengthen the principle of equal pay between men and women through the EU [Pay Transparency Directive](#) (Directive 2023/970/EU).

It is the [view of the NIHRC alongside the Equality Commission for NI](#) that NI equality law must be amended to keep pace with these changes by the transposition deadline of June 2026. Implementing the EU Pay Transparency Directive in NI law would lead to greater accountability and transparency by employers on gender pay gaps within their organisations, including enhanced enforcement measures to improve access to justice and enforcement of rights and strengthened rights relating to compensation. It would also require intersectional multiple discrimination claims in Northern Ireland to be effectively addressed, including providing for intersectionality within equality legislation ([Annual Statement 2025, at 116](#)). To date, the UK Government has not expressed a view on the extent to which the EU Pay Transparency Directive impacts dynamic obligations under Windsor Framework Article 2.

In November 2024, the Department of Communities issued a [consultation on The Gender Pay Gap Information Regulations](#) and the NIHRC [expressed concern](#) that the Department had not taken the opportunity in this consultation to address how the EU Pay Transparency Directive will be reflected in NI law by June 2026. The Minister for Communities also [agreed in principle to use the Employment Rights Bill](#) as a vehicle for progressing gender pay gap reporting in Northern Ireland, however the [Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill Consultation](#) launched in 2024 did not address the EU Pay Transparency Directive, which the [NIHRC highlighted](#) at the time. In October 2025, the NI Department for Communities [published](#) its response to the consultation noting that the implications of the EU Pay Transparency Directive are currently being considered and that it aims to introduce Regulations to give effect to Gender Pay Gap reporting as soon as possible after the Northern Ireland Employments Rights Bill becomes law. As of February 2026, the Employment Rights Bill had not yet been introduced.

In addition, the NIHRC considers that the two new EU directives setting minimum standards for equality bodies ([Council Directive 2024/1499/EU](#) and [Directive 2024/1500/EU](#)) also amend or replace provisions in Annex 1 of the Windsor Framework. NI law should therefore be amended to keep pace with

such changes within the transposition deadline of June 2026. The directives require, for example, that equality bodies are provided with the human, technical and financial resources necessary to perform their mandates under the relevant EU equality directives in Annex 1.

Given the tight deadline associated with the implementation of the Pay Transparency Directive and the two equality body directives, the NIHRC is concerned that there has been no indication from the relevant NI departments or the UK Government on the timeline for consultation or legislation on how these measures will be reflected in NI law.

NHRI's recommendations to national and regional authorities

1. The Commission continues to recommend that the Department of Justice ensures that individuals in Northern Ireland have fair and effective access to legal aid, as required. This includes ensuring that specific needs are considered and accommodated. This also includes allocating ring-fenced resources that are adequate to ensure an efficient legal aid system in Northern Ireland.
2. The Commission continues to recommend that the Ministry of Justice ensures that sufficient, long-term resources are available where closed material procedures are used in Northern Ireland. Also that the use of closed material procedures in Northern Ireland is limited in cases involving serious human rights violations and, at least, ensures the removal of obstacles to ensuring accountability. This must not compromise the rights to a fair trial and an effective remedy. Furthermore, that the Department of Justice ensures a comprehensive library for closed judgments is available and accessible to legal teams and judges in Northern Ireland. Additionally, that the NI Office implements effective measures to ensure the principles of necessity and proportionality are fully reflected within any authorisation for non-jury trials in Northern Ireland. Also, that the NI Office adopts the indicators developed by the working group on non-jury trials to determine the conditions whereby the use of non-jury trials will be discontinued.
3. The NIHRC recommends that, pursuant to Articles 2 and 13 of the Windsor Framework:
 - The NI Executive Office and the Department for Communities bring forward legislation to ensure NI law keeps pace with those provisions of the EU directives on standards for equality bodies which amend or replace the EU Equality Directives in Annex 1 in line with the transposition deadline; and

- the UK Government, the NI Executive, and the NI Department for Communities, ensure that NI equality law is amended to keep pace with the relevant provisions of the EU Pay Transparency Directive in line with the transposition deadline.

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