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[Blog article](#) by Aisha O'Reilly, Policy Officer, Equality Commission NI

International Human Rights Day 2022

Human Rights Framework: Equality Considerations

It's the Northern Ireland Human Rights Festival 2022, and the Equality Commission is proud to support the Human Rights Consortium, which organises the Festival.

We continue to call for a strong domestic human rights framework, which promotes equality of opportunity and prevents discrimination, both at a UK-wide level, and in Northern Ireland. The current framework should be protected and strengthened.

The Human Rights Act 1998, and the European Court of Human Rights have made a range of judgments benefiting different equality groups, including disabled people and people of different ages, races, sexual orientations, religious beliefs, and genders. This has allowed Northern Irish people to challenge public authorities on issues such as the rights of unmarried parents to adopt children.

The existing framework has clearly played an important role in furthering equality and allowing individuals to establish their rights.

However, at the UK-wide level, we have expressed significant concerns about the equality implications of proposals put forward to repeal the Human Rights Act, and introduce a new 'Bill of Rights'.

In this context, we call on the UK government to ensure that no reform will proceed without a convincing case that such reform is necessary to further improve access to rights. We further recommend:

- The progressive realisation of rights, ensuring they don't regress or go backwards
- Raising awareness amongst both the general public and Government bodies on equality and human rights
- Improved engagement with those affected, including equality groups, so Government can take steps to strengthen human rights and equality and
- That the domestic human rights framework reflects international human rights standards

Any consideration of the UK wide human rights framework must consider and reflect our specific history and circumstances here in Northern Ireland. Any changes to the framework have the potential to impact the underpinnings of the improved society in Northern Ireland in which we now live.

Human rights protections here should be strengthened - we continue to call for a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, reflecting the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, which could provide a clear statement of a society's commitment to certain values and a legal framework for ensuring those values are advanced by all of society's institutions.

In relation to Northern Ireland, we also recommend that:

- Any NI Bill of Rights includes a principle of equality
- Equality law is strengthened through single equality legislation and
- Equality and human rights are strengthened post-Brexit.

The human rights framework has had a central role in progressing equality. These protections must be maintained and strengthened to ensure individuals and equality groups can continue to avail of their rights.

During this Northern Ireland Human Rights Festival, we continue to call for human rights protections that promote equality of opportunity and prevent discrimination.

Join us – share our recommendations with colleagues, officials, friends and family, and engage with your local political representatives to highlight the importance of a strong human rights framework with equality at its centre.

Further information on our Human Rights policy positions and priorities online at www.equalityni.org/HumanRights