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Little progress made on tackling human rights and equality issues affecting persons with disabilities in Northern Ireland

Plans for a disability strategy and a Disability Forum aimed at improving the lives of persons with disabilities have not been able to move forward because of the lack of a Northern Ireland Executive.

The lack of progress in a wide range of areas has been [highlighted in a joint submission](#) (*pdf, 449kb*) published today by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, in their role as the Independent Mechanism for NI (IMNI).

The submission is in relation to an Inquiry by the Committee on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) of progress made on their recommendations from a previous Inquiry into the United Kingdom in 2016.

Further IMNI recommendations are made around addressing the disability employment gap, support for independent living, as well as accessible and affordable housing for persons with disabilities and a number of other areas.

Alyson Kilpatrick, Chief Commissioner, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and Geraldine McGahey, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, commented:

“We remain very concerned about the lack of progress in addressing the Committee’s recommendations from 2016, compounded by the lack of a Northern Ireland Executive and functioning institutions. The UK has obligations through the UNCRPD, as well as Windsor Framework Article 2 to uphold rights and equality protections for persons with disabilities.

“It is imperative that we introduce a disability strategy and a Disability Forum so that disabled persons and their representative have their voice heard and we can move forward with policy and initiatives to realise their rights and equality entitlements as set out in the UNCRPD.

“Our submission recommends that the Independent Living Fund is reopened for new claimants; steps are taken to tackle barriers to housing and the right to live independently; and that we need an effective “Disability Employment Strategy that aims to reduce the disability employment gap in Northern Ireland.

“We hope that by providing this submission, recommendations and engaging with the UNCRPD Committee Inquiry that we can highlight the need for urgent action to remedy the pressing issues that are preventing persons with disabilities in Northern

Ireland from being empowered and realising their rights as laid out in the UNCRPD.”

Notes to Editors

- The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and Equality Commission for NI have a joint role as the [Independent Mechanism for NI](#), which involves promoting, protecting and monitoring the implementation of the UNCRPD in Northern Ireland.
- The [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international treaty](#) highlighting that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- The UK adopted the UNCRPD in 2006 and ratified it in 2009, meaning it agreed to be bound by the rights and to protect and promote the human rights of disabled people.
- Read the full IMNI report '[Jurisdictional 'Parallel' submission on the implementation, in Northern Ireland, of the recommendations by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in its 2016 report on an Inquiry, carried out under Article 6 of the Optional Protocol, into the United Kingdom](#)' (*pdf, 449kb*)
- IMNI recommends that the NI Executive take immediate steps to finalise, publish and effectively implement a robust disability strategy for NI accompanied by a measurable plan of action for improving the living conditions of all persons with disabilities and effective monitoring arrangements. The Disability Strategy should embed consideration of Windsor Framework Article 2 and include monitoring of EU developments in respect of the six Annex 1 Equality Directives, including relevant CJEU case law.
- IMNI recommend that the NI Executive take steps to increase provision of appropriate accommodation, and related social care, to meet the specific needs of a range of equality groups, advancing the right to independent living.
- IMNI recommend that the Department for Communities reopens the Independent Living Fund for new claimants in NI and ensures the fund is resourced to meet demand on a long-term basis.
- IMNI recommend that the Department for Communities develop and implement, in partnership with disabled people and their representative organisations, an effective Disability Employment Strategy that aims to reduce the disability employment gap in Northern Ireland.
- IMNI recommend that the Department for the Economy ensure provision of long-term funding arrangements for existing and new disability employment projects.
- NI has the lowest employment rate for disabled people in the UK with 36.4% of disabled people in employment compared to 80.3% of people without a disability, an employment gap of 43.9%. Referencing for this is available at page 14 of the report.
- You can read the 2016 Inquiry report: '[Inquiry concerning the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland carried out by the Committee under article 6 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention : Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities : report of the](#)

Committee'