

Programme for Government and Budget Recommendations



PFG PRIORITIES:

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

> Introduction

In this publication, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland sets out high level recommendations that it wishes to see advanced through the Executive's Programme for Government (PFG) and budget.

We welcome and strongly support the Executive's proposed focus on achieving outcomes via the PFG; specifically given the potential that this offers to advance equality of opportunity and good relations for those who live with and experience inequalities and the absence of good relations.

We advocate a clear commitment in the PFG, and in associated action plans, to stakeholder involvement – not only in co-design but in rolling monitoring and review of impacts, particularly across the Section 75 equality categories. Such an approach has the potential to be transformative and to deliver tangible outcomes for equality groups.

We have set out specific recommendations that we wish to see advanced across the following areas: social attitudes; education; employment; social protection; housing, accommodation and communities; health and social care; and public and political life.

We also highlight the need for a particular focus on identifying and tackling inequalities which have emerged from, or been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the policy response to it; for leadership in promoting positive and challenging negative social attitudes; for equality law reform; to address equality issues related to UK withdrawal from the EU; to address gaps in equality data; to develop effective equality strategies; to ensure compliance with international human rights conventions; as well as for Departments and other public bodies to ensure, when preparing budget proposals, that they fulfil their statutory equality and good relations duties.

We consider that there is significant scope for the promotion of equality and good relations to be further embedded and mainstreamed across the Outcomes Framework.

ECNI (2021) Response to the Executive's consultation on a Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework

Read more: www.equalityni.org/pfg

Read more: www.equalityni.org/pfg



PFG PRIORITIES:

FRAMEWORK

> Recommendations

We recommend that:

- there is a clear commitment in the PfG, underpinned by the inclusion of robust, outcome focused action measures, to identifying, addressing and monitoring the key inequalities experienced by the Section 75 equality groups, as well as to promoting good relations;
- a focus on addressing key inequalities includes identifying and mitigating any negative equality impacts, now and in the future, arising from the COVID-19 pandemic;
- the PfG makes it explicit that promoting equality of opportunity and good relations are cross-cutting themes across all Government strategies, legislative and policy development and actions;
- leadership is demonstrated in promoting positive and challenging negative social attitudes;
- all relevant PfG measures are not only tracked in aggregate but also for the impact on individuals from each of the Section 75 equality grounds;
- there is a clear commitment in the PfG, and in associated action plans, to stakeholder involvement from across the equality categories – not only in co-design but in the rolling monitoring and review of impacts.

> Promoting equality / good relations

Equality of opportunity and good relations must be central to all public policy development and implementation.

Many key inequalities experienced by Section 75 equality groups remain persistent and hard to tackle. We consider that the PfG and Budget provide a key mechanism to maximise equality of opportunity and good relations outcomes.

It is essential that all PfG outcomes measures that relate to people are developed in such a way so as to enable Departments and other public bodies to gather data across the Section 75 grounds. While data from Northern Ireland regarding the equality impacts of COVID-19 remains limited, information from elsewhere suggests that the COVID-19 crisis will deepen known inequalities and likely lead to the emergence of new inequalities for people now and over their lifecycle.

Read more: www.equalityni.org/pfg



PFG PRIORITIES:

SOCIAL ATTITUDES



> Recommendation

In addition to actions to identify and tackle inequalities which have emerged from, or been exacerbated by, the COVID-19 pandemic, we recommend actions to:

- challenge prejudicial attitudes, behaviour and hate crime, so as to ensure that workplaces, services, public spaces and communities are free from harassment and/or discrimination across the equality grounds.

Nearly one half (45%) of Young Life and Times respondents in 2019 had witnessed some kind of racist bullying or harassment in their school.

NILT (2021) Black Lives Matter? Attitudes to minorities and migrants in Northern Ireland

> Prejudicial attitudes / hate crime

The Commission has highlighted the need to tackle prejudicial attitudes, behaviour and hate crime.

It is essential that steps are taken to ensure that workplaces, services, public spaces and communities are free from harassment and/or discrimination across the equality grounds.

This includes action to address sectarianism and racism within the workplace; tackle the significant attitudinal barriers to employment for people with disabilities; to challenge negative attitudes towards a range of groups including Irish Travellers, migrant workers and other minority ethnic individuals, as well as lesbian, gay and bisexual people and trans people. Further, it includes challenging gender stereotypes and gender based violence.

Whilst we recognise and welcome the steps already taken by a range of stakeholders to tackle hate crime in Northern Ireland, it is clear that stronger measures, including reform of the hate crime legislation, are needed to tackle the persistent and growing problem of hate crime against a range of equality groups in Northern Ireland.

Read more: www.equalityni.org/SocialAttitudes



PFG PRIORITIES:

EDUCATION

> Recommendations

In addition to actions to identify and tackle inequalities which have emerged from, or been exacerbated by, the COVID-19 pandemic, we recommend actions to:

- tackle prejudice-based bullying;
- address inequalities in attainment and access, with a particular focus on those experienced by Traveller, Roma and Newcomer children;
- ensure progress on a number of our recommendations 'of benefit to all children'. In particular to advance childcare and early-years provision to meet the diverse needs of all children; drive attainment via collaborative approaches involving family and the wider community; and put in place a system for learning from successful interventions.

> Educational inequalities

The Commission recognises and reinforces the wider value of education, beyond solely the achievement of qualifications. While in assessing inequalities in attainment, the Commission draws on generally accepted qualification based measures, we reiterate the important role that education can play in wider development. It can provide exposure to literature, language, sport, activities, art, and music; as well as allowing individuals to develop an understanding and experience of the value and range of diverse cultures, identities and backgrounds in Northern Ireland.

The absence of face-to-face learning, specialist supports and usual social interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted those children already experiencing inequality. There is an ongoing need to identify, and tackle, inequalities linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and the policy response to it. This includes learning from the pandemic around how schools, families and communities can work together successfully.

The implementation of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act provides an opportunity to effectively combat prejudice-based bullying as it places new duties on schools and boards of governors. Strong and visible leadership is necessary over the coming years to ensure an anti-bullying culture in every school.

Urgent action by Government, built on the analysis of equality-disaggregated data and on engagement with key stakeholders, families and communities, is essential to better promote equality of opportunity and avoid the emergence or widening of inequalities in the response to COVID-19.

ECNI (2020) COVID-19 and Education: Equality Considerations

Read more: www.equalityni.org/Education/Policy



PFG PRIORITIES:

EMPLOYMENT INEQUALITIES



> Recommendations

In addition to actions to identify, and tackle, inequalities which have emerged from, or been exacerbated by, the COVID-19 pandemic, we recommend actions to:

- support people with disabilities to access and remain in the workplace;
- support women's economic participation, including through access to appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare;
- address the exploitation and forced labour of migrant workers and the concentration of some minority ethnic workers in low paid employment;
- ensure the provision of training and programmes that are accessible and inclusive for all to get into, or stay in, work.

> Employment inequalities

The removal of barriers to work, including those experienced by women, people with disabilities, older people and minority ethnic workers, will contribute to realising Northern Ireland's full economic potential with improved employment opportunities for all.

A specific focus for the Commission is economic independence, specifically mindful of the needs of women. We have highlighted that the availability of appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare provision is a fundamental part of mothers entering, remaining and progressing in work, and recommended the implementation of an effective Childcare Strategy and action plan.

We have also raised the need to promote flexible working practices and to encourage men to share responsibility for childcare; as well as to implement a gender pay strategy and action plan that addresses structural factors within society and the workplace and that tackles issues such as the concentration of women in part time, low paid work.

Workplaces should be welcoming and inclusive, with freedom from prejudice and harassment at work. We recommend action to reduce discrimination in employment, including due to pregnancy and maternity and disability. There is clear evidence of the economic exclusion of people with disabilities. People with disabilities face barriers to employment and require support in terms of accessing and remaining in the workplace.

Read more: www.equalityni.org/Employment/Policy



PFG PRIORITIES:



Further, we recommend support for initiatives aimed at tackling the exploitation of migrant workers; reducing ethnic minority disadvantage in employment; raising awareness of the rights of migrant workers; and maximising migrant workers' access to the labour market.

The highest proportion of employment related discrimination enquiries to the Commission are in the area of disability (42%), followed by sex discrimination (35%). Almost all sex discrimination enquiries relate to pregnancy and maternity (33%).

ECNI Discrimination Enquiries Statistics 2020-2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the fundamental importance of childcare and early-years support - in facilitating the economic participation of parents / carers, and ensuring the development and progression of children from a range of equality categories.

ECNI (2020) Commission urges renewed focus on childcare and early-years provision to support families and children from across the equality groups

Read more: www.equalityni.org/Employment/Policy



PFG PRIORITIES:

SOCIAL PROTECTION



> Recommendations

In addition to actions to identify, and tackle, inequalities which have emerged from, or been exacerbated by, the COVID-19 pandemic, we recommend actions to:

- protect the most vulnerable from the adverse impact of welfare reform, particularly mindful of the impact on people with disabilities, women and minority ethnic communities (including asylum seekers and refugees);
- give effect to the recommendations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Inquiry Report into the impact of welfare reform (2016), and the 2017 UNCRPD Concluding Observations as they relate to welfare reform;
- identify and commit to specific measures which will mitigate adverse impacts of welfare reform, or to any alternate policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity.

> Accessing social protection

The Commission has highlighted the need to protect the most vulnerable, mitigating adverse impacts of welfare reform.

We have, for example, raised concerns about the potential impact of welfare reform proposals on people with disabilities and women. Older people are also shown not to fully access benefits and take up programmes; and minority ethnic communities, including asylum seekers and refugees, can also experience barriers to accessing social protection and services.

We welcome the Department for Communities Minister's June 2021 commitment to extend existing welfare mitigations, pending agreement by the Executive on associated legislation, beyond 31 March 2022 and to take into account, in the review of welfare mitigations, currently being undertaken by the Independent Advisory Panel, the recommendations and observations of the UNCRPD Committee on welfare reform in its 2016 Inquiry Report and 2017 concluding observations.

...persons with disabilities affected by policy changes have had their freedom of choice and control over their daily activities restricted, the extra cost of disability has been set aside and income protection has been curtailed as a result of benefit cuts, while the expected policy goal of achieving decent and stable employment is far from being attained;

...there is reliable evidence that the threshold of grave or systematic violations of the rights of persons with disabilities has been met in the State party

UNCRPD Committee (2016) 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

Read more: www.equalityni.org/SocialProtection/Policy



PFG PRIORITIES:

HOUSING, ACCOMMODATION AND COMMUNITIES

> Recommendations

In addition to actions to identify, and tackle, inequalities which have emerged from, or been exacerbated by, the COVID-19 pandemic, we recommend actions to:

- advance sharing in housing while ensuring objectively assessed need is met;
- address the longer social housing waiting list for Catholic households;
- improve the provision of disability related accommodation;
- tackle the under-reporting of hate incidents and crimes and increase outcome rates.

Meeting the needs of an ageing population that require care and support networks raises issues such as “under-occupation, suitability and accessibility, isolation, fuel poverty, affordability and tenure specific issues”.

DfC (2021) Housing Supply Strategy Call for Evidence, p15

> Inequalities in housing, accommodation and communities

Housing is a basic human need and provides a foundation for family and community life. Good quality, affordable housing in safe, sustainable communities is essential to ensuring the health and well-being of individuals and a prosperous society.

Data set out in our 2017 Statement in Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities highlighted a number of inequalities. These included longer waiting times for social housing for Catholic household reference person applicants, limited access to appropriate accommodation for Irish Travellers, vulnerability to racial attack of homes of minority ethnic and migrant groups and harassment of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in their homes and neighbourhoods as well as issues about independent living for people with disabilities.

There are opportunities to tackle the inequalities which we have identified and make significant progress in promoting equality and good relations. It will be important that actions are taken forward in areas such as the housing reforms announced by the Minister for Communities during 2020; the Department’s on-going ‘Housing for All’ programme of shared housing; the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s Traveller Accommodation Strategy and the outworkings of the Independent Review of Hate Crime legislation in Northern Ireland.

Read more: www.equalityni.org/Housing/Policy



PFG PRIORITIES:

HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE & WELL-BEING

> Recommendations

In addition to actions to identify, and tackle, inequalities which have emerged from, or been exacerbated by, the COVID-19 pandemic, we recommend actions to:

- identify and remove barriers to health, social care and well-being experienced by particular Section 75 equality groups, including older people; lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people; trans people; Irish Travellers and other minority ethnic communities; and people with disabilities;
- ensure investment in health care to address the specific needs of equality groups, including the health care needs of people with disabilities, and young people's mental health needs.

> Health, social care and well-being inequalities

Health and social care is fundamental to people's quality of life and general well-being. A number of factors can contribute to health inequalities including socio-economic and environmental circumstances; lifestyle and health behaviour; and access to effective health and social care.

The Commission has highlighted barriers to accessing health and social care, experienced by particular Section 75 equality groups, such as older people; lesbian, gay and bisexual people; trans people; Irish Travellers and other minority ethnic communities. These include barriers relating to prejudice, information, language, culture and, particularly for those living in rural areas, lack or affordability of transport.

We have also highlighted the need to ensure investment in health care to address the specific needs of equality groups; for example, people with disabilities, including their sexual health and maternity needs; as well as young people's mental health needs and to address the high suicide rates among men, Irish Travellers, and young people.

Read more: www.equalityni.org/Health/Policy



PFG PRIORITIES:



We have raised concerns regarding barriers to accessing health and social care, including those faced by children and young people in accessing age-appropriate health care; as well as ageist attitudes experienced by older people, and stereotypes that portray older people as cared for, rather than care givers.

There is also the need to ensure the collection by the Department of Health, of system wide data across the Section 75 grounds; and that appropriate account is taken of people's multiple identity.

Poor health, including long-term health conditions and disability, is particularly prevalent in areas of deprivation. This suggests that persons with disabilities are likely to be disproportionately affected by COVID-19, but the data to confirm this, and therefore how best to focus support, is lacking.

Independent Mechanism for Northern Ireland (2020) Submission to Women and Equalities Committee's Inquiry into the Unequal Impact of COVID-19: Disability and Access to Services

Read more: www.equalityni.org/Health/Policy



PFG PRIORITIES:

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC & POLITICAL LIFE

> Recommendations

In addition to actions to identify and tackle inequalities which have emerged from, or been exacerbated by, the COVID-19 pandemic, we recommend actions to:

- address identified gaps in equality data across a number of areas of public policy; and ensure that data is sufficiently disaggregated to allow for meaningful equality analysis, to better inform public policy development;
- increase diversity in government public appointments by taking actions to increase the participation of those with disabilities; delivering on gender targets for boards and chairs; and implementing its 'Strategic Approach to Public Appointments Policy and Board Effectiveness in NI' policy and action plan to advance participation more generally;
- increase diversity in political representation by advancing the participation of women, and individuals from minority ethnic groups, in political life.

> Participation in public / political life

To deliver a fully effective PFG, it is necessary to ensure that all people and perspectives are represented and can participate equally - whether in consultation on public policy, or in economic, political or public life and decision making, including peace building.

The Commission has highlighted the need to promote the participation of under-represented Section 75 groups in public and political life and decision making, including through ensuring their meaningful and active engagement in policy decision making. For example, we have raised the need to take measures, including temporary special measures, to increase women's participation in politics, public life and decision making, including peacebuilding.

We have also raised concerns about the under-representation of people with disabilities in public life, and have called for steps, in furtherance of the disability duties on public bodies, to promote their participation in public life. Further, action is required to encourage the visibility and participation of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, older people and minority ethnic people in public life.

Read more: www.equalityni.org/Participation/Policy



PFG PRIORITIES:



There are substantial and specific data gaps across all areas of public life in relation to the participation of those from across the nine Section 75 equality categories. While sufficiently categorised or disaggregated quantitative data often does not exist to underpin a robust view with regards to any under-representation or otherwise of wider equality groups, for example lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) or trans people, we recommend action to address the key barriers often faced by such individuals - for example, negative media stereotyping; the fear of vandalism, violence or abuse; or the fear of being 'outed' etc.

The under-representation of women in politics in Northern Ireland is a serious issue which must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

AERC Report (2015) Women in Politics and the NI Assembly

Read more: www.equalityni.org/Participation/Policy



LAW REFORM



> Recommendations

We recommend actions to:

- reform and strengthen equality law across a number of equality grounds; including age (as regards the provision of goods, facilities and services), race, disability, sex, fair employment, and sexual orientation;
- reform wider areas of the law that impact on Section 75 equality groups.

People of all ages should have protection against discrimination on the grounds of age when accessing goods and services.

ECNI (2013) Strengthening Protection for Children and Young People

> Equality law reform

The Commission's longstanding view is that the introduction of single equality legislation would best harmonise and simplify the protections available in Northern Ireland. It is of note that equality legislation in other parts of the United Kingdom has been streamlined and strengthened through the introduction of single equality legislation.

We recommend that the PfG contains a clear timetabled commitment to strengthen existing legislation across a number of key areas.

These include reform of:

- age discrimination legislation (in the provision of goods, facilities and services, relating to all ages);
- race equality legislation;
- disability discrimination legislation;
- sex equality legislation;
- fair employment legislation (as regards the exception on recruitment of teachers and fair employment monitoring);
- sexual orientation equality law.

It also includes wider changes to the law that impact on Section 75 groups; for example, introducing changes to strengthen the hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland. We further recommend that gender pay gap reporting legislation is brought into force and regulations introduced.

Reforming, strengthening and updating Northern Ireland equality law will help tackle inequalities, ensure greater harmonisation and consistency across the equality legislation, and address the significant gaps in protection between equality law in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Read more: www.equalityni.org/LawReform/Policy





PFG PRIORITIES:

EU-UK WITHDRAWAL

> Recommendations

We recommend actions to:

- commit to act in accordance with the UK Government's obligations under Article 2 of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement: Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, including the commitment to keep pace with any future EU changes to 'Annex 1' Directives;
- commit to ensure that equality laws keep pace, not only with 'Annex 1' EU equality laws (as required under Article 2 of the Protocol), but with all future EU laws that strengthen equality rights;
- commit to address, and mitigate, the potential impact of any loss of EU funding on equality groups, as well as the impact on the voluntary and community sector.

> Commitment to equality and human rights after Brexit

It is important the Executive sets out in its PfG the explicit recognition of the potential impact of the United Kingdom leaving the EU on equality and human rights and makes clear the need for additional measures to better protect equality and human rights in Northern Ireland.

We recommend that the Executive makes a clear commitment in the PfG to act in accordance with the UK Government's obligations under Article 2 of the Protocol, including the UK Government's commitment in the Protocol to keep pace with any future EU changes to the Annex 1 equality Directives.

The Executive must ensure that the protections currently in place in Northern Ireland regarding the rights, safeguards, and equality of opportunity provisions, set out in the chapter of the same name in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, are not reduced as a result of Brexit. This commitment is binding on the Northern Ireland Executive and the Assembly, as well as the UK Government and Parliament, as a matter of international law.

Further, all the provisions in the Withdrawal Agreement, including the UK Government's commitment under Article 2 of the Protocol, are now contained in UK law. This includes a restriction on the legislative competence of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the powers of Northern Ireland Ministers and departments, preventing them from acting in a way which is incompatible with Article 2(1) of the Protocol.

Read more: www.equalityni.org/Brexit





PfG PRIORITIES:

We also recommend that the Executive commits in the PfG to ensuring that equality laws keep pace, not only with any changes that the EU may make to the EU equality laws set out in Annex 1, as required under Article 2 of the Protocol, but also with all future EU laws that strengthen equality rights. Further, the Executive should commit to keeping pace with future equality enhancing protections and good practice, including those from the EU.

We continue to call for the Executive to ensure there is no negative impact on equality and good relations for people living in Northern Ireland as a result of the UK leaving the EU. EU funding has enabled the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland to play an important role in addressing social and economic deprivation, training and employment, social enterprise, health and well-being, 'peace building', and building cross-community and cross-border relationships. We recommend that the PfG includes a commitment to address, and mitigate, the potential impact of any loss of EU funding on equality groups as well as the impact on the voluntary and community sector.

Read more: www.equalityni.org/Brexit



PFG PRIORITIES:

EQUALITY DATA

> Recommendations

In addition to actions to identify inequalities which have emerged from, or been exacerbated by, the COVID-19 pandemic, we recommend actions to:

- collect comprehensive equality data to identify equality impacts and shape targeted actions to advance equality;
- address key gaps in equality data, including on the grounds of gender identity, sexual orientation, and race;
- rectify the lack of data disaggregation in relation to ethnicity, disability and gender.

> Gaps in equality data

The Equality Commission has long identified the need for robust equality data in Northern Ireland, both to enable good evidence-based policy making and to ensure effective compliance with the equality and good relations duties established by the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

All key measures, including in the PfG should not only be tracked in aggregate but also for the impact on individuals from each of the Section 75 equality grounds.

The Commission has highlighted the lack of specific data across a number of themes in relation to a range of equality grounds, including gender identity, sexual orientation, race; as well as multiple identity and across all areas of public life in relation to participation. It has also highlighted the lack of data disaggregation across all equality grounds, which prevents an examination of potential inequalities encountered as a result of multiple identities (for example, barriers faced by young, single mothers).

The PfG should include actions, particularly by Departments and other public bodies, to address key gaps in equality data – including to ensure that data is available across the full range of equality grounds, and in respect of people’s multiple identities. The collection of such data should be mainstreamed across existing and new administrative systems and also proactively captured as part of all key public surveys.

Read more: www.equalityni.org/EqualityData/Policy



PfG PRIORITIES:

EQUALITY DATA

The absence of comprehensive equality data from wider datasets means that it is difficult for the Executive, Departments and others to assess the nature and extent of key inequalities, as well as to identify effective policy responses and track progress in achieving equality outcomes.

Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for access to up to date and detailed equality data in Northern Ireland, as a vital component in shaping public policy responses. In Northern Ireland while some published COVID-19 data included information on impacts by age and gender it typically did not, for example, include data by race or disability. In contrast, a number of equality-based analyses using data available in Britain and elsewhere were able to consider and demonstrate differential impacts in those jurisdictions of the virus, the wider pandemic and responses to it, across a range of equality grounds.

The Outcomes Based Accountability model provides Departments with the opportunity to significantly advance data collection and disaggregation and further evidence based policy making. The reporting dashboard proposed within the PfG has the potential to provide transparency on available data and two way engagement as action plans are designed, implemented and revised.

In practical terms, we envisage that mainstreaming could be further assisted by the Executive ensuring that all PfG outcome measures that relate to people are not only tracked in aggregate but also for impacts across the Section 75 grounds.

ECNI (2021) Response to the Executive's consultation on a Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework

Read more: www.equalityni.org/EqualityData/Policy



PfG PRIORITIES:

EQUALITY STRATEGIES

Recommendations

We recommend action to:

- ensure that effective equality and good relations strategies and action plans are implemented and updated across the full range of anti-discrimination grounds.

...promoting equality of opportunity and good relations should be cross-cutting themes across all Government strategies, policy development and actions.

ECNI (2021) PfG Outcomes Framework Response

Effective equality and good relations strategies

The Commission considers that further actions to address key inequalities include the need to ensure that effective equality and good relations strategies and associated action plans are in place, implemented and reviewed across a range of equality grounds.

The Commission welcomes that work has begun to develop or update a number of equality strategies. It is essential that this work proceeds from development on to full delivery, supported by rolling review.

A number of actions are key to successful implementation:

- **Stakeholder Involvement** from across the equality categories – not only in co-design, but in delivery, and in the rolling monitoring and review of impacts.
- **Mainstreaming** actions from the agreed final strategies should be mainstreamed into the corporate and annual business plans of relevant Departments, and into higher level frameworks as appropriate.
- **Monitoring** all key measures should not only be tracked in aggregate, but also for the impact on individuals from each of the equality grounds.
- **Data collection** - ensuring that the collection of comprehensive equality characteristics are mainstreamed across existing and new administrative systems and also proactively captured as part of all key public surveys.
- **SMART, time-bound and resourced action plans** to ensure effective, on-time and prioritised delivery.
- **Layered reporting and review.** In addition to a strategic review in the final year of each strategy, we recommend an annual progress report and a process of rolling in-year review involving key stakeholders.

Read more: www.equalityni.org/equalitydata/Policy



PFG PRIORITIES:

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

> Recommendations

We recommend action to:

- address key shortfalls in Northern Ireland so as to ensure compliance with obligations in international human rights conventions, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Ultimately, the research has identified a range of shortfalls in delivery in Northern Ireland relative to the UNCRPD.

Research (2014) *Shortfalls in public policy and programme delivery in Northern Ireland relative to the Articles of UNCRPD*

> International human rights obligations

The Commission is of the view that the PFG should include clear commitments to address key gaps in policies and programmes in Northern Ireland, so as to ensure compliance with the UK Government's obligations under international human rights conventions.

There should also be clear commitments to ensure comprehensive input into State Party submissions relating to such conventions.

These conventions include the UNCRPD, as well as other international conventions such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD); the UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM).

A number of international committees have called for action to address shortfalls in Northern Ireland relevant to international standards and obligations. We have sought to highlight for example, that there are key gaps, in terms of policies and programmes, aligned to a number of UNCRPD Articles that need addressed.

Read more: www.equalityni.org/IntlMech/Policy



BUDGET



Key Points

- In the preparation of budget proposals, Departments and other public authorities should ensure that they are fulfilling their statutory equality and good relations duties.
- The Commission has set out in guidance how Section 75 duties and equality scheme commitments apply to the budget processes. Equality scheme arrangements and tools - i.e. screening and equality impact assessment (EQIA) - provide a means for Departments and other public authorities to assess the likely impacts of the budget proposals.

Applying equality scheme arrangements for assessments to the full range of decisions will ensure transparent and evidence-based decisions.

ECNI (2015) Section 75 and Budgets: a short guide

Equality and Good Relations requirements

Meeting equality and good relations requirements in developing and delivering the PfG and Budget requires leadership and commitment at the highest levels and throughout public policy making.

Leaders, senior managers and decision makers should ensure that their Section 75 practices demonstrate good governance, meaningful equality assessments, actions to address persistent inequalities, and good communication and engagement.

We have set out in guidance (2015) how Section 75 duties and equality scheme commitments apply to the budget processes. As highlighted in this guidance, in the preparation of budget proposals, Departments and other public authorities should ensure that they fulfil their statutory equality and good relations duties.

Departments and other public authorities have functional responsibility not only for contributing to the preparation of budget proposals, but also the allocation of individual budget settlements. Similarly, they must fulfil these functions and make decisions having given the required consideration under the statutory equality duties.

“...it is vital that all levels of government adopt an equality responsive approach to budgeting making as a means of fulfilling Section 75 duties.”

Expert paper (2013) Equality Responsive Budgeting

Read more: www.equalityni.org/Public-Authorities





For further information: www.equalityni.org/pfg

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