



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

**Submission to the UN Committee on Economic,
Social and Cultural Rights**

**Parallel Report for the Seventh Periodic Review
of the United Kingdom**

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The NIHRC is an A-status National Human Rights Institution. In accordance with the Paris Principles and pursuant to Section 69(1) of the Northern Ireland (NI) Act 1998, the NIHRC reviews the adequacy and effectiveness of measures undertaken by the UK Government and NI Executive to promote and protect human rights, specifically within NI. In accordance with section 78A(1) of the NI Act, the NIHRC also monitors the UK Government's commitment under Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework¹ (Windsor Framework Article 2) to ensure there is no diminution of rights and safeguards protected in the relevant part of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.²
- 1.2 This submission is presented to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (the Committee) in respect of the UK's compliance with the UN ICESCR. It makes several recommendations for the Committee's consideration of the UK (being the UK Government and NI Executive as relevant) regarding compliance with the UN ICESCR in NI.

2.0 General Information

Data Collection

- 2.1 There is insufficient specific, disaggregated data across protected characteristics in NI, including gender, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation. There is no data collected in relation to people who fulfil numerous different categories of identity.³ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that extensive disaggregated data is collected, published and effectively monitored in NI.**

Cumulative Impact Assessments

- 2.2 State-conducted, cumulative impact assessments are rarely sufficient, particularly on the impact of social security policy changes in NI.⁴ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK conducts cumulative impact assessments to inform decisions in NI.**

Business and Human Rights

- 2.3 The UK Government's updated National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights does not have a specific NI focus.⁵ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that NI is reflected in the UK's national action plan on business and human rights.**

Climate and Environmental Regulations

- 2.4 After significant delay, the first Environmental Improvement Plan for NI was published.⁶ NI needs to double its renewable generation capacity to meet its 2030 emissions targets.⁷ Pollutants, in some parts of NI, continue

to breach air quality objectives.⁸ There have been significant issues raised in NI regarding flooding and pollution of water ways, including by the presence of toxic algae.⁹ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures climate justice values are adopted in all laws and policies aimed at tackling climate change, including ensuring a focus on the specific needs of and preventative measures for individuals or communities most affected. This requires working with key stakeholders to ensure effective mitigations and monitoring to maintain good air quality, pollution free water ways and to prevent future flooding events in NI.**

3.0 Maximum Available Resources

- 3.1 The NI Affairs Committee has reported that funding constraints throughout the UK have affected adversely the amount of the block grant provided to the NI Executive, which has undermined the ability of the NI Executive to deliver effective public services in NI.¹⁰ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that NI is adequately funded, utilising a needs-based approach.**

4.0 Constitutional Issues

NIHRC Budget

- 4.1 The NIHRC was re-accredited as the A-status National Human Rights Institution for NI, with a recommendation that it needs to receive an enhanced and autonomous budget. The United Nations was content to re-accredit the NIHRC based on a commitment by the UK to achieve this. **The NIHRC recommends that the UK takes steps to satisfy itself and the United Nations that the NIHRC has adequate and secure long-term funding that is sufficient to fulfil its statutory functions and ensure its compliance with the UN Paris Principles.**

Bill of Rights for NI

- 4.2 An Ad Hoc Committee of the NI Assembly on Human Rights supported the enactment of a Bill of Rights in principle.¹¹ However, there has been no plan to progress this. **The NIHRC recommends that the UK fulfils its commitment to a Bill of Rights for NI.**

UK Withdrawal from the EU

- 4.3 Pursuant to Windsor Framework Article 2 European Union law, which was binding on the UK on 31 December 2020 and which underpins a relevant right, safeguard or equality of opportunity protection in the relevant chapter of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998, continues to set standards below which the law in NI must not fall.¹² It provides specific protection against discrimination, requiring the law in NI to dynamically align with changes to the six main EU equality directives listed in Annex 1 of the Windsor Framework.¹³ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK**

ensures the delivery of effective training on Windsor Framework Article 2 to all relevant officials and that guidance on policy and legislative development is swiftly updated.

- 4.4 Despite previous commitments to the contrary,¹⁴ the UK Government subsequently confirmed that Windsor Framework Article 2 rights may be affected by the abolition of retained EU interpretive effects in the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023.¹⁵ The NIHRC disagrees with this interpretation.¹⁶ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK establishes a comprehensive notification process to identify any amendment, repeal or restatement of laws pursuant to the 2023 Act, relevant to Windsor Framework Article 2.**

Reform of the UK's human rights framework

- 4.5 The previous UK Government introduced several pieces of legislation which reformed the UK's human rights framework.¹⁷ Not least, legislative amendments have reduced access to domestic courts for individuals seeking a human rights-based remedy.¹⁸ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures the fundamental principles of human rights are adhered to and any reform to the UK's human rights framework does not weaken human rights protections, but builds on the Human Rights Act 1998.**

5.0 Article 2(2) Equality and Non-Discrimination

Equality laws and policies

- 5.1 Discrimination legislation in NI continues to "lag behind the rest of the UK". NI is also without a single Equality Act, as in Great Britain.¹⁹ That means domestic equality law is fragmented and incomplete. There are several equality strategies that are either absent completely or still awaited in NI. These include a Gender Equality Strategy; a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (Or Questioning), Intersex+ strategy; and a Refugee Integration Strategy.²⁰ Windsor Framework Articles 2 and 13 require NI law to be amended by June 2026 to reflect enhanced rights protections in the EU directives on standards for equality bodies²¹ and EU Pay Transparency Directive,²² which includes recognition of "intersectional discrimination".²³ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK:**
- **consolidates, strengthens and clarifies equality protections in NI within a Single Equality Act, which includes intersectional multiple discrimination, as required by the EU Pay Transparency Directive;**
 - **ensures that up-to-date robust, gender-sensitive, culturally appropriate equality-related strategies and action plans with ring-fenced funding are developed promptly and thereafter implemented and monitored in NI; and**

- **enacts legislation to amend NI law to ensure it keeps pace with those provisions of EU directives on standards for equality bodies pursuant to Articles 2 and 13 of the Windsor Framework in line with transposition deadline, 29 June 2026.**

Hate crime

- 5.2 NI remains the only part of the UK without stand-alone hate crime legislation.²⁴ By 2027, a Sentencing Bill is proposed which introduces statutory aggravation for hate crime and a Victims Bill and includes provisions relating to victims of crime.²⁵ **The NIHRC recommends that instead of a piecemeal approach in NI that the UK promptly develops, implements and monitors robust hate crime legislation in NI, guided by the Independent Hate Crime Review Team’s recommendations.**

Reform of the UK Asylum System

- 5.3 The Illegal Migration Act 2023 created unequal access to asylum for individuals who arrive in the UK via unofficial routes.²⁶ Certain provisions of the 2023 Act have been deemed incompatible with the ECHR and to have resulted in a diminution of EU minimum asylum standards²⁷ and therefore, breached Windsor Framework Article 2.²⁸ The Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024 is not being implemented, but has not yet been repealed.²⁹ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK repeals the Illegal Migration Act 2023 and the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024 and provides access to status determination mechanisms for people seeking asylum, refugees and stateless persons to help ensure that they have their claims processed expeditiously and that individuals granted protection are able to integrate effectively.**

6.0 Article 3 – Equal Rights of Men and Women

Gender Pay Gap

- 6.1 Mandatory pay gap reporting is not in force in NI.³⁰ The proposed Employment Rights Bill may be used to address this.³¹ However, this Bill is yet to be introduced to the NI Assembly.³² NI law must be amended to reflect enhanced rights protections in the EU Pay Transparency Directive, including stronger enforcement measures and greater accountability and transparency by 7 June 2026.³³ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK:**
- **ensures that the gender pay gap and insecure, low-paid employment of women in NI is effectively addressed and monitored. This includes requiring employers to publish a narrative with their gender pay gap data that is evaluated through a gender budgeting lens; and**

- **brings forward legislation to amend NI law to ensure it keeps pace with relevant provisions of the EU Pay Transparency Directive that amend and/or replace provisions of the EU Gender Equality (Employment) Directive.**

Gender Budgeting

- 6.2 There is a “persistence of deeply embedded gendered inequalities which continue to inhibit women’s life opportunities in NI”.³⁴ This is exacerbated through a focus on gender neutrality within policymaking in NI.³⁵ **The NIHRC recommends that the NI Executive adopts a gender-sensitive approach to policy making in NI, including by embedding gender budgeting within law and policy making in NI.**

7.0 Articles 6 and 7 – Right to Work and Right to Just and Favourable Working Conditions

Barriers to refugees and asylum seekers accessing employment

- 7.1 People seeking asylum are not able to work anywhere in the UK for the first 12 months of their following their application.³⁶ With no means to supplement their income, such individuals are at greater risk of destitution. **The NIHRC recommends that the UK removes its reservation against Article 6 of the UN ICESCR and reviews its work-related restrictions placed on people seeking asylum in NI while their claims are being processed.**

Persons with Disabilities

- 7.2 NI has the lowest employment rate for d/Deaf and disabled people and the largest gap between the employment rates of d/Deaf and disabled and non-disabled people within the UK.³⁷ Disability and employment is an identified priority, but concrete plans are unclear.³⁸ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK takes concrete steps to tackle the low employment rate for d/Deaf and disabled people in NI.**

Rehabilitation of Offenders

- 7.3 The UK Supreme Court will consider the appeal to a failure to provide a mechanism in NI by which an individual is able to apply to have criminal convictions spent. This is the case regardless of the passage of time and their personal circumstances can affect an individual’s employment prospects.³⁹ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK promptly amends the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NI) Order 1978 to enable an offender to be rehabilitated if their circumstances satisfy the criteria for compliance with Article 8 of the ECHR. This includes ensuring an effective review mechanism is operational.**

Working conditions of migrant workers

7.4 Data is lacking,⁴⁰ but it has been established that migrant workers in NI are at a high risk of exploitation, with many unaware of their employment rights.⁴¹ Individuals relying on sponsorship visas are at particular risk, including at risk of financial penalty by their employer if they try to leave before their contract is finished.⁴² This particularly affects zero-hour contract employees and non-unionised, agriculture, and care home sectors.⁴³ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that all migrant workers in NI are protected against exploitation and abuse and enjoy the same conditions as other workers in NI. This includes having effective access to complaint mechanisms, interpretation services, legal assistance and access to effective remedies without fear of reprisal, deportation or detention. Furthermore, the conditions of migrant workers in NI should be effectively monitored, including by regularly collecting and disseminating all relevant, disaggregated data.**

Modern slavery and human trafficking

7.5 Trafficking and Exploitation Risk Orders are not available in NI. The Illegal Migration Act 2023 includes provisions on modern slavery and human trafficking in respect of people who have entered the UK in breach of immigration control which deny access to support services to victims of human trafficking who have arrived in the UK irregularly.⁴⁴ The trafficking provisions of the 2023 Act were found to be incompatible with Article 4 of the ECHR and the EU Trafficking Directive (2011), when read alongside the CoE European Convention on Action against Trafficking, resulting in a breach of Windsor Framework Article 2.⁴⁵ The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 contains several provisions which raise concerns, including that a potential victim's late compliance with a Trafficking Information Notice, without good reason, must be taken into account as damaging that person's credibility.⁴⁶ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that all victims of modern slavery and human trafficking in NI are able to access specialist support services, appropriately tailored to take account of age, gender and culture, regardless of how they came to enter the UK.**

8.0 Article 9 – Social Security

Social security

8.1 Social security reform disproportionately affects marginalised groups in NI.⁴⁷ Steps have been taken in NI to temporarily mitigate the effects until March 2028.⁴⁸ Particular concerns regarding the five week wait for Universal Credit, the two-child limit, support for private renters,⁴⁹ the assessment process for Personal Independence Payments,⁵⁰ Work Capability Assessments,⁵¹ and use of household (not separate) payments persist.⁵² **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that social**

security is accessible, promptly available in NI, and that maximum available resources are used to guarantee an adequate standard of living to all recipients, which is guided by a cumulative impact assessment that is monitored regularly. This includes ensuring that a comprehensive and secure mitigation package is applied in NI where necessary and maintained for as long as is required. It includes repealing the two-child tax limit, making separate Universal Credit payments the primary option, remedying the five-week wait for Universal Credit, and promptly remedying accessibility and assessment issues with Universal Credit and Personal Independent Payment.

Funeral Payments

8.2 The average cost of a funeral in NI is £3,256, a rise of 105 per cent since 2004.⁵³ The eligibility criteria for a Funeral Expenses Payment is complex, inflexible and exclusionary.⁵⁴ In NI, a portion of the Funeral Expenses Payment is capped and does not keep pace with inflation.⁵⁵ In NI, the Bereavement Support Payment is not available for co-habitees without dependent children.⁵⁶ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK:**

- **provides suitable and sufficient support to families in NI to help with increasing costs associated with funerals, keeping pace with inflation, and inclusive of students, individuals without recourse, people seeking asylum and low-income families not in receipt of a qualifying benefit; and**
- **extends Bereavement Support Payments to co-habitees without dependent children, including in NI.**

9.0 Article 10 – Protection of Family, Mothers and Children

Accessible childcare

9.1 There remains no statutory duty in NI to provide adequate childcare provision.⁵⁷ Costs and accessibility of childcare in NI are having a significant effect on parents' employment, particularly for women, one parent families, low-income households and parents whose children have additional needs.⁵⁸ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that childcare facilities and arrangements in NI are available, affordable and accessible. This includes that a flexible and accessible childcare model is in place in NI that operates outside traditional working hours. It also includes introducing statutory arrangements in NI to deliver extended, affordable, responsive, high-quality provision of early education and care initiatives for families with**

children, using the provision available in other parts of the UK as a starting point.

Access to financial support for unmarried couples

9.2 The UK Supreme Court ruled that the requirement that couples must be married to access Widowed Parent's Allowance breached their ECHR rights.⁵⁹ After several delays,⁶⁰ the Bereavement Benefits (Remedial) Order 2023 came into force, enabling remedial payments for unmarried couples to be made back to 30 August 2018.⁶¹ However, concerns remain that the amendments do not extend to individuals who do not have children and do not require ex gratia payments to fully recompense individuals bereaved back to February 2016.⁶² **The NIHRC recommends that the UK Government ensures that Bereavement Benefits (Remedial) Order 2023 is fully retrospective to February 2016 for the families who made claims based on the High Court of Justice in NI's judgment.**

Foster care

9.3 Unlike in Great Britain, the Foster Placement (Children) Regulations (NI) 1996 do not include minimum standards for foster care or a statutory requirement for foster care to be inspected. Minimum Kinship Care Standards, which are subject to regular review, were introduced in 2012.⁶³ There are a range of additional issues regarding foster care in NI, including the need for regulations and standards and an inspection regime.⁶⁴ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK develops and implements minimum standards of foster care without further delay and introduces a statutory requirement for foster care to be inspected in NI.**

Child, early and forced marriage

9.4 Unlike in England and Wales,⁶⁵ the Marriage (NI) Order 2003 permits the marriage of a child aged 16 or 17 years with the consent of their parents or legal guardians.⁶⁶ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK:**

- **expeditiously repeals all legal provisions permitting the marriage of children in NI and increases the minimum age for marriage to 18 years for all children in NI; and**
- **strengthens efforts to combat forced marriages in NI, such as sensitising parents on the need for full and free consent to marry.**

Domestic and sexual abuse and violence

9.5 Disaggregated data is lacking and many incidents go unreported, but domestic and sexual abuse and violence remains high in NI, with a disproportionate effect on women.⁶⁷ There is insufficient refuge support in

NI.⁶⁸ Persons with insecure immigration status have limited access to the support that does exist in NI.⁶⁹ There is an increasing acknowledgement of paramilitary-related coercive control in NI, particularly against women.⁷⁰ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that there are specialised, accessible, gender-sensitive support and services for victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence and abuse with guaranteed sustainable funding. This includes support to assist victims and survivors to navigate and exit from paramilitary linked coercive control. Such support should be available regardless of immigration status. Steps taken should be guided by disaggregated data and meaningful engagement with victims, survivors and representative organisations. This includes ensuring that there are sufficient refuge places available in NI for individuals that are accessible at the point of need.**

Abuse in health and social care settings

9.6 Unlike in England and Wales,⁷¹ there is still no free-standing offence where an individual, who has the care of another individual by virtue of being a care worker, ill-treats or wilfully neglects that individual in NI.⁷² Work is ongoing to eliminate the use of restrictive practices, starting by ensuring the use of restrictive practices is minimised and only used when absolutely necessary.⁷³ The Muckamore Abbey Hospital inquiry continues, with 15 people being prosecuted.⁷⁴ The inquiry is facing legal challenge from family members of patients⁷⁵ and there is no set deadline for closing the hospital.⁷⁶ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK:**

- **promptly introduces a freestanding offence in NI where an individual, who has the care of another individual by virtue of being a care worker, ill-treats or wilfully neglects that individual; and**
- **ensures that findings from investigations into human rights abuses in care settings in NI are addressed immediately and fully remedied, and put effective complaints mechanisms in place, which is accessible and monitored to ensure that such breaches do not recur in the future.**

9.7 The UK-COVID Inquiry is investigating issues within health and social care settings across the UK, including in NI, with its work continuing.⁷⁷ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK adopts the recommendations from the COVID-19 Inquiry in relation to the management of the pandemic in care homes, ensuring that learning is disseminated across the sector and that a human rights-based plan is in place for any future public health emergency or pandemic.**

Carers

9.8 There are more than 290,000 unpaid carers in NI, with nearly two thirds of whom are women and 30 per cent living in poverty.⁷⁸ Many carers in NI are unable to access support or take the breaks and respite that they need, leaving carers susceptible to mental ill-health, loneliness, deteriorating health and burnout.⁷⁹ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK promptly develops, implements and monitors an up-to-date Carers Strategy and measurable action plan for NI, involving carers and their representative organisations at every stage of this process. This should include concrete steps for providing accessible support to unpaid carers, with consideration of specific needs, such as for young or older carers. Additionally, financial support should be provided that is proportional to additional costs for carers and the rising cost of living, including providing a proportional uplift to the Carers' Allowance; introducing an additional carers recognition payment; introducing a young carer's recognition payment; introducing a payment where more than one child is being cared for; and introducing a relaxation of the earnings rules which when exceeded, end entitlement to benefit.**

10.0 Article 11 – Adequate Standard of Living

Poverty

10.1 An anti-poverty strategy for NI is still awaited, which is to include consideration of child poverty.⁸⁰ In 2022/2023, 349,000 (18 per cent) were living in relative poverty,⁸¹ and 271,000 (14 per cent) were living in absolute poverty in NI.⁸² UK inflation sits at 2.6 per cent, but reached a high of 11 per cent in 2022.⁸³ The effects of increased costs and financial uncertainty continue to be felt by individuals and families in NI.⁸⁴ There are 45 per cent in fuel poverty in NI, the highest rate in the UK.⁸⁵ In 2024, Winter Fuel Payments continued for individuals in NI born before 25 September 1957. Eligible applicants were provided with between £250 and £600 for heating bills. The UK Government announced in July 2024 that this payment was to be means tested. The Department for Communities NI is exploring the introduction of a one-off hardship payment for individuals in receipt of state pension who are no longer entitled to Winter Fuel Payment due to the changes.⁸⁶ The use of foodbanks and 'warm banks' continues to increase in NI.⁸⁷ Education costs, such as school uniforms contribute to poverty levels.⁸⁸ The rising cost of living has a disproportionate effect on women in NI.⁸⁹ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK promptly develops, implements, monitors and adequately resources an anti-poverty strategy and up-to-date fuel poverty strategy for NI, with a measurable action plan and adequate long-term resources, that is guided by meaningful engagement with affected individuals and their representative organisations at every stage of the process. The anti-poverty strategy should contain specific actions to eradicate child poverty in NI, including by establishing concrete and time-limited targets with measurable**

indicators, and regular monitoring and reporting on the reduction of child poverty in NI.

Debt vulnerability

10.2 In NI, 25 per cent of adults have low financial resilience, with 14 per cent of adults in NI finding it hard to keep up with bills and loans and six per cent of adults in NI in financial difficulty.⁹⁰ Debt vulnerability in NI has an added dimension with paramilitary groups often operating as illegal lenders.⁹¹ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK takes concrete steps to provide the necessary financial support, debt relief and education to ensure individuals in NI are financially resilient and not at risk from illegal lenders. This includes supporting individuals in NI to safely extract themselves from illegal lending and to prosecute the illegal lenders.**

Access to food

10.3 In NI, 26 per cent of the population are food insecure.⁹² There have been at least 90,300 emergency food parcels distributed annually in NI, including over 38,000 parcels for children.⁹³ There is limited consideration of individuals with allergies or food intolerances.⁹⁴ People with disabilities, working age adults, particularly individuals living alone, people with caring responsibilities, women, and children are overrepresented among individuals using foodbanks in NI.⁹⁵ Free school meals during school holidays are not available in NI.⁹⁶ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK takes steps to ensure that there is food security in NI, including promptly developing, implementing and monitoring a rights-based strategy for the protection of the right to adequate and good quality food and the promotion of healthy diets in NI. Such measures should consider and reasonably accommodate food allergies and intolerances. Also, measures should ensure that Free School Meals are consistently available during school holidays and can be fully accessed by children in NI as required.**

Crisis fund

10.4 The Crisis Fund provides non-permanent emergency support to individuals with no other means of support.⁹⁷ There have been calls to make the Crisis Fund permanent with guaranteed funding.⁹⁸ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK places the Crisis Fund on a permanent footing, with guaranteed funding, while addressing the causes of destitution in the first instance, rather than rely on a discretionary fund to address destitution when it emerges. This includes introducing measures to guarantee targeted support to all individuals living in poverty or at risk of poverty, including people seeking asylum, refugees, migrants and other groups at particular risk.**

Asylum financial support

10.5 Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 provides support for people seeking asylum and their dependents who appear to be destitute or who are likely to become destitute.⁹⁹ This support is insufficient with people seeking asylum in NI finding it difficult to afford the basic essentials.¹⁰⁰ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that the level of financial support provided to people seeking asylum reflects the cost of living across the UK and that no individual in NI is exposed to destitution.**

Overcrowding in housing

10.6 Across NI, 90 per cent of NI Housing Executive estates are segregated.¹⁰¹ Research suggests that individuals who identify as other or no religion, often minority ethnic residents, live in the smallest homes, experience the most overcrowding and are more likely to live in poor standard housing in NI.¹⁰² Roma communities have specific difficulties in finding appropriate rental properties, with reports of discrimination by rental agencies, leading to overcrowding.¹⁰³ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK addresses overcrowding in housing in NI, including by tackling discrimination against minority ethnic communities in private rental markets. This should include putting safeguards in place to regulate and ensure non-discrimination within private rental markets.**

Homelessness

10.7 In NI, most recently 16,943 presented as homeless, with 11,537 households accepted as statutorily homeless.¹⁰⁴ This figure does not include 'hidden homeless'.¹⁰⁵ Lack of reasonable, available accommodation, family breakdown, neighbourhood harassment and domestic violence are contributing factors.¹⁰⁶ In one year, 188 homeless people died in NI.¹⁰⁷ The Vagrancy Act 1824 and Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847 continue to criminalise homelessness in NI.¹⁰⁸ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK:**

- **eliminates all forms of homelessness in NI. This includes working with representative organisations and housing support organisations to identify effective early intervention models and to address the causes and effects of homelessness, particularly from a gender-sensitive perspective;**
- **identifies and addresses factors contributing to deaths of homeless individuals in NI, particularly of rough sleepers; and**
- **ensures that homelessness is not criminalised in NI, including through promptly repealing NI-applicable provisions of the Vagrancy Act 1824 and the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847.**

Social Housing

10.8 There is a shortage of social housing in NI.¹⁰⁹ A new housing supply strategy is awaited.¹¹⁰ Current targets fall significantly short of the number of new dwellings required.¹¹¹ Rising rents and insecure rental arrangements continue to cause concern.¹¹² Social housing in NI is allocated on a points-based system, which determines an applicant's position on the waiting list.¹¹³ The current definition for intimidation points excludes domestic violence, coercive control or intimidation due to nationality.¹¹⁴ There is no official appeals mechanism.¹¹⁵ The informal complaints procedure is lengthy and exacerbates harm on households already at risk.¹¹⁶ Segregation and paramilitary intimidation remain prevalent in NI,¹¹⁷ with a rise in the use of intimidation tactics against racial and ethnic minorities within housing estates.¹¹⁸ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK:**

- **ensures that there is sufficient and appropriate long-term social housing available to meet demand in NI, including mitigating measures to address existing waiting lists;**
- **revises the housing selection scheme in NI to ensure that it effectively considers applicants' circumstances and reflects up-to-date common challenges faced by individuals and households in NI, in addition to providing adequate mechanisms for appeal; and**
- **promptly, robustly and collaboratively eradicates paramilitary and sectarian intimidation that causes families to be forced out of their homes in NI. This includes actively monitoring the situation by ensuring that comprehensive equality data on housing in NI is regularly gathered, monitored, evaluated and published.**

Asylum and refugee resettlement

10.9 In NI, private hotels are often used as contingency accommodation for families.¹¹⁹ Statutory support services in NI have concerns about their ability to meet the complex social, physical and mental health needs of families in hotels.¹²⁰ Families have experienced negative attitudes from staff working in hotels, have issues with the provision of quality, culturally appropriate food and there is a lack of engagement with the views of children and young people living in hotels.¹²¹ UK Home Office dispersal accommodation is often inadequate, with affected residents living with damp or mould.¹²²

10.10 Individuals who receive refugee status are evicted from dispersal accommodation and given 28 days to find alternative accommodation.¹²³ This often involves presenting to the NI Housing Executive as homeless and being offered accommodation that is often of a temporary nature and

in a different area away from established services and support networks.¹²⁴

The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that:

- **the support and accommodation provided to refugees and people seeking asylum in NI is urgently reviewed to ensure it is adequate, fit for purpose and culturally appropriate. This includes the adoption of a realistic, long-term strategy aimed at expeditiously ending the use of the 'contingency' asylum accommodation model in NI, particularly for families with children and people with specific needs; and**
- **the transition from Home Office accommodation to "move on" accommodation for people who receive refugee status is co-ordinated and as undisruptive as possible, particularly where children are affected.**

Travellers' accommodation

10.11 Existing law and practice do not provide for sufficient, habitable and culturally adequate Travellers' accommodation in NI.¹²⁵ The Unauthorised Encampments (NI) Order 2005 disproportionately affects Traveller communities in NI and threatens their nomadic culture.¹²⁶ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that it is recognising and facilitating the cultural rights of Travellers in NI to live their traditional lifestyle. This includes ensuring that there is sufficient Traveller-specific accommodation available in NI with sufficient access to essential utilities on a long-term basis and ensures that the Unauthorised Encampments (NI) Order 2005 is promptly repealed.**

11.0 Article 12 – Right to Physical and Mental Health

Access to healthcare for migrants

11.1 Migrants often encounter barriers to accessing healthcare in NI.¹²⁷ There is a lack of healthcare provision, including mental health services, for migrants, particularly people seeking asylum, disabled, trauma experienced or have complex needs.¹²⁸ People seeking asylum in temporary and contingency hotel accommodation have raised concerns about lack of access to healthcare information, inadequate provision for medical needs and significant delays in health assessments.¹²⁹ There are reports of migrants being questioned about immigration status at the point of contact with health services.¹³⁰ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK identifies and minimises procedural barriers to all migrants and people seeking asylum accessing healthcare. This includes introducing guidance for healthcare professionals on providing effective access.**

Access to reproductive healthcare

11.2 Abortion has been legalised in NI on a range of grounds, with most services in operation.¹³¹ Funding is available for a regional surgical abortion service up to 23 weeks and 6 days, but is limited in practice to 20 weeks due to training delays and the service remains fragile due to staff shortages.¹³² After 20 weeks gestation, travel to England continues for anyone that requires a surgical abortion.¹³³ Telemedicine is unavailable in NI, unlike the rest of the UK.¹³⁴ Regional guidance on what does and does not constitute conscientious objection is lacking.¹³⁵ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that:**

- **sufficient, long-term, ring-fenced funding is available and fully utilised to maintain consistent and stable abortion services in line with the Abortion (NI) Regulations in every Health and Social Care Trust area in NI and the necessary funding for abortion services in NI is an addition to the Department of Health NI's broader budget;**
- **telemedicine is an option for early medical abortions in NI under certain circumstances, as in other parts of the UK, and provides a clear pathway to care and after care for telemedicine abortions, including for individuals using unregistered sources; and**
- **comprehensive, regional guidance on conscientious objection in relation to abortion in NI is introduced.**

Gender recognition

11.3 Gender-affirming healthcare in NI has a waiting list of at least three years.¹³⁶ Gender recognition continues to be based on a medical model of assessment.¹³⁷ An indefinite ban on the private sale and supply of puberty-suppressing hormones has been introduced in NI.¹³⁸ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that the gender recognition process in NI is amended to reflect the self-declaration model. This process should be affordable, respectful and accessible, including effectively training staff and professionals across an individual's gender recognition journey and that that transgender children are supported effectively and that the best interests of the child are the primary consideration.**

Healthcare waiting lists

11.4 In 2023/2024, 121,043 patients spent over 12 hours in an emergency department in NI.¹³⁹ In 2023, 696,000 patients were on waiting lists in NI, with 197,345 (49 per cent) waiting over a year for an initial outpatient appointment, 64,513 (54 per cent) waiting over a year for inpatient treatment and 46,511 (27 per cent) waiting over 26 weeks for a diagnostic test.¹⁴⁰ Waiting list performance levels are "significantly worse in NI

compared with the other UK regions".¹⁴¹ Waiting lists for mental health services are a particular challenge, with poor mental health in NI costing £3.4 billion annually.¹⁴² **The NIHRC recommends that the UK:**

- **immediately develops, implements and monitors a targeted, measurable and appropriately financed plan of action aimed at eradicating unreasonable waiting times in NI, and eliminating barriers in access to healthcare and services in NI. This includes ensuring that resources and finances available are ring-fenced and sufficient to satisfy need on a long-term basis and ensure effective communication with patients. This also includes ensuring consideration of specific needs, such as gender, age, disability, race or ethnicity, and rurality; and**
- **promptly and fully addresses the backlog regarding mental healthcare waiting lists in NI and that long-term measures with ring-fenced funding and robust monitoring are in place to ensure that mental healthcare services and support are expeditiously available to all in NI, as required. This includes consideration of the specific needs of specialised services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and support for suicide prevention.**

Menopause

11.5 There is no specific protection against discrimination relating to menopause in NI.¹⁴³ The law also does not reflect the intersectional nature of menopause in many cases.¹⁴⁴ There remains a lack of support, medication, and treatment for menopause in NI.¹⁴⁵ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures perimenopausal and menopausal women in NI have equal access to employment throughout their working life, and ensure perimenopausal and menopausal women in NI have access to medication and treatments on a long-term and affordable basis.**

Period poverty

11.6 There have been significant developments in addressing period poverty in NI.¹⁴⁶ However, due to broader cuts to funding for the provision of free period products was reduced by more than 40 per cent.¹⁴⁷ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures provision for free period products in NI is as wide as possible to avoid divergence in access, for example, places of detention and civil society organisations that provide essential public services should be included. Steps should be taken to ensure provision does not become an undue burden on the organisations and premises affected in NI. Also, that period poverty levels in NI are effectively monitored and comprehensive disaggregated data is disseminated to identify potential gaps.**

Additionally, ensures that period products that are not free are not inaccessibly priced and are fully accessible in NI.

12.0 Articles 13 and 14 – Education

Academic selection

12.1 Unregulated academic selection continues in NI,¹⁴⁸ which damages children's mental health,¹⁴⁹ “magnifies inequalities” for specific disadvantaged groups of children,¹⁵⁰ and damages the life-chances of a large proportion of the school population.¹⁵¹ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK promptly introduces a non-selective system of post-primary school admission and that the two-tier system of education in NI is abolished. This process should be undertaken through meaningful consultation with schools, parents, guardians, carers and children.**

Bullying

12.2 Specific groups of children in NI remain particularly affected by bullying, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning) and intersex+ pupils and individuals from a minority ethnic community.¹⁵² **The NIHRC recommends that the UK implements targeted measures to address bullying, including cyberbullying, on the grounds of race, sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics, disability, migration or other status in all NI schools. This includes ensuring that children, all teachers and other education providers are trained on how to identify, address and remedy the effects of bullying.**

Access to education for specific groups of children

12.3 Children of migrant families make up at least 5 per cent of all school enrolments in NI.¹⁵³ Support for these children is ad-hoc and short-term which effects provision, including access to language supports, uniform grants, free school meals and free school transport.¹⁵⁴ Some children who have been granted refugee status or other humanitarian protection experience disruption to their education due to being evicted from UK Home Office accommodation.¹⁵⁵ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK:**

- **ensures that all children seeking asylum and children from migrant families in NI have timely access to education and other necessary supports, such as language classes, uniform grants, school meals and transport; and**
- **reviews the curriculum, initial teacher education and in-service professional development to ensure sufficient representation and awareness of racial, ethnic and cultural diversities across education in NI. This includes meaningful consultation with**

parents, guardians, children and representative organisations at every stage of the process.

12.4 Traveller and Roma children have some of the lowest levels of educational attainment of all equality groups in NI.¹⁵⁶ Early intervention, teacher training and a bespoke approach to the school curriculum reflecting a child's specific needs are required.¹⁵⁷ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that educational underachievement in NI is addressed, including a focus on addressing inequalities for Traveller and Roma children.**

Integrated education

12.5 There are 72 grant-aided integrated schools in NI.¹⁵⁸ There are 27,700 pupils (7.8 per cent) enrolled in integrated education.¹⁵⁹ The Integrated Education Act 2022 places a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage, facilitate and the development of Integrated Education.¹⁶⁰ An Independent Review specifically recommended an increase in the number of integrated schools in NI.¹⁶¹ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK fully utilises the Integrated Education Act 2022 and promptly takes action to ensure integrated education provision in NI meets demand, including providing the necessary support for schools that self-nominate to transition to an integrated school.**

Shared Education

12.6 The Shared Education Act (NI) 2016 places an obligation on the Department of Education to promote shared education.¹⁶² After the UK's exit from the EU, future funding for shared education in NI is unclear.¹⁶³ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that long-term, secure funding for shared education is guaranteed in NI. This includes ensuring that any potential negative effect on funding of shared education due to the UK leaving the EU will be adequately and appropriately mitigated.**

Relationships and sexuality education

12.7 The Relationships and Sexuality Education (NI) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 made age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion, a compulsory component of the curriculum in NI.¹⁶⁴ Opt-outs from relationships and sexuality education for pupils at the request of parents are permitted.¹⁶⁵ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK:**

- **considers the recommendations from the UN CRC Committee and rulings from the ECtHR concerning the provision of withdrawal from relationships and sexuality**

education in NI and puts in place ongoing arrangements to monitor the effectiveness of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (NI) (Amendment) Regulations 2023. This includes the collection and publication of disaggregated data on opt-outs in NI, which also aims to provide insight into the reasons for the withdrawals; and

- **develops a strategy for NI that aims to raise awareness of the benefits of holistic relationships and sexuality education and to address any myths or misconceptions relating to the provision of relationships and sexuality education that may increase the likelihood of parental withdrawal. This includes developing measures to mitigate against the adverse effects of children and young people in NI being withdrawn from relationships and sexuality education.**

Special educational needs

12.8 The Special Educational Needs Disability Act (NI) 2016 has not been fully implemented.¹⁶⁶ There have been several critical reviews of special educational needs and services in NI.¹⁶⁷ Approximately 400 children with special educational needs in NI were on waiting lists for a suitable school place for the 2024/2025 academic year.¹⁶⁸ While most children on waiting lists were provided with placements by the start of the school year, this is not guaranteed and the delay and lack of communication experienced while awaiting a decision has caused parents and children “huge anxiety”¹⁶⁹ and affects the ability to “plan accordingly”, which can result in children not being able to avail of or continue with their school placement.¹⁷⁰ On occasion, civil society in NI has had to provide alternative education due to lack of special school places.¹⁷¹ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that:**

- **the necessary revised Special Educational Needs Regulations and Code of Practice for NI are progressed as a matter of priority and ensure that the transformation of special education needs services in NI is robust, adequately funded and effectively implemented as a matter of priority;**
- **targets for delivery are set and monitored, prioritising children’s needs and requisite support, including education, transport and other measures to ensure effective educational engagement and improve children’s outcomes; and**
- **that children with special educational needs in NI that have been adversely affected by past failings of the assessment process are effectively remedied.**

13.0 Article 15 – Participation in Cultural Life

Minority culture and language

13.1 The institutions created under the Identity and Language (NI) Act 2022 to enhance and protect the Irish language and enhance and develop the Ulster-Scots tradition in NI have not been established.¹⁷² An Irish Language Strategy and an Ulster Scots Strategy are still awaited.¹⁷³ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK protects, promotes and progresses minority language and culture in NI, particularly regarding Irish language and Ulster Scots culture and heritage. This includes undertaking meaningful engagement with minorities and their representative organisations in NI.**

Access to sport

13.2 In NI, young persons with disabilities and young people entitled to free school meals were less likely to participate in sport and be a member of a team or club that involved taking part in physical activity.¹⁷⁴ Decisions are being taken by sporting bodies which may impede access for transgender people to participate and compete in sports in NI.¹⁷⁵ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK:**

- **adopts a concrete plan of action, with resources and measurable objectives, to implement legislation, regulation and standardisation to ensure that everyone has access to inclusive participation in all sports facilities and sufficient support for recreational activities, in line with promoting independent living. This includes accommodating and providing specific measures as required, for example, for persons with disabilities or members of racial or ethnic minority communities; and**
- **ensures individuals who wish to participate in sport in NI are supported to do so guided by the principles of reasonableness, proportionality and non-discrimination.**

Supporting the arts

13.3 Funding for arts organisations in NI has decreased by 40 per cent.¹⁷⁶ In 2023/2024, arts activity fell by 22 per cent in NI, compared to 2022/2023.¹⁷⁷ Cost of living increases and limited available public funding are having a negative effect on the arts in NI.¹⁷⁸ There has been a marked increase in people employed in part-time and freelance contracts within the arts sector.¹⁷⁹ Rates of persons with disabilities employed within the arts remain below the national average in NI.¹⁸⁰ **The NIHRC recommends that the UK ensures that the arts sector in NI receives sufficient, secure, long-term funding that is proportional to inflation.**

¹ The Windsor Framework was formerly known as the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland to the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement 2020 and all references to the Protocol in this document have been updated to reflect this change. (see Decision No 1/2023 of the Joint Committee established by the Agreement on the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community of 24 March 2023 laying down arrangements relating to the Windsor Framework).

² The UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement, including the Windsor Framework, is incorporated into UK law via the EU (Withdrawal) Act 2018, including Section 7A.

³ Equality Commission NI, 'Equality Data'. Available at: [ECNI - Equality Data](#)

⁴ NI Human Rights Commission, 'Cumulative Impact Assessment of Tax and Social Security Reforms in NI' (NIHRC, 2019).

⁵ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'Implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: May 2020 Update' (FCO, 2020).

⁶ Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, 'Environmental Improvement Plan for NI' (DAERA, 2024).

⁷ Letter from Former Chair of the NI Affairs Committee, Sir Robert Buckland, to Interim Minister for the Economy, Deirdre Hargey MLA, 24 May 2024.

⁸ In 2023, further research estimated that air pollution was attributable to 900 premature deaths annually in NI. See Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, 'Air Pollution in NI: 2021' (DAERA, 2022); Queen's University Belfast and Technology University Dublin 'Air Pollution and Mortality on the Island of Ireland' (QUB and TUD, 2023).

⁹ Anna Maguire, and Jessica Lawrence, 'Downpatrick flooding has "ripped the heart" out of town', *BBC News*, 2 November 2023; 'Newry swamped by floods a second time as country braces for Storm Ciarán', *The Irish Times*, 1 November 2023; Gillian Anderson, 'Department for Infrastructure responds after claims Derry treated with "utter contempt" over flooding', *Derry Journal*, 24 March 2023; 'Rural residents "living in fear and dread" over flooding', *The Irish News*, 30 January 2023; 'Flooding in Tyrone and Donegal causes "catastrophic damage"', *BBC News*, 23 July 2023; Louise Cullen and Alan Haslam, 'Portrush: Beaches red-flagged for toxic algae risk', *BBC News*, 26 July 2023; Louise Cullen, 'Lough Neagh: The year the UK's largest lake turned green', *BBC News*, 2 January 2024; Louise Cullen, 'Lough Neagh: Toxic algae potentially waking again', *BBC News*, 7 March 2024; 'Earl and minister hold "constructive" Lough Neagh talks', *BBC News*, 17 July 2024.

¹⁰ House of Commons NI Affairs Committee, 'The Funding and Delivery of Public Services in NI' (NIAC, 2024), at para 75.

¹¹ A Bill of Rights for NI was committed to under the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998. An NI Assembly Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights was established to consider the creation of a Bill of Rights for NI. A panel of five experts was to be appointed by the then First Minister and Deputy First Minister to support the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights. However, these appointments have not been made. See NI Assembly, 'Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Bill of Rights' (NIA, 2022), at para 13.

¹² NI Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for NI, 'Working Paper: The Scope of Article 2(1) of the Northern Ireland Protocol' (NIHRC and ECNI, 2022), at 17.

¹³ Directive 2000/43/EC, 'EU Council Directive on Implementing the Principle of Equal Treatment between Persons Irrespective of Racial or Ethnic Origin', 29 June appendix 2000; Directive 2000/78/EC, 'EU Council Directive on Establishing a General Framework for Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation', 27 November 2000; Directive 2004/113/EC, 'EU Council Directive on Implementing the Principle of Equal Treatment between Men and Women in the access to and supply of goods and Services', 13 December 2004; Directive 2006/54/EC, 'EU Council Directive on the Implementation of the Principle of Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Matters of Employment and Occupation', 5 July 2006; Directive 2010/41/EU, 'EU Parliament and EU Council Directive on the Application of the Principle of Equal Treatment between Men and Women Engaged in an Activity in a Self-employed Capacity', 7 July 2010; Directive 79/7/EEC, 'EU Council Directive on the Progressive Implementation of the Principle of Equal Treatment for Men and Women in Matters of Social Security', 19 December 1978.

¹⁴ UK Parliament Hansard, 'House of Lords: Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill – Lord Callanan', 2 March 2023. See NI Human Rights Commission and Equality Commission for NI, 'Briefing on the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill' (NIHRC and ECNI, 2023).

¹⁵ Letter from the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, Kemi Badenoch MP, to the House of Lords Sub Committee on the Ireland/NI Protocol, 16 June 2023. See also Letter from the Minister for Industry and Economic Security at the Department of Business and Trade, Nusrat Ghani MP, to the House of Lords Sub-Committee on the Ireland/NI Protocol, 11 September 2023; Letter from the Chair of the House of Lords Sub-Committee on the Ireland/NI Protocol, Lord Jay, to the Minister for Industry and Economic Security at the Department of Business and Trade, Nusrat Ghani MP, 19 October 2023; Letter from Minister for Industry and Economic Security at the Department of Business and Trade, Nusrat Ghani MP, to the House of Lords Sub-Committee on the Ireland/NI Protocol, 24 November 2023.

¹⁶ NI Human Rights Commission and Equality Commission for NI, 'NI Human Rights Commission and Equality Commission for NI Submission to the European Scrutiny Committee Inquiry on Retained EU law: The Progress and Mechanics of Reform' (NIHRC and ECNI, 2024).

¹⁷ For example, the Illegal Migration Act, the NI Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act and the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill. See 'Government officially scraps Dominic Raab's Bill of Rights plan', *Politics.Co.UK*, 27 June 2023.

¹⁸ NI Human Rights Commission, 'Evidence to Joint Committee on Human Rights Legislative Scrutiny of the Bill of Rights Bill' (NIHRC, 2022); NI Human Rights Commission, 'Advice on the Bill of Rights Bill' (NIHRC, 2022); NI Human Rights Commission, 'Submission to the House of Lords on the Illegal Migration Bill' (NIHRC, 2023); NI Human Rights Commission, 'Advice on NI Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill' (NIHRC, 2022); NI Human Rights Commission, 'Supplementary Briefing: UK Government's Proposed Amendments to NI Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill' (NIHRC, 2023); Letter from the NI Human Rights Commission to the Lord Jay, Chair of the House of Lords Sub-Committee on the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol, 30 January 2023; NI Human Rights Commission, 'Supplementary Briefing: UK Government's Additional Proposed Amendments to NI Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill' (NIHRC, 2023).

¹⁹ Discrimination remains prohibited across several pieces of legislation in NI, resulting in a complex framework. The UK Government has a further obligation under Protocol Article 2 to ensure that NI law keeps pace with Directive 2000/43/EC Racial Equality Directive, to the extent that rights or protections are enhanced as a result of amendments or replacement. See House of Commons NI Affairs Committee, 'The Experiences of Minority Ethnic and Migrant People in NI: Second Report of Session 2021-22' (NIAC, 9 March 2022), at 3.

²⁰ The New Decade, New Approach Agreement 2020 committed to introducing social inclusion strategies in NI, including a gender equality strategy, a disability strategy, a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (Or Questioning), Intersex+ Strategy and an anti-poverty strategy. In 2024, the Minister for Communities confirmed that the Department for Communities in NI was moving forward on the development of these strategies but that final decisions on the timing of the implementation of the strategies would be subject to NI Executive agreement. See NI Office, 'New Decade, New Approach' (NIO, 2020); Letter from Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons MLA, to Gender Equality Co-design Group Members, 11 October 2024.

²¹ Council Directive 2024/1499/EU, 'Directive on Standards for Equality Bodies in the Field of Equal Treatment between Persons Irrespective of their Racial or Ethnic Origin, Equal Treatment in Matters of Employment and Occupation between Persons Irrespective of their Religion or Belief, Disability, Age or Sexual Orientation, Equal Treatment between Women and Men in Matters of Social Security and in the Access to and Supply of Goods and Services, and Amending Directives 2000/43/EC and 2004/113/EC', 7 May 2024; Directive 2024/1500, 'Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on Standards for Equality Bodies in the Field of Equal Treatment and Equal Opportunities between Women and Men in Matters of Employment and Occupation, and Amending Directives 2006/54/EC and 2010/41/EU', 14 May 2024.

²² Directive 2023/970/EU, 'EU Parliament and Council Directive to Strengthen the Application of the Principle of Equal Pay for Equal Work or Work of Equal Value, between Men and Women Through ay Transparency and Enforcement Mechanisms', 10 May 2023.

²³ The NIHRC considers that, pursuant to Articles 2 and 13 of the Windsor Framework, the relevant provisions of the EU Pay Transparency Directive amend and/or replace provisions in Directive 2006/54/EC, 'EU Parliament and Council Directive on the Implementation of the Principle of Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Matters of Employment and Occupation (Recast)', 5 July 2006 which is listed in Annex 1 of the Windsor Framework. For further discussion of the EU Pay Transparency Directive see Section on 'Right to Work and to Just and Favourable Conditions to Work – Gender Pay Gap' below.

²⁴ This is despite an Independent Review of Hate Crime legislation in NI recommending that stand alone legislation should be introduced. See Email correspondence from the Department of Justice to the NI Human Rights Commission, 10 July 2024; Independent Hate Crime Review Team, 'Hate Crime Legislation in NI: An Independent Review - Consultation Paper' (IHCR, 2020); NI Human Rights Commission, 'Response to Public Consultation on Improving the Effectiveness of Hate Crime Legislation in NI' (NIHRC, 2022).

²⁵ Email correspondence from the Department of Justice to the NI Human Rights Commission, 10 July 2024.

²⁶ The Illegal Migration Act 2023 denies access to the UK asylum system for individuals who have arrived through what are considered by the UK Government to be unofficial routes and prevents such individuals from presenting claims for protection. Individuals can face detention before being removed to another country. There are concerns in relation to limitations in judicial oversight and access to effective remedies, the removal of support to victims and potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking, and the weakening of child protection arrangements. Section 2(2)-2(6), Illegal Migration Act 2023 sets out four conditions, which are essentially that the person arrived in the UK irregularly after 20 July 2023 and did not come directly to the UK from a country in which their life and liberty were threatened. There are minor exceptions in Section 2(11). See NI Human Rights Commission, 'Submission to the House of Lords on the Illegal Migration Bill', (NIHRC, 2023).

²⁷ Directive 2005/85/EC, 'Council of the EU Directive on Minimum Standards on Procedures in Member States for Granting and Withdrawing Refugee Status', 1 December 2005; Directive 2003/9/EC, 'Council of the EU Directive Laying Down Minimum Standards for the Reception of Asylum Seekers', 27 January 2003; Directive 2004/83/EC, 'EU Council Directive on Minimum Standards for the Qualification and Status of Third Country Nationals or Stateless Persons as Refugees or as Persons who Otherwise Need International Protection and the Content of the Protection Granted', 29 April 2004; and Regulation 2013/604/EU, 'EU Parliament and Council Regulation Establishing the Criteria and Mechanisms for Determining the Member State Responsible for Examining an Application for International Protection Lodged in One of the Member States by a Third-country National or a Stateless Person', 26 June 2013.

²⁸ The High Court of Justice in NI found that the provisions on arrangements for: removal and leave; disregard of some claims for asylum, including human rights claims; the powers to grant immigration bail; and decisions relating to a person's age, would cause a diminution of the rights in EU minimum standards enjoyed by people seeking asylum contrary to the commitment in Windsor Framework Article 2, therefore the relevant sections were disapplied in NI. Further, the High Court of Justice in NI issued a declaration of incompatibility in respect of those provisions that were contrary to the ECHR, which applies across the UK. See *In the Matter of an Application by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission for Judicial Review in the Matter of an Application by JR295 For Judicial Review and In the Matter of the Illegal Migration Act 2023* [2024] NIKB 35.

²⁹ The 2024 Act declares Rwanda as a safe third country and removes the possibility of challenging this categorisation. During parliamentary consideration of the Bill, the NIHRC raised concerns about compliance with the ECHR and EU minimum standards within the scope of Windsor Framework Article 2. See NI Human Rights Commission, 'NIHRC Advice on the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration Bill)' (NIHRC, 2024).

³⁰ Price Waterhouse Cooper, 'Women in Work Index 2023' (PWC, 2023); In 2023, NI was recorded as the top performing UK region for women's employment outcomes, with a recorded gender pay gap of five percent. However, NI was also recorded as having the lowest female labour force participation rate. This suggests that while employment outcomes for women in NI are better than other parts of the UK, a lower proportion of working age women in NI are participating in the labour market to begin with. Research by the Nevin Economic Research Institute also found that, controlling for a range of individual, family/household and job characteristics, logged hourly earnings of women in NI are 7.2 percent

lower than men's earnings. See Lisa Wilson and Ciara O'Gorman, 'How are We Unequal? The Adjusted Gender Pay Gap in NI' (NERI, 2023). The Department for Communities NI consulted on proposals to monitor the gender pay gap in NI in November 2024. See Department for Communities, 'The Gender Pay Gap Information Regulations: Public Consultation' (DfC, 2024).

³¹ NI Assembly Hansard, 'Written Answer: Employment Rights Bill – Gordon Lyons MLA – AQW 15701/22-27', 28 October 2024.

³² Department for the Economy, 'The Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill Consultation' (DfE, 2024); NI Human Rights Commission, 'Submission to the Department for the Economy on the Employment Rights Bill Consultation' (NIHRC, 2024).

³³ This is a requirement of Windsor Framework Articles 2 and 13. See Directive 2023/970/EU, 'EU Parliament and Council Directive to Strengthen the Application of the Principle of Equal Pay for Equal Work or Work of Equal Value, between Men and Women Through ay Transparency and Enforcement Mechanisms', 10 May 2023. Equality Commission for NI and NI Human Rights Commission, 'Briefing Paper: The EU Pay Transparency Directive: The UK Government's Dynamic Alignment Obligations Relating to Windsor Framework Article 2' (ECNI and NIHRC, 2024)

³⁴ Joan Ballantine et al, 'Gender Budgeting: Working Paper 1 – What Does the Literature Tell Us? Lessons for NI' (Ark Working Papers, 2021).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The UK Government have made a reservation on Article 6 of the UN ICESCR. People seeking asylum can apply to work in the UK if they have been waiting on a decision on their application for at least 12 months and they are not considered responsible for the delay. See Melanie Gower et al, 'Asylum Seekers: Permission to Work Policy' (HoC, 2022).

³⁷ University of Ulster Economic Policy Centre, 'Disability and the Labour Market' (UUEPC, 2022).

³⁸ NI Executive, 'Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021' (NIE, 2016).

³⁹ This relates to Article 6(1) of the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NI) Order 1978, which is being challenged by the NIHRC. The High Court of Justice in NI found this provision violated Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Court of Appeal in NI reversed the decision of the High Court of Justice in NI and held that Article 6(1) of the 1978 Order is compatible with Article 8 of the ECHR. In October 2024, the UK Supreme Court heard the case, with its judgment awaited. See *In the Matter of an Application by JR123 for Judicial Review* [2022] NIQB 42; *Department of Justice and JR123* [2023] NICA 30.

⁴⁰ Irish Congress of Trade Union, 'Migrant Workers and Their Families in NI: A Trade Union Response' (ICTU, 2023), at 46.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Jane Starling, 'If you want a reference, pay up.' How UK care homes are exploiting overseas nurses', *UNISON Magazine*, 24 February 2022; NI Human Rights Commission, 'Submission to the UN ICESCR Committee: Parallel Report for the List of Issues in Relation to the Seventh Periodic Report of the UK' (NIHRC, 2022).

⁴³ NI Human Rights Commission, 'Submission to the UN ICESCR Committee: Parallel Report for the List of Issues in Relation to the Seventh Periodic Report of the UK' (NIHRC, 2022).

⁴⁴ See *In the Matter of an Application by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission for Judicial Review in the Matter of an Application by JR295 For Judicial Review and In the Matter of the Illegal Migration Act 2023* [2024] NIKB 35; NI Human Rights Commission, 'Submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights' Inquiry on the Illegal Migration Bill' (NIHRC, 2023).

⁴⁵ Article 11 of the EU Trafficking Directive imposes a duty on Member States to ensure assistance and support to victims of trafficking as soon as the competent authorities have reasonable grounds for believing that a person might have been subjected to human trafficking. See *In the Matter of an Application by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission for Judicial Review in the Matter of an Application by JR295 For Judicial Review and In the Matter of the Illegal Migration Act 2023* [2024] NIKB 35, at paras 157-158 and 22; Article 11, Directive 2011/36/EU, 'Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting its Victims, and Replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA', 5 April 2011.

⁴⁶ NI Human Rights Commission, 'Joint NI Human Rights Commission/Equality Commission for NI Briefing Paper on the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking and Electronic Travel Authorisation Provisions in the Nationality and Borders Bill' (NIHRC, 2022).

⁴⁷ NI Human Rights Commission, 'Cumulative Impact Assessment of Tax and Social Security Reforms' (NIHRC, 2019); Women's Policy Group NI, 'NI COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan: Relaunch – One Year On' (WPG, 2021).

⁴⁸ A financial package for mitigation social security reforms has been operational in NI since 2016. In 2022, after several years of uncertainty, bedroom tax mitigations have been extended indefinitely. The Welfare Supplementary Payment (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2022 extend all other existing mitigations, including benefit cap mitigations, until March 2025. The 2022 Regulations also ensure that claimants do not lose their bedroom tax if they move home and that any person who is responsible for children can get an extra payment to cover the benefit cap with the payment being the full value of the cut to their benefits. In December 2024, it was announced that all other existing mitigations would be extended until March 2028. See Department for Communities, 'Press Release: 37,000 now have long term protection from the bedroom tax', 1 March 2022; Welfare Supplementary Payment (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2022; Department for Communities, 'Press Release: Welfare mitigation payments to be extended for another three years', 5 December 2024.

⁴⁹ Welfare Mitigations Review Independent Advisory Panel, 'Welfare Mitigations Review: Independent Advisory Panel Report' (DfC, 2022).

⁵⁰ Independent Mechanism NI, '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' (IMNI, 2023).

⁵¹ Institute for Fiscal Studies, 'Institute for Fiscal Studies Response to Changes to Department for Work and Pensions Work Capability Assessments' (IFS, 2023); Letter from NI Human Rights Commission and Equality Commission for NI to Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Mel Stride MP, 26 October 2023.

⁵² Email correspondence from the Department for Communities to the NI Human Rights Commission, 6 September 2022.

⁵³ These were the average funeral costs in NI as of 2023. In NI, the proportion of families experiencing financial difficulties associated with funerals has risen every year for the last four years, with 55 per cent of affected families took on debt as a result. See Sun Life, 'Cost of Dying: 2024 Report' (Sun Life, 2024); Quaker Social Action, 'Funeral Poverty in NI' (QSA, 2024).

⁵⁴ A key criterion for Funeral Expenses Payment eligibility is that it is considered 'reasonable' for the applicant to take responsibility for the funeral. It excludes students, people with no recourse to public funds, people seeking asylum and people on low income who are not in receipt of a qualifying benefit. See Department for Communities NI, 'Annual Report by the Department for Communities on the Social Fund 2022/23' (DfC, 2023); Quaker Social Action, 'Funeral Poverty in NI' (QSA, 2024).

⁵⁵ Quaker Social Action, 'Funeral Poverty in NI' (QSA, 2024).

⁵⁶ Bereavement Support Payment gives financial help to deal with the more immediate costs caused by the death of a partner. It is paid where the date of death was on or after 6 April 2017. See NI Direct, 'Bereavement Support Payment'. Available at: <https://gov.wales/childcare-3-and-4-year-olds>; Quaker Social Action, 'Funeral Poverty in NI' (QSA, 2024).

⁵⁷ Elsewhere in the UK, there is a statutory duty to provide adequate childcare provision. In 2024, 19 per cent of families in NI use formal childcare with, on average, parents spending around £14,000 a year on formal childcare for a child under five years old. The Pre-School Education Programme in NI funds 1 year of non-compulsory education before a child starts primary school, however this is more limited than the childcare schemes available elsewhere in the UK and Ireland. There are tax, social security and subsidy schemes available in NI to help parents pay for childcare, however, many childcare providers require advance payment and "many low-income families are not in a financial position to make such large, upfront payments. See NI Assembly Research and Information Service, 'Briefing Paper: Economic Inactivity, Key Employment Barriers and Childcare Costs Potentially Impacting Those Barriers: Initial Considerations for NI', 17 May 2024. UK Government, '15 hours Free Childcare for 3 and 4-year-olds'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs/free-childcare-and-education-for-2-to-4-year-olds>; Welsh Government, 'Childcare for 3 and 4 year olds'. Available at: <https://gov.wales/childcare-3-and-4-year-olds>; Scottish Government, 'Early Education and Care'. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/policies/early-education-and-care/early-learning-and-childcare/>; Government of Ireland, 'Early Childhood Care and Education Programme'. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2459ee-early-childhood-care-and-education-programme-ecce>. UK Government, 'Tax-Free Childcare'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/tax-free-childcare>; NI Direct, 'Adviser Discretion Fund'. Available at: [Adviser Discretion Fund \(ADF\) | nidirect](#); Employers for Childcare, 'New NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme to help with childcare costs', 25 June 2024; Department of Education, 'Press Release: Education Minister announces £25million package of measures for early learning and childcare in Northern Ireland', 23 May 2024; NI Assembly Hansard, 'Urgent Written Ministerial Statement: Early Learning and Childcare Measures 2024/25 – Paul Givan MLA, Minister of Education', 23 May 2024.

⁵⁸ Department of Education, 'Review of Childcare Services in NI – Final Report' (DE, 2023), at 132-142.

⁵⁹ *In the Matter of an Application by Siobhan McLaughlin for Judicial Review (NI)* [2018] UKSC 48.

⁶⁰ House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 'Bereavement Support Payment - First Report of Session 2019–20' (WPC, 2019); Draft Bereavement Benefits (Remedial) Order 2021.

⁶¹ Where a claimant's late partner died before this date, the 2023 Remedial Order provides for a part payment of the higher rate of Bereavement Support Payment, if the death was after 5 April 2017, provided that the claim is made by 8 February 2024. Under the Remedial Order, claimants are also eligible for Widowed Parent's Allowance, where their late partner died before 6 April 2017, and they continue to meet the entitlement conditions on 30 August 2018. See Department for Work and Pensions, 'Explanatory Memorandum to The Bereavement Benefits (Remedial) Order 2022' (DWP, 2022).

⁶² The High Court of Justice in NI first considered this issue in February 2016. This recommendation was supported by the House of Commons and House of Lords Joint Committee on Human Rights. See NI Human Rights Commission, 'Submission to Joint Committee for Human Rights on the Proposal for a draft Bereavement Benefits (Remedial) Order 2021' (NIHRC, 2021); House of Commons and House of Lords Joint Committee for Human Rights, 'Proposal for a Draft Bereavement Benefits Remedial Order 2021: Discrimination against Cohabiting Partners' (JCHR, 2021).

⁶³ The Department of Health stated that it would update fostering standards in NI, but this remains outstanding. See Department of Health, 'Minimum Kinship Care Standards NI' (DoH, 2019); Regulatory and Quality Improvement Authority, 'Review of Statutory Fostering Services Overview Report' (RQIA, 2013).

⁶⁴ The Department of Health's response to the Independent Review's recommendations on foster care is awaited. See Department of Health, 'An Independent Review: Children's Social Care Services in NI' (DoH, 2023), at paras 13.4 – 13.30.

⁶⁵ The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022 sets the minimum age for marriage at 18 years old in England and Wales.

⁶⁶ NI Human Rights Commission, 'Submission to Department of Finance Consultation on Marriage Law' (NIHRC, 2022).

⁶⁷ In 2022/2023, there were 32,875 domestic abuse incidents recorded. In 2022/2023, 69 per cent of victims of domestic abuse crimes were women and 31 per cent were men. At least 83 per cent of offenders are men and up to 14 per cent are women. Due to lack of reporting, these figures are only indicative of the extent of the issue, particularly regarding violence against women and girls. Since 2020, 25 women have been murdered by men, or where a man has been charged in connection with the death, in NI. See Police Service NI, 'Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in NI 2004/2005 to 2022/2023' (PSNI 2024); 'Two still held over the murder of a children's nurse in Banbridge', BBC News, 16 December 2024; Eric Spikol et al, 'Male Experience of Intimate Partner Violence: The Male Experience of Intimate Partner Violence Study' (QUB, 2024).

⁶⁸ In 2022/2023, 518 women and 342 children in NI accessed refuges run by Women's Aid NI. Women's Aid NI recorded 7,543 women and 5,948 children accessed outreach support, allowing them to stay in their own homes. See Women's Aid Federation NI, 'Annual Report 2022–2023' (WAFNI, 2023).

⁶⁹ In 2024, the no recourse to public funds rule continues to operate, preventing persons with insecure immigration status from accessing benefits, such as refuge support. The strict eligibility criteria for the Destitute Domestic Violence concession also continues, which may prevent some groups, such as women from the European Economic Area, from benefiting. Delays in issuing the concession also continue. See Centre for Social Justice, 'Out from the Shadows: Transforming support for victims of Modern Slavery and Domestic Abuse with No Recourse to Public Funds' (CSJ 2021).

⁷⁰ Aisling Swaine, '“When You Know What They are Capable Of”: Paramilitary-related Gendered Coercive Control' (Foyle Family Justice Centre and UCD, 2024).

⁷¹ Sections 20–25, Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015.

⁷² Section 267 of the Mental Capacity (NI) Act 2016 makes it an offence to ill-treat, or wilfully neglect a person who lacks capacity and includes a statutory definition of restraint. See NI Human Rights Commission, 'Submission to the Consultation on Proposals for New Mental Capacity Legislation for NI' (NIHRC, 2014).

⁷³ The Department of Health NI is expected to bring an Adult Protection Bill to the NI Executive subject to financial approval. See Department of Health, 'Press Release: Policy to minimise restrictive practices in health and social care published', 20 March 2023; NI Assembly Committee for Health, 'Official Report: Adult Protection Bill – Department of Health – 16 May 2024' (CoH, 2024), at 1–2.

⁷⁴ Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry, 'Press Release: Hearings due to return week commencing 9 September 2024', 25 June 2024; Public Prosecution Service NI, 'Press Release: Public Prosecution Service issues further decisions on Muckamore Abbey Hospital files', 25 October 2024.

⁷⁵ Families have reported feeling sidelined and unfairly treated by the inquiry. See Lyndsey Telford, 'Families of Muckamore patients brand inquiry “a shambles”', *BBC News NI*, 14 November 2024.

⁷⁶ Department of Health, 'Press Release: Written Statement to the NI Assembly by Health Minister Mike Nesbitt – Closure of Muckamore Abbey', 5 June 2024.

⁷⁷ UK Covid-19 Inquiry, 'Structure of the Inquiry'. Available at: <https://covid19.public-inquiry.uk/structure-of-the-inquiry/>

⁷⁸ It is estimated that one in five adults in NI have some form of unpaid caring role Carers NI, 'Unpaid Carers, Poverty and the Cost of Living Crisis in NI' (CNI, 2022), at 5.

⁷⁹ Carers NI, 'State of Caring 2023' (CNI, 2023), at 5–14.

⁸⁰ In 2023, a draft anti-poverty strategy was ready for ministerial consideration, with a public consultation to follow. Members of the Co-Design Group expressed concerns at the Department for Communities' confirmation that it is not intending to provide the Co-Design Group, who were part of the co-design process to set out key priorities for the strategy, with an opportunity to consider the draft anti-poverty strategy, in advance of a public consultation. The Anti-Poverty Strategy has been identified as a priority for the Minister for Communities. Children are at a higher risk of living in poverty than the overall NI population. In 2022/2023, there were approximately 109,000 children in NI (24 per cent) living in relative poverty, while approximately 86,000 children (19 per cent) were recorded as living in absolute poverty. An extension to the most recent Child Poverty Strategy for NI ended in 2022. See Equality Coalition, 'Seminar on Progressing an Anti-Poverty Strategy in NI', 28 June 2023; Letter from Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons MLA, to Gender Equality Co-design Group Members, 11 October 2024, NI Assembly Hansard, 'Written Question: New Child Poverty Strategy – Nick Mathison MLA - AQW 9773/22-27', 22 April 2024; NI Executive, 'The Executive's Child Poverty Strategy' (NIE, 2016); Department for Communities, 'Press Release: Minister announces extension to Child Poverty Strategy', 11 September 2020; Department for Communities, 'NI Poverty and Income Inequality Report 2022/2023' (DfC, 2024).

⁸¹ Compared to 16 per cent in 2021/2022. See Department for Communities NI, 'The NI Poverty and Income Inequality report (2022/2023)' (DfC, 2024).

⁸² Compared to 13 per cent in 2021/2022. See Department for Communities NI, 'The NI Poverty and Income Inequality report (2022/2023)' (DfC, 2024).

⁸³ Bank of England, 'Inflation and the 2 per cent target'. Available at: [Inflation and the 2% target | Bank of England](https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/inflation-and-the-2-per-cent-target/); Office for National Statistics, 'Inflation and Price Indices'. Available at: [Inflation and price indices - Office for National Statistics](https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/)

⁸⁴ Isabella McRae, 'Is the cost of living crisis over and will prices in the UK ever come down?', *Big Issue*, 14 August 2024; Howden Insurance, 'Press Release: When Will the Cost of Living Crisis End?', 20 March 2024.

⁸⁵ See National Energy Action, 'Energy Crisis: Two Years In – Urgent Action on Fuel Poverty Policy' (NEA, 2023), at 12;

⁸⁶ NI Direct, 'Winter Fuel Payment'. Available at: [Winter Fuel Payment | nidirect](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment/); Department for Communities, 'Press Release: Communities Minister statement on Winter Fuel Payment', 30 July 2024; James Martin McCarthy, 'MLA seeks clarity as Minister reveals he is exploring “hardship payment” for those who will miss out on Winter Fuel Payment', *Belfast Live*, 28 October 2024.

⁸⁷ Trussell Trust, 'Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in NI: 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024' (TT, 2024), at 1; Thea Graham, 'Belfast's “warm banks” to help those struggling to stay warm this winter', *Belfast Live*, 16 January 2024; Will Grimond, 'Almost a dozen “warm banks” open in Ards and North Down', *NI World*, 8 December 2022; 'Urgent “warm banks” demand', *The Irish News*, 18 October 2022; Richard Vernalls, 'More councils looking at “warm banks” for residents amid rising energy bills', *Belfast Telegraph*, 30 August 2022; Sherie Ryder and Rozina Sini, 'Cost of living: “We started up a warm bank”, *BBC News*, 20 October 2022

⁸⁸ NI Assembly Hansard, 'Official Report: School Uniform Grant – Paul Givan MLA', 3 June 2024; Rebecca McGirr, 'Cost of living: Minister urged to “step up” over uniform costs', *BBC News*, 6 August 2022; UK Government, 'Press Release: New law to make school uniform costs affordable for all', 29 April 2021; NI Human Rights Commission Engagement with Civil Society Organisations on the UN ICESCR, 11 October 2022; NI Assembly Hansard, 'Official Report: School Uniform Grant – Paul Givan MLA', 3 June 2024.

⁸⁹ Women's Support Network and Ulster University, 'Women's Experiences of the Cost of Living Crisis in NI' (WSN and UU, 2023).

- ⁹⁰ Financial Conduct Authority, 'Financial Lives 2022: Key Findings from the Financial Conduct Authority Lives May 2022 Survey' (FCA, 2023), at 35 and 124.
- ⁹¹ House of Commons NI Affairs Committee, 'The Effect of Paramilitary Activity and Organised Crime on Society in NI: Second Report of Session 2023-2024' (NIAC, 2024), at para 30; Jordan Moats, 'Fears energy payments could be taken by paramilitary loan sharks in NI', *ITV News*, 24 January 2023; Consortium for the Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas 'Women Living with Debt' (CRSWDRA, 2022); 'Spotlight: Paramilitary loan sharks targeting food bank users', *BBC News*, 13 December 2022.
- ⁹² This is based on the responses of 3,159 survey participants. Food insecurity is defined as individuals are facing either reduced quality, variety or desirability of diet, or disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake. See Food Standards Agency, 'Food and You 2: NI Wave 5-6 Key Findings' (FSA, 2023).
- ⁹³ Trussell Trust, 'Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in NI: 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024' (TT, 2024), at 1.
- ⁹⁴ Individuals with food allergies and intolerances are particularly affected by rises in food prices and face challenges accessing appropriate foods, including in foodbanks. NI Commissioner for Children and Young People, 'A Place to Call Home – Report Launch', 23 February 2023; Sara Neill, 'Cost of Living: NI woman with coeliac disease says food bill has doubled', *BBC News*, 24 July 2023.
- ⁹⁵ Trussell Trust and Ipsos, 'Hunger in NI' (TT and Ipsos, 2023), at 26.
- ⁹⁶ Free school meals during the holidays were introduced during COVID-19, but ceased in 2023. This differs from policy elsewhere in the UK. The Department of Education has stated that this is due to significant budgetary constraints. See Robbie Meredith, 'Free school meals: NI 'holiday hunger' payments axed', *BBC News*, 30 March 2023; NI Assembly Hansard, 'Written Answers: Free School Meals – Peter Weir MLA – AQW 7681/17-22', 8 October 2020; Robbie Meredith, 'Free school meals: Meals to be funded during holidays until 2022', *BBC News*, 20 November 2020.
- ⁹⁷ This mainly includes migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum. See NI Executive, 'Press Release: Junior Ministers Jennifer McCann and Jonathan Bell today outlined the benefits of the new Crisis Fund for vulnerable minority ethnic people,' 4 February 2015.
- ⁹⁸ NI Human Rights Commission, 'Response to the NI Affairs Committee Inquiry into the Experience of Minority Ethnic and Migrant People in NI' (NIHRC, 2021); NI Human Rights Commission, 'Response to Public Consultation on Draft Refugee Integration Strategy' (NIHRC, 2022), at para 2.15; NI Human Rights Commission, 'Submission to the CoE Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities – Parallel Report to the CoE Advisory Committee on the Fifth Monitoring Report of the UK' (NIHRC, 2022), at 34-35.
- ⁹⁹ Section 95, Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. See Home Office, 'Immigration Statistics: Asylum and Protection - Section 95 Support By Local Authority' (HO, 2023). See also Gov.UK, 'What You'll Get'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support/what-youll-get>; Section 95 support includes housing and £47.39 allowance per week for each person in self-catered accommodation. For people in accommodation that is catered they receive £9.58 allowance per week. Up to £3 per week is available for people seeking asylum that are pregnant or a mother of a child aged one to three years old. Up to £5 is available for a mother of a baby under 1 year old. In 2023, 3,030 people seeking asylum were in receipt of section 95 support in NI, compared to 1,404 individuals in 2022.
- ¹⁰⁰ British Red Cross, 'The Longest Year: Life Under Local Restrictions – NI Briefing' (BRC, 2021).
- ¹⁰¹ Department for Communities, 'Housing Supply Strategy 2022-2037: Call for Evidence Summary Report' (DfC, 2021), at 28.
- ¹⁰² Lucy Michael et al, 'Inequalities Experienced by Black Asian Minority Ethnic Traveller People: A Report for Belfast City Council, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and Public Health Agency NI' (BCC, 2022), at 7.
- ¹⁰³ UK Parliament Hansard, 'NI Affairs Committee: The Experiences of Minority Ethnic and Migrant People in Northern Ireland Inquiry – Forward South Partnership – MEM0031', October 2021.
- ¹⁰⁴ This is an increase from 10,349 in 2022/2023. See NI Statistics and Research Agency, 'NI Housing Statistics 2023-2024' (DfC, 2024); NI Statistics and Research Agency, 'NI Housing Statistics 2022-2023' (DfC, 2023).
- ¹⁰⁵ These are individuals that have had their application rejected or did not apply in the first place and are not recognised as statutorily homeless.
- ¹⁰⁶ NI Statistics and Research Agency, 'NI Housing Statistics 2022-2023' (DfC, 2023); NI Statistics and Research Agency, 'NI Housing Statistics 2021-2022' (DfC, 2022).
- ¹⁰⁷ This includes homeless people sleeping rough, in emergency accommodation and other temporary settings. The research has found that in the UK, people experiencing homelessness are at least three times more likely to be murdered. There are increased risks of deaths from alcohol, drugs and suicide. Barriers to mental health support, and isolation and mistrust arising from surveillance and enforcement action have been identified as contributors to deaths of homeless people. See Inside Housing 'Press Release: Deaths of people sleeping rough in UK rise 42 per cent, investigation finds', 16 October 2024.
- ¹⁰⁸ The Department of Justice is continuing to review the 1824 Act and 1847 Act, with a view to the provisions that apply to NI eventually being repealed. See NI Policing Board, 'Question to the Chief Constable – Vagrancy Offences – John Blair', 1 April 2021; NI Assembly Hansard, 'Official Report: Vagrancy Laws – Repeal – Naomi Long MLA', 20 May 2024.
- ¹⁰⁹ On 31 March 2024, there were 47,312 applications on the social housing waiting list in NI, an increase from 45,105 applicants on 31 March 2023. Of these applicants, 35,464 were in housing stress, an increase from 32,633 on 31 March 2023. See Department for Communities, 'NI Housing Statistics 2023-2024' (DfC, 2024); Department for Communities, 'NI Housing Statistics 2022-2023' (DfC, 2024).
- ¹¹⁰ NI Assembly Hansard, 'Housing Supply Strategy – Gordon Lyons', 18 June 2024.
- ¹¹¹ In 2015, the NI Housing Executive reported that an overall requirement of 190,000 new dwellings was required in NI between 2008 and 2025, an annual figure of 11,200. See NI Housing Executive, 'NI Housing Market Review and Perspectives 2015-2018' (NIHE, 2015), at 23.
- ¹¹² The Department for Communities NI published an affordable housing policy, aiming to create an additional supply of 'intermediate rent' homes and provide an affordable housing option. The intermediate rent policy aims to develop a framework for more high quality, secure and affordable housing in the long-term. See Department for Communities, 'NI Housing Statistics 2023-2024' (DfC, 2024); NI Statistics and Research Agency, 'NI Housing Statistics 2022-2023' (DfC,

2023); NI Statistics and Research Agency, 'NI Housing Statistics 2021-2022' (DfC, 2022); NI Housing Executive, 'Ending Homelessness Together: Homelessness Strategy 2022-2027 – Year One Annual Progress Report' (NIHE, 2024), at 5-7.

¹¹³ Article 22, Housing (NI) Order 1981; Department for Communities, 'Press Release: New housing policy to deliver more affordable rented homes', 30 March 2023.

¹¹⁴ In 2022, the NIHRC assisted several individuals who have not been awarded intimidation points, despite being victims of intimidation. Intimidation points are awarded to applicants whose home has been destroyed or seriously damaged or they are in serious and imminent risk of being killed or seriously injured as a result of a terrorist, racial or sectarian attack, or because of an attack motivated by hostility because of an individual's disability or sexual orientation or result of an attack due to neighbourhood nuisance or other similar forms of anti-social behaviour. In 2024, the NIHRC initiated a Judicial Review to challenge the operation of the housing selection scheme, with a leave hearing due in February 2025. See NI Housing Executive, 'Housing Selection Scheme Rules' (NIHE, 2014), at Rule 23.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Across NI, 90 per cent of NI Housing Executive estates are segregated, with emblems and flags are erected within new housing estates to demark territory. See Department for Communities, 'Housing Supply Strategy 2022 - 2037: Call for Evidence Summary Report' (DfC, 2021), at 28. NI Assembly Hansard, 'Written Answers: Housing Stock - Minister for Communities, Deirdre Hargey MLA - AQW 2764/22-27', 16 August 2022; Jayne McCormack, 'Paramilitaries: Housing intimidation "rife" in NI', *BBC News*, 23 November 2023; Alliance Party, 'Press Release: Bradshaw submits Private Member's Bill to tackle unwanted flags and banners on public property', 26 June 2024.

¹¹⁸ This has included racist and xenophobic posters, graffiti and physical attacks on property and individuals. See Ita Dungan, 'Eight families forced from homes by racist attacks', *BBC News*, 4 July 2024; Jessica Rice, 'Man forced out of Belfast home after racist graffiti calls for public's support: "This is a time for action"', *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 July 2024.

¹¹⁹ An inspection of contingency accommodation in NI by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration raised concerns that the average length of time families spend in hotels is 201 days, with some families reporting they had been there for over a year. See Meetings between NI Human Rights Commission and civil society organisations, May 2022, August 2022 and October 2022; Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, 'An Inspection of Contingency Asylum Accommodation for Families with Children in NI' (ICIBI, 2024).

¹²⁰ Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, 'An Inspection of Contingency Asylum Accommodation for Families with Children in NI' (ICIBI, 2024).

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Dispersal accommodation is where asylum seekers are moved to after contingency accommodation. See NI Human Rights Commission roundtable meeting with civil society organisations, 9 April 2024.

¹²³ Section 22, Asylum Support Regulations 2000. Reports suggest that this notice period is sometimes shorter. See Meeting between the NI Human Rights Commission and the Horn of Africa People's Aid NI, 16 April 2024.

¹²⁴ Meeting between the NI Human Rights Commission and the Horn of Africa People's Aid NI, 16 April 2024.

¹²⁵ NI Human Rights Commission, 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Travellers' Accommodation in NI' (NIHRC, 2018); Children's Law Centre and South Tyrone Empowerment Programme, 'Joint Submission to the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities Advisory Committee: Rights of Traveller Children and Families in NI' (CLC and STEP, 2022).

¹²⁶ The Unauthorised Encampments (NI) Order 2005 allows a police officer to direct a person to leave land and remove any vehicle or property on that land and creates an offence and power of seizure for non-compliance. See NI Human Rights Commission, 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Travellers' Accommodation in NI' (NIHRC, 2018), at 288.

¹²⁷ There have been reports of barriers to accessing General Practitioner services and National Health Service dental services. These barriers include travel to healthcare appointments, delays in the decision-making process that affect pregnant women in particular, and a lack of access to translation and interpretation services. Delays in issuing asylum registration cards and HC2 certificates have also been reported. See NI Human Rights Commission, 'Submission to the NI Affairs Committee Inquiry into the Experience of Minority Ethnic and Migrant People in NI' (NIHRC, 2021); Meeting between NI Human Rights Commission and NI Council for Racial Equality, 9 August 2022; House of Commons NI Affairs Committee, 'Inquiry into the Experience of Minority Ethnic and Migrant People in NI - Oral Evidence', 8 September 2021, at Question 22.

¹²⁸ Asylum registration cards and HC2 certificates are required to register and receive full support for many health care services. See House of Commons NI Affairs Committee, 'Inquiry into the Experience of Minority Ethnic and Migrant People in NI - Oral Evidence', 8 September 2021, at Question 19; Independent Mechanism in NI Disability Forum Meeting, 2 August 2022.

¹²⁹ Children's Law Centre and South Tyrone Empowerment Programme, 'Joint Submission to Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities Advisory Committee: Rights of Asylum Seeker Children Living in Contingency Accommodation (Hotel Buildings) in NI, Run by Mears Group PLC' (CLC and STEP, 2022).

¹³⁰ Roundtable on Access to Healthcare and Windsor Framework Article 2 hosted by the NI Human Rights Commission, 6 June 2022.

¹³¹ Abortion has been legalised in NI on request up to 12 weeks and where there is a risk of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman up to 24 weeks. Abortion is also permitted in NI on the grounds of immediate necessity, a risk to life or grave permanent injury to physical or mental health of the pregnant woman, a diagnosis of a severe foetal impairment or fatal foetal abnormality. See Regulations 3 and 4, Abortion (NI) (No 2) Regulations 2020. As of 2024, medical abortion services were available up to 23 weeks and 6 days in all five Health and Social Care Trusts in NI. Surgical abortion under local anaesthetic up to 11 weeks and 6 days was also available across all five Health and Social Care Trusts in NI, with the Northern Trust also offering surgical abortion up to 11 weeks and 6 days under conscious sedation. See NI Abortion and Contraception Task Group, 'Report on the Sexual and Reproductive Health in NI' (NIACT, 2024), at 14.

¹³² NI Abortion and Contraception Task Group, 'Report on the Sexual and Reproductive Health in NI' (NIACT, 2024), at 16.

¹³³ *Ibid*, at 14.

¹³⁴ Meeting between NI Human Rights Commission and Department of Health, 19 July 2023.

¹³⁵ In 2024, the Department of Health was content that sufficient guidance already existed and did not plan to introduce specific guidance on conscientious objection regarding abortion services in NI. Instead, individual Trusts in NI were expected to provide training on conscientious objection to their staff, this training was not mandatory. There have been reports of frequent misuse or misunderstanding of conscientious objection in the context of abortion services, including withdrawal of administrative support and refusal to dispense early abortion medication by pharmacists. See Meeting between NI Human Rights Commission and Informing Choices NI, 24 July 2023; Meeting between NI Human Rights Commission and civil society organisations, 25 July 2023; Email correspondence from Royal College of Nursing NI to NI Human Rights Commission, 19 July 2023; Meeting between NI Human Rights Commission and Informing Choices NI, 24 July 2023; Meeting between NI Human Rights Commission and civil society organisations, 25 July 2023; Meeting between NI Human Rights Commission and Alliance for Choice, 27 February 2024; NI Abortion and Contraception Taskgroup Conference, Parliament Buildings, 25 April 2024; NI Abortion and Contraception Taskgroup, 'Report on the Sexual and Reproductive Health in NI' (NIACT, 2024), at 17;

¹³⁶ The Rainbow Project, 'Trans Healthcare'. Available at: <https://www.rainbow-project.org/trans-healthcare-nhs-and-private/>

¹³⁷ Eligibility criteria for a Gender Recognition Certificate requires that an applicant is over 18, diagnosed with gender dysphoria, has lived in the acquired gender for more than two years and intends to do so permanently. Under the Gender Recognition Act 2004, for a transgender person's acquired gender to be legally recognised in the UK, an application must be submitted to a Gender Recognition Panel, which issues a Gender Recognition Certificate if the application is successful. Currently, the Gender Recognition Panel process for the UK is centralised and based in England. Consultations on possible amendments to the gender recognition process have been conducted in England, Wales and Scotland, but not NI. There are concerns that any change to the process for the rest of the UK, without making provision to accommodate applicants from NI seeking gender recognition, which could in effect deny transgender individuals in NI from accessing a legal gender recognition process. See NI Direct, 'Gender Recognition'. Available at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/gender-recognition>;

Scottish Government, 'Review of the Gender Recognition Act 2004: A Consultation' (Scottish Government, 2017); Gender Equalities Office, 'Reform of the Gender Recognition Act – Government Consultation' (GEO, 2018).

¹³⁸ This was introduced "in light of the findings of the independent Cass Review, and to close potential loopholes that could be exploited by not having a UK-wide legislative approach". However, this decision led to protests in NI from individual and groups that believe that this development is denying transgender children and young people access to healthcare, with potentially life-threatening consequences. See Department of Health, 'Press Release: Temporary ban on prescription and supply of puberty blockers extended to NI', 23 August 2024; 'Protests held as puberty blocker ban extended in NI', *BBC News*, 27 August 2024; 'Puberty blockers to be banned indefinitely in NI', *BBC News*, 10 December 2024.

¹³⁹ This was an increase from 106,990 in 2022/2023. A report highlighted issues within the Royal Victoria Hospital's emergency department affecting the provision of safe, effective patient care, including staffing, crowding, infection prevention control/environmental issues, patient care, medicines management and governance. See Information Analysis Directorate, 'NI Statistics: Emergency Care 2023/2024' (DoH, 2024), at Table 6; Department of Health, 'Review of Urgent and Emergency Care Services in NI: Consultation Report and Strategic Priorities' (DoH, 2022).

¹⁴⁰ NI Audit Office, 'Press Release: Tackling waiting lists', 10 October 2023; NI Audit Office, 'Tackling Waiting Lists' (NIAO, 2023), at para 1.4.

¹⁴¹ NI Audit Office, 'Press Release: Tackling waiting lists', 10 October 2023; NI Audit Office, 'Tackling Waiting Lists' (NIAO, 2023), at para 1.6.

¹⁴² The NI Audit Office further noted that "mental health funding in NI represents around six per cent of the overall health and social care budget and, over time, has not kept pace with increases in the wider health budget" and that "bringing funding levels in NI closer to that elsewhere in the UK would require substantial additional investment of £80 [to] £190 million per annum". The new mental health strategy requires sustained additional investment throughout its lifetime, otherwise its delivery is at risk. In NI, 12.6 per cent of children and young people have an emotional disorder. At 31 March 2024, 1,990 children and young people in NI were waiting for a mental health assessment, with 1,026 (52 per cent) waiting for more than nine weeks. See NI Audit Office, 'Mental Health Services in NI' (NIAO, 2023); Department of Health, 'Press Release: Minister of Health publishes new 10 year Mental Health Strategy', 29 June 2021; Mental Health Champion, 'Press Release: NI mental health strategy funding needs tenfold increase to meet demand, says Professor Siobhán O'Neill', 15 March 2023; Youth Wellbeing NI, 'Mental Health of Children and Parents in NI: Results of the Youth Wellbeing Prevalence Survey' (YWNI, 2020), at 11; Department of Health, 'Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Waiting Time Statistics for NI: At 31 March 2024' (DoH, 2024), at Table 1.

¹⁴³ Menopause-related claims in the UK are often argued on the grounds of sex, age and disability discrimination. See for example Equal Pay Act (NI) 1970, Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976; Maternity and Parental Leave etc. Regulations (NI) 1999.

¹⁴⁴ Certain groups may face particular challenges related to menopause including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex+ people, younger women and ethnic minority women. See House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 'Menopause and the Workplace' (HoC, 2022), at 30.

¹⁴⁵ Women make up nearly half of the working population in NI and with the recent change in pension age, it is likely that more women will be working into later life. A shortage of hormone replacement therapy in NI has also contributed to women's distress and difficulties in managing their symptoms. See NI Committee Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Equality Commission for NI and Labour Relations Agency, 'Promoting Equality in Employment for Women Affected by Menopause: Guidance for Employers, Trade Union Representatives and Employees' (ICTUNI, 2021), at 3; 'Hormone replacement therapy: NI shortage "distressing" for women', *BBC News*, 8 November 2021.

¹⁴⁶ The Period Products (Free Provision) Act 2022 requires that relevant NI Departments must ensure that period products are obtainable free of charge by all persons who need to use them. This includes having sufficient products to meet a person's needs while in NI. At minimum free period products must be available in health and education settings. Regulations are required to clarify which public bodies and premises have duties under the 2022 Act. As of July 2024, regulations had been made by five of the nine NI Executive Departments regarding implementation of the 2022 Act. See Email correspondence from the Executive Office to the NI Human Rights Commission, 1 August 2024.

¹⁴⁷ UK Parliament Hansard, 'Written Statement: NI Finances 2023-2024 – Chris Heaton-Harris – HCWS748', 27 April 2023; Robbie Meredith, 'Period Poverty: No free tampons in school "adds stress to families"', *BBC News*, 4 May 2023.

¹⁴⁸ In 2023/2024, the arrangements for transfer tests changed, a common entrance examination operated by the Schools Entrance Assessment Group replaced the dual testing system. See 'Common transfer test: Thousands of children sit first paper', *BBC News*, 11 November 2023.

¹⁴⁹ Participation and the Practice of Rights, 'Could Make Or Break a Child: The State of Human Rights and Academic Selection in NI' (PPR, 2019).

¹⁵⁰ Leanne Henderson et al, 'Educational Underachievement in NI' (Stranmillis University College, 2020), at 6.

¹⁵¹ Ulster University UNESCO Centre, 'Transforming Education in NI - Academic Selection and the Transfer Test' (IEF, 2021).

¹⁵² Department for Communities, 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (Or Questioning), Intersex+ Strategy Expert Advisory Panel – Themes and Recommendations' (DfC, 2021); Rebecca Loader et al, 'Experiences of Education among Minority Ethnic Groups in NI' (QUB, 2023), at para 6.3.

¹⁵³ In 2021/2022, there were 18,356 children of migrant families enrolled in NI schools, which equates to 5 per cent of all school enrolments. Of these, 2,943 children had special educational needs (17 per cent) and 5,003 were entitled to free school meals (28 per cent). See NI Statistics and Research Agency, 'Newcomer Pupils 2021/2022' (DoE, 2022).

¹⁵⁴ Children's Law Centre and South Tyrone Empowerment Programme, 'Joint Submission to CoE Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities Advisory Committee: Rights of Asylum Seeker Children Living in Contingency Accommodation (Hotel Buildings) in NI, Run by Mears Group PLC' (CLC and STEP, 2022).

¹⁵⁵ Meeting between NIHRC and the Horn of Africa People's Aid NI, 16 April 2024: Families often have to present as homeless and can be moved to alternative accommodation away from their children's schools, forcing them to find new school places which can result in disruption and delay. See also Ita Dungan, 'My Children haven't been to School Since January', *BBC News NI*, 30 May 2024.

¹⁵⁶ Reasons for lower levels of educational attainment among Traveller and Roma children are nuanced, this is not a homogenous group. See Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement, 'A Fair Start: Final Report and Action Plan' (DoE, 2021).

¹⁵⁷ Required funding to address this issue could not progress while the NI Executive was suspended. See Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement, 'A Fair Start: Final Report and Action Plan' (DoE, 2021).

¹⁵⁸ Two integrated nursery schools, 49 integrated primary schools and 21 integrated post-primary schools. See Education Authority, 'Integrated Education'. Available at: <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/integrated-education>.

¹⁵⁹ Department of Education, 'Annual Enrolments at Schools and in Funded Pre-school Education in NI 2023-2024' (NISRA, 2024).

¹⁶⁰ Section 6, Integrated Education Act 2022.

¹⁶¹ Independent Review of Education, 'Investing in a Better Future' (Independent Review of Education, 2023).

¹⁶² In 2024, it is estimated that approximately 70,000 pupils in the NI education system are able to participate in shared education. This is educating together children and young people of different religious belief or who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation, and children and young people who are not. See Section 2, Shared Education Act (NI) 2016; Department of Education, 'Advancing Shared Education: Fourth Report to the NI Assembly' (DE, 2024).

¹⁶³ Email correspondence from Department of Education to NI Human Rights Commission, 9 August 2023; NI Assembly Hansard, 'Written Questions: Advancing Shared Education – Nick Mathison MLA - AQW 8025/22-27, 15 March 2024.

¹⁶⁴ Regulation 2(2), Relationships and Sexuality Education (NI) (Amendment) Regulations 2023; Regulation 3, Relationships and Sexuality Education (NI) (Amendment) Regulations 2023.

¹⁶⁵ The 2023 Regulations allow, at the request of a parent, a pupil may be excused from receiving relationships and sexuality education, or specified elements of that education. As a result, the Curriculum (Circumstances in which a Pupil may be Excused from Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Education) Regulations (NI) 2023 were introduced. Regulation 2(3) Relationships and Sexuality Education (NI) (Amendment) Regulations 2023.

¹⁶⁶ Many provisions require supporting regulations, which are not yet in place. In 2021, the Department of Education consulted on new Special Educational Needs Regulations and a Code of Practice. In 2024, work continued on finalising the new framework, prior to being introduced to the NI Assembly. See Department of Education, 'New Special Educational Needs Framework'. Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/review-special-educational-needs-and-inclusion>; NI Assembly Hansard, 'Written Question: Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 – Nick Mathison MLA - AQW 8699/22-27', 26 March 2024; Department of Education, 'End to End Review of Special Educational Needs'. Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/end-end-review-special-educational-needs-sen>

¹⁶⁷ In 2023, the Department of Education and Education Authority NI commenced an end-to-end review of special educational needs in NI. The end-to-end review is being undertaken over four phases, with the outcome awaited. See NI Audit Office, 'Special Educational Needs' (NIAO, 2017); NI Audit Office, 'Impact Review of Special Educational Needs' (NIAO, 2020); NI Commissioner for Children and Young People, 'Too Little Too Late: A Rights Based Review of Special Educational Needs in NI' (NICCY, 2020); NI Assembly Public Accounts Committee, 'Report on Impact Review of Special Educational Needs' (NIA, 2021); NI Commissioner for Children and Young People, 'Too Little, Too Late: Monitoring Report' (NICCY, 2022).

¹⁶⁸ Gráinne Connolly, 'Breaking point' as Special Educational Needs kids wait for school place', *BBC News*, 17 June 2024; Robbie Meredith, 'Robbie Meredith, 'NI education: More than 100 schools refuse new Special Educational Needs classes'', *BBC News*, 11 April 2024.

¹⁶⁹ 'Special needs pupil 'felt lonely' during school place delay', *BBC News*, 1 May 2024; 'Almost 150 Special Educational Needs children in NI do not have a confirmed school place for September 2023', *ITV News*, 27 July 2023; Robbie Meredith, 'Special needs: No school places for more than 300 pupils', *BBC News*, 23 June 2022; Robbie Meredith, 'Family "in limbo" as building work delays school start', *BBC News*, 5 September 2024; Robbie Meredith, "'Gut punch" for 19 Special Educational Needs pupils facing school start delay', *BBC News*, 26 September 2024.

¹⁷⁰ Robbie Meredith, 'Special educational needs: Teen with autism may have to quit school', *BBC News*, 16 August 2023.
¹⁷¹ Lauren Harte, 'Education Authority statement as 42 nursery children with special educational needs educated outside school setting', *Belfast Live*, 4 October 2023.

¹⁷² The Identity and Language (NI) Act 2022 established an Office of Identity and Cultural Expression, as well as a Commissioner to protect and enhance the use of Irish Language by public authorities, and a Commissioner to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster-Scots and the Ulster British tradition in NI. See Section 2, Identity and Language (NI) Act 2022; John Manley, 'Stormont leaders urged to expedite appointment of Irish language commissioner', *The Irish News*, 15 February 2024.

¹⁷³ In 2017 and 2022, the High Court of Justice in NI held that "the Executive Committee has failed in its statutory duty, under section 28D(1) of the NI Act 1998, to adopt a strategy setting out how it proposes to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language. In 2020, a commitment was made to publish an Irish Language Strategy and an Ulster-Scots Strategy. In 2021, a Co-Design Group for the Irish Language Strategy and a Co-Design Group for the Ulster-Scots Strategy were established by the Department for Communities. In 2024, the Co-Design Group for the Irish Language Strategy and the Co-Design Group for the Ulster-Scots Strategy continued to meet with officials from the Department for Communities to discuss the content of the two strategies. See *In the Matter of an Application by Conradh na Gaeilge* [2017] NIQB 27; *In the Matter of an Application by Conradh na Gaeilge* [2022] NIQB 56; NI Office, 'New Decade, New Approach' (NIO, 2020), at 16; Meeting of the Ulster-Scots Strategy Co Design Group, 27 June 2024; Meeting of the Irish Language Strategy Co Design Group, 22 July 2024.

¹⁷⁴ In 2023, it was reported that cuts to community transport for [d/Deaf and] disabled people will impact on independent living, including access sporting and cultural facilities. See Department for Communities, 'Experience of Sport by Young People in NI in 2022' (DfC, 2023); UK Independent Mechanism for the UN CRPD, 'Seven Years On: Disabled People's Rights to Independent Living, Employment and Standard of Living in the UK' (UKIM, 2023), at 11.

¹⁷⁵ NI Human Rights Commission Engagement with Civil Society Organisations on the UN ICESCR, 11 October 2022.

¹⁷⁶ Equity, 'Response to the draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 - Our Plan: Doing what Matters Most' (Equity, 2024).

¹⁷⁷ Small scale organisations saw the largest fall of 34 per cent. Income from all sources fell by 2.65 per cent compared to the previous year, with the sharpest fall being in earned income, which fell by 6.32 per cent. See Arts Council NI, '2023-23 Annual Funding Survey' (ACNI, 2024).

¹⁷⁸ Arts Council NI, 'Press Release: Number of NI arts events falls year-on-year as impact of financial pressures hit creative sector', 19 September 2024.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Arts Council NI, '2023-23 Annual Funding Survey' (ACNI, 2024).

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