

Domestic Protections of Human Rights

If you're on this island where can you go for help?

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC)

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Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)

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The '**Joint Committee**', which is a forum for considering human rights issues in the island of Ireland, affecting both jurisdictions (ROI + NI)

The IHREC has a **broad statutory remit** in relation to the protection and promotion of human rights and equality under the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, (2014)* to protect and promote human rights and equality,

- to encourage the development of a culture of respect for human rights, equality, and intercultural understanding in the State,
- to promote understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights and equality in the State,
- to encourage good practice in intercultural relations, to promote tolerance and acceptance of diversity in the State and respect for the freedom and dignity of each person
- to work towards the elimination of human rights abuses, discrimination and prohibited conduct.

Some of their specific functions include:

- to **provide information** to the public in relation to human rights and equality;
- to **keep under review** the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice in the State relating to the protection of human rights and equality
- to **examine legislative proposals** and report its views on any implications for human rights or equality
- to make recommendations to the Government in relation to measures to strengthen, protect and uphold human rights and equality in the State
- to apply to the High Court or the Supreme Court for liberty to appear as **amicus curiae** (Friend of the Court) in proceedings that involve or are concerned with the human rights or equality rights of any person
- to provide **practical assistance**, including legal assistance, to persons in vindicating their rights
- to provide or assist in the provision of **education and training** on human rights and equality issues

The NIHRC is a human rights institution with a status **accreditation** from the United Nations. The NIHRC is funded by UK government, but is an independent public body that operates in full accordance with the **UN Paris Principles**.

Established on the basis of the **Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement**, it plays a central role in supporting a society that, as it rebuilds following conflict, respects & upholds human rights standards & responsibilities.

Its mission is to "*champion and guard the rights of all those who live in Northern Ireland.*" To do this, it makes sure government and other public bodies protect the human rights of everyone in NI and what steps they can take if their rights are violated.

It does this by:

- **Advising** the **Westminster** government, the **NI Executive** and **Assembly**, and key agencies on legislation and compliance with human rights.
- Working to **promote awareness** of human rights through education, training and research
- **Monitoring** international treaty work
- **Offering legal advice**, including taking strategic legal cases

On 27 June 2011, the 'Joint Committee' published their Advice on a **Charter of Rights for the Island of Ireland**. The advice was based on a study of the human rights protections which the UK and Ireland have signed up to in political agreements, such as the ECHR and other international human standards.

They advised that "*a Charter would not need to create any new protections. It could restate the fundamental human rights that already exist in both jurisdictions, thereby helping to underpin the peace process.*"

This remains part of the 'unfinished business' of the GFA and has yet to be fully adopted!!!

How should Children (anyone under 18 in Ireland) pursue their rights?

In 2002 the *Ombudsman for Children Act* was passed by the Oireachtas. It established the **Ombudsman of Children's Office (OCO)** to facilitate the full implementation of the UNCRC and promote Children's rights in Ireland. Though it operates independently, it reports directly to the Oireachtas. **Dr Niall Muldoon** was appointed by President Higgins in February 2015. To undertake your own, deeper investigation of Children's Rights consider consulting the OCO's website (www.oco.ie) or some of the 'civil society' organizations that promote Children's Rights in Ireland, such as the Children's Rights Alliance (www.childrensrights.ie), particularly their annual "Report Card" that show our implementation progress.