

[Home](#) > ... > [Your Rights](#) > [Fundamental Rights](#) > Northern Ireland

National courts and other non-judicial bodies

Content provided by:
Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland

[National Courts](#)

[National Human Rights Institutions](#)

[Ombudsperson](#)

[Specialised human rights bodies](#)

[Other](#)

National Courts

1. Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service

Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service is responsible for the administration of the criminal, civil and family courts and tribunals in England and Wales and non-devolved tribunals in Scotland and Northern Ireland. It provides for a fair, efficient and effective justice system delivered by an independent judiciary.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service aims to ensure that all citizens receive timely access to justice according to their different needs, whether as victims or witnesses of crime, defendants accused of crimes, consumers in debt, children at risk of harm, businesses involved in commercial disputes or as individuals asserting their employment rights or challenging the decisions of government bodies.

For information about contacting courts see: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/global/contacts/hmcts/courts/index.htm>

For information about contacting tribunals see:
<http://www.justice.gov.uk/global/contacts/hmcts/tribunals/index.htm>

2. Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service

The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) is an agency of the Department of Justice for Northern Ireland. It provides administrative support to the Northern Ireland's courts, i.e. the Court of Appeal, High Court, crown court, county courts, magistrates' courts and coroner's courts. It also provides administrative support for tribunals and enforces civil court judgments through the Enforcement of Judgments Office.

Web: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/topics/courts-and-tribunals>

Contact details: <http://www.courtsni.gov.uk/en-GB/ContactDetails/>

[Additional Information](#)

Civil proceedings

Proceedings in Northern Ireland are similar to those in England and Wales. High Court proceedings are commenced by a writ and county court proceedings are commenced by a civil bill or a small claims application. These must be served on the defendant, who will have a right to defend against the action. Judgments of civil courts are enforceable through a centralised procedure administered by the Enforcement of Judgments Office.

Legal aid

1. In all three jurisdictions of the UK there is a comprehensive system whereby a person in need of legal advice or representation in court may receive financial assistance out of public funds. These schemes are referred to as "Legal Aid" and are fundamental to the realisation of each individual's legal rights. Legal aid is aimed at those on low and modest incomes and may be granted free of charge, or subject to financial contribution by the individual. If legal aid is granted, the case is conducted in the normal way, except that no money passes between the individual and their solicitor: all payments are made through the legal aid fund.
2. In Northern Ireland, the provision of legal aid is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission. Eligibility for legal aid in most types of civil or criminal matters is determined by a means and merits test.
3. If a person feels that their rights under the European Convention on Human Rights have been violated and intend to bring their case before the European Court of Human Rights there are number of schemes available to provide them with legal advice and assistance. Under the legal advice scheme, a person may be assisted by an experienced solicitor or legal advisor in the preliminary stages of their application. If the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg declares an application admissible, an applicant may get financial assistance directly from Strasbourg. Eligibility is determined on the basis of whether or not an applicant would be eligible for domestic legal aid.
4. In a number of urban areas, law centres provide legal advice and representation which may be free depending on means. Law centres, which are financed from various sources, often including local government authorities, usually employ full-time salaried lawyers; but many also have community workers. Much of their time is devoted to housing, employment, social security and immigration problems. Free advice is also available in Citizens Advice Bureaux, consumer and housing advice centres and in specialist advice centres run by various voluntary organisations. The Refugee Legal Centre and the Immigration Advisory Service, both of which receive government funding, provide free advice and assistance to asylum seekers, and the Immigration Advisory Service also provides free advice and assistance to persons with immigration rights of appeal.

Victims of crime

1. The courts may order an offender, on conviction, to pay compensation to the victim for personal injury, loss or damage resulting from an offence. In England and Wales the courts are obliged to consider compensation in every appropriate case and to give reasons where no compensation is awarded. Compensation for a victim must come ahead of a fine if the court is considering both, and the recovery of amounts awarded in compensation must be put ahead of recovery of fines.
2. Where the Crown Prosecution Service declines to prosecute, victims may prosecute privately in England and Wales, but in practice seldom do so. Victims may also sue for damages in the civil courts. Court procedure has been simplified so that persons without legal knowledge can bring small claims for loss or damage.
3. Victims of any nationality who suffer injury as a result of violent crime in England, Wales or Scotland may apply for compensation from public funds under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. Compensation is based on a tariff of awards, and payments range from £1,000 to £500,000 for the most seriously injured victim.
4. Separate arrangements exist in Northern Ireland, where compensation can in certain circumstances be paid from public funds for criminal injuries, and for malicious damage to property, including the resulting loss of profits.
5. There are three organisations in the UK that provide generic support to victims of crime: Victim Support – which covers England and Wales – Victim Support Scotland and Victim Support Northern Ireland. These receive funding from the government.
6. In June 1996 the Government published a new Victim's Charter which was subsequently made a statutory requirement through the Victims Code of Practice in April 2006. Victims now have the legal right to a high

quality of service from the criminal justice agencies. The code also tells victims how to complain if they do not receive a high quality of service. The introduction of the Witness Charter gave witnesses a similar, but non-statutory, set of standards of service. A separate Code of Practice for victims of crime has been published in Northern Ireland, which sets out the standards of service which victims should receive during their contact with the NI criminal justice system and how to make a complaint. All victims of reported crime are given a "Victims of crime" leaflet which gives practical advice about what to do in the aftermath of a crime. It explains simply the police and court processes, how to apply for compensation and what further help is available.

National Human Rights Institutions

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

The Northern Ireland Human rights Commission (NIHRC) is a national human rights institution with A status accreditation from the United Nations (UN). NIHRC is funded by United Kingdom government, but is an independent public body that operates in full accordance with the UN Paris Principles.

Our job is to make sure government and other public bodies protect the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland. We also help people understand what their human rights are and what they can do if their rights are denied or violated.

Contact Details:

Temple Court 39 North Street Belfast Northern Ireland BT1 1NA Tel: +44 (0)28 9024 3987 Email: information@nihrc.org Web: <http://www.nihrc.org/>

Ombudsperson

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

This ombudsman was set up by Parliament to help both individuals and the public.

Our role is to investigate complaints that individuals have been treated unfairly or have received poor service from government departments and other public organisations and the NHS in England. Our powers are set out in law and our service is free for everyone.

Contact Details

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
Millbank Tower
Millbank
London
SW1P 4QP Web: <https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/>

Specialised human rights bodies

- Ombudsperson for rights of the child

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

The Commissioner for Children and Young People is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) which was established in October 2003.

The current Commissioner is Koulla Yiasouma and her role is to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland. The Commissioner shall also have regard to any relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The sponsor Department is the Department for Communities

Contact Details:

NICCY Equality House 7-9 Shaftesbury Square Belfast Northern Ireland BT2 7DP Tel: 028 9031 1616 Email: info@niccy.org Web: <http://www.niccy.org/>

• Commissioner for Older People

The Commissioner for Older People is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) which was set up in November 2011. The current Commissioner is Eddie Lynch and his role is to safeguard and promote the interests of older people in Northern Ireland.

Contact Details:

COPNI Equality House 7-9 Shaftesbury Square Belfast Northern Ireland BT2 7DP Tel: 028 9089 0892 Email: info@copni.org Web: <http://www.copni.org/>

• Equality Body - correct JH

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Contact details:

Equality House 7-9 Shaftesbury Square Belfast Northern Ireland BT 2 7DP Tel: 028 90 500 600 Email: information@equalityni.org Web: <http://www.equalityni.org>

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is a non departmental public body established by the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Our powers and duties derive from a number of statutes which have been enacted over the last decades, providing protection against discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, race, religion and political opinion, sex and sexual orientation. We also have responsibilities arising from the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in respect of the statutory equality and good relations duties which apply to public authorities.

Our sponsor Department is the Executive Office.

• Data Protection Body

1. The Information Commissioner

The Information Commissioner's Office is the UK's independent authority set up to uphold information rights in the public interest, promoting openness by public bodies and data privacy for individuals

Contact Details

Information Commissioner's Office Wycliffe House Water Lane Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF Tel: 0303 123 1113 (or 01625 545745 if you would prefer not to call an '03' number, or +44 1625 545745 if calling from overseas) Web: <https://ico.org.uk/>

2. Information Commissioner - Regional office

Northern Ireland

Information Commissioner's Office – Northern Ireland 3rd floor, 14 Cromac Place Belfast, Northern Ireland BT7 2JB Tel: 028 9026 9380 Email: ni@ico.org.uk

Other

1. WEBSITE - Directgov

The Official UK Government website for citizens of the UK.

Web: <http://www.gov.uk>

2. Citizens Advice Service

The Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice, and by influencing policy makers.

Web: <http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk>

3. Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission

The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission ("the commission") is a Non Departmental Public Body of the Department of Justice (DOJ) established under the Access to Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. The Minister of Justice, David Ford, has indicated his intention to transfer the responsibilities of the commission to an executive agency within the Department in Autumn 2014. The new organisation will be called the Legal Services Agency Northern Ireland. This transfer will not fundamentally change the overall provision of services, but will deliver a range of important governance improvements and efficiency savings.

The Commission's role is to administer the provision of publicly funded legal services in keeping with the statutory legal aid schemes. We apply statutory tests to determine whether an individual should receive civil legal aid and if eligible, we pay solicitors and barristers for the legal services provided. While the judiciary is responsible for the granting of criminal legal aid, the commission also pays for the corresponding legal services provided. In addition to administering the legal aid scheme, we also provide input to support the DOJ in its programme of work to reform legal aid.

Contact details:

The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission 2nd Floor, Waterfront Plaza, 8 Laganbank Road, Mays Meadow, Belfast, Northern Ireland BT1 3BN Tel: +44 (0)28 9040 8888 Web: <http://www.nilsc.org.uk>

Its mission is to promote fair and equal access to justice in Northern Ireland in its provision of publicly funded legal services.

Its aim is to provide high quality, customer focused services that target those in greatest need and demonstrate value for money.

They lawyers and other advice providers:

- to help people who are eligible for legal aid to protect their rights in civil matters
- to help people who are under investigation, or facing criminal charges

4. The Victims' Commissioner

Baroness Newlove of Warrington, Victims' Commissioner for England & Wales The Tower, 9th Floor, 102 Petty France, London, SW1H 9AJ Email: victims.commissioner@victimscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk Web: <http://victimscommissioner.org.uk/>

The role of the Victims' Commissioner is to promote the interests of victims and witnesses, encourage good practice in their treatment, and regularly review the Code of Practice for Victims which sets out the services victims can expect to receive.

The Commissioner is here to listen to the views of victims and witnesses, understand the criminal justice system from their point of view and try to help improve the services and support available.

Please note that by law, the Commissioner is not allowed to intervene in specific cases. However, we will endeavour to provide direction of where to get the best advice and support.

5. Victim Support Northern Ireland

Contact Details:

Central Office Victim Support NI Annsgate House 3rd Floor 70/74 Ann Street Belfast Northern Ireland BT 1 4EH
Tel: 028 9024 3133 Email: belfast@victimsupportni.org.uk

Victim Support Northern Ireland is the charity which helps people affected by any type of crime. We provide emotional support, information and practical help to victims, witnesses and others affected by crime.

Victim Support NI is the leading charity supporting people affected by crime. We offer a free and confidential service, whether or not a crime has been reported. We are an independent organisation - not part of the police, courts or any other criminal justice agency.

Each year Victim Support NI offers help to almost 30,000 people who have been affected by crime.

6. The Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

Unit 2 Walled Garden Stormont Estate Belfast Northern Ireland BT4 3SH Tel: 028 90 44 3982 Freephone: 0800 7836317 Email: pa@prisonerombudsman.x.gsi.gov.uk Web: <http://www.niprisonerombudsman.gov.uk/>

The Prisoner Ombudsman is appointed by the Minister of Justice for Northern Ireland and is completely independent of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS).

The Prisoner Ombudsman investigates :

- complaints from prisoners held in Northern Ireland
- visitors to prisoners held in Northern Ireland
- deaths in Prison Service custody in Northern Ireland

The current Ombudsman is Tom McGonigle, and a team of investigators and other staff support him.

7. The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner

Contact Details:

5th Floor 21 Bloomsbury Street London WC1B 3HF Tel: 020 7211 1500

The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) is an independent, non-departmental public body set up under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 give the Immigration Services Commissioner various powers including:

- refusing an adviser entry to the regulatory scheme
- deregulating a regulated adviser
- limited or varying levels of work advisers may undertake
- laying a disciplinary charge against a regulated adviser
- applying for a Restraining Order or an injunction
- prosecuting for illegally providing immigration advice and/or services
- Prosecuting for illegally advertising immigration advice and/or services
- entering an adviser's premises
- seizing an adviser's records

For further information see: <http://www.oisc.gov.uk>

8. Commission for Victims and Survivors

Contact Details:

Commission for Victims and Survivors
Equality House
7-9 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast
BT2 7DP
Tel: 028 9031 1000
Fax: 028 9060 7424

The Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland believe passionately in their work and the rights of all victims and survivors to be heard, to be respected and to have access to services that are the best they can be. The Commission for Victims and Survivors aims to improve the lives of victims and survivors of the Conflict.

It is their mission to address the needs of all victims and survivors by ensuring excellent service provision, acknowledging the legacy of the past and building for a better future. Its work is underpinned by a number of core values which they use in their day to day work. They seek outcomes based on the fulfillment of these values. These values are as follows:

- Victims Centred - victims and survivors are at the centre of all that the Commission does and they encourage and value their participation.
- Open and Transparent - the Commission are open, honest, accountable and responsive in all their work.
- Equality and Diversity - the Commission treats everyone equally and they challenge inequality with impartiality, independence and integrity.
- Respect - the Commission will be courteous and professional in their approach to everyone that contacts them.
- Impartiality - the Commission will uphold their independence and maintain a critical distance to challenge Government and relevant authorities.
- Delivering Quality - the Commission will strive to deliver all their programmes to a high standard.

For further information see <http://www.cvsni.org>

■ Last update: 10/04/2018

The national language version of this page is maintained by the respective Member State. The translations have been done by the European Commission service. Possible changes introduced in the original by the competent national authority may not be yet reflected in the translations. The European Commission accepts no responsibility or liability whatsoever with regard to any information or data contained or referred to in this document. Please refer to the legal notice to see copyright rules for the Member State responsible for this page.