

Youth Manifesto for Change Enough is enough!



NIYF Contribution to the Committee on the Rights of the Child – Universal Periodic Review (4th Cycle) Working Group 41st Session

& Youth Manifesto for the NI Assembly Election May 2022



March 2022



Contents:

Foreword	Page 3
Introduction	Page 3
Overarching Recommendations.....	Page 4
Our Issues	Page 4
Mental Health	Page 5
Voices	Page 8
Education	Page 10
Housing	Page 14
Policing, Justice & Safety	Page 16
Poverty	Page 18
Transport	Page 20
Inclusion & Diversity	Page 22
Environment	Page 24
Peace Building	Page 26
Appendix	Page 28

Foreword:

Over the past 5 years NIYF has produced a number of key pieces of youth lead research. In doing so we have listened to thousands of young people and supported them to have a say on issues that affect their lives.

This manifesto has been created by young people through our 'Speaking Truth To Power Sub Group'.

We work to empower young people to challenge disadvantage and inequality; effect change and contribute to building a just, fair and equal society.

The impact of Covid-19 is a key overarching issue for young people – including how their voices have not been listened to and their rights have been overlooked. The pandemic has made inequality and disadvantage much worse for many.

Political instability, funding cuts, the impact of Brexit, rising levels of poverty are all impacting young people negatively.

We are also committed to working with other organisations to campaign for equality.

This manifesto asks for government and other decision makers to effect positive change. In addition to our asks we are committed to supporting other organisations and working in partnership in the pursuit of social justice.

Our manifesto is published in 2 parts, this full version and an 'abridged' or shortened version which pulls out key asks.

Introduction:

This is an ambitious yet achievable Manifesto. We call on the Government to Reimagine democracy and empower young people to be the change that we need.

We urge an end to government collapses and greater empowerment to civic society.

The bedrock of our proposals are based on **promoting youth voice** and investing in young people as change makers.

Enough is enough!



Overarching Recommendations:

As well as a series of ambitious asks; young people are calling for 4 overarching recommendations as set out below.

1. The Appointment of a Minister for Youth

Children and Young People's issues go far beyond the remit of one particular department. The current system is limited in terms of ensuring young people's issues are listened to and acted upon.

The Minister should sit as part of the NI Executive and should have a remit that includes ensuring a cross departmental approach to meeting the needs of children and young people; working closely with the Commissioner for Children and Young People and should have a direct link with children and young people through relevant NGOs.

2. The Establishment of an All Party Working Group for young people.

Building upon the success of the NIYF Political Youth Champions group – where elected reps and young people meet regularly to work together on key youth issues it is proposed that an All Party Group for young people is established in Stormont to include MLAs; young people and other stakeholders.

Key areas of work of the group should include influencing enhanced protections for young people aged 18-25 who regularly 'fall through the cracks' in terms of service provision and right protections.

3. Implement a Bill of Rights for NI that enshrines the UNCRC in law

Various NI agreements have included a Bill of Rights for NI. NIYF agrees strongly that a Bill of Rights for NI is long overdue and should be expedited.

Youth Rights should feature heavily in the Bill of Rights as arguably, current legislation and policy discriminates against this age band – particularly those most in need and those aged 18-25.

4. Knowledge of Rights

Young people experience discrimination and barriers in many aspects of their lives. A lot of the time this is because young people are not aware of their rights. Young people have asked for more education on their rights.

The Department for Education should therefore be tasked with including ongoing knowledge of rights education in the curriculum for all pupils at all ages including those at primary and post primary school.

Our Issues:

The following section lays out key issues as identified by young people. These have been contextualised explaining what each issue is; what the government is saying about it, what young people's rights are and what young people are asking for.

Mental Health

Mental health is about both feeling good and doing well. It helps us to notice and feel happiness and to manage everyday living. This include being able to:

- learn, feel, express and manage a range of positive and negative emotions.
- have good and meaningful relationships with others.
- cope with and manage change and uncertainty.

When bad things happen, having good mental health skills won't take the pain or stress away, but, in time, it can help us find a way out of it. Mental health is not stuck at one level. With skills and practice it can be strengthened and built.

Government Position:

In line with commitments made as part of the New Decade, New Approach agreement, Health Minister Robin Swann launched the publication of the new Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 on 29 June 2021.

The Strategy sets the strategic direction of mental health services in Northern Ireland for the next decade. It has 35 actions under three overarching themes:

- (1) Promoting mental wellbeing, resilience and good mental health across society
- (2) Providing the right support at the right time - including improvements in child and adolescent mental health services
- (3) New ways of working – including a single mental health service, data and outcomes, workforce planning and research.

Our Rights:

UNCRC Article 6 says that state parties must recognise that every child has the inherent right to life.

States Parties must also ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

Our Research Says:

Mental illness is the largest cause of ill health in NI.

More than 20% of young people in northern Ireland are suffering from “significant mental health problems” by the time they reach 18.

Young people’s mental health has been significantly impacted by Covid-19, with 74% of young people reporting that their mental health has deteriorated.

When asked to describe how they felt during the pandemic in one word, the top 3 responses from young people were: Anxious, Annoyed, Frustrated.

Children and young people in Northern Ireland experience common mood disorders such as anxiety and depression at a rate of around 25% higher than those in other parts of the UK. 3

NI has the highest rates of suicide in the United Kingdom

The legacy of the conflict contributes to poor mental health through its negative impact on the social and economic circumstances of people and communities, and through death, violence, bereavement and injury suffered.

CAMHS referrals from A&Es have increased by 24% in the last year.

There are worrying increases in the scale of the prescribing of anti-depressant medication to young people.

For those in crisis the current 12 week waiting time for 6 sessions of CBT does not meet the acute needs of vulnerable people.

There is a lack of youth specific facilities for young people with mental ill health in NI.

There is a huge negative stigma attached to mental health which in turn leads to a ‘culture of silence’ when it comes to talking about it.

Young people often afraid to talk about mental health.

Young people agree that mental health issues need to be discussed more in schools and colleges.

Our Asks:

Establish a working group as part of the Executive Working Group on Mental Wellbeing, Resilience and Suicide Prevention, to assess and address the long term impact of COVID-19 on children and young people.

Create a meaningful link between the Minister for Health and their department for regular communication and engagement with the Youth Led 'Elephant Coming Out of The Dark' campaign.

An independent review of emergency mental health provision.

Government funding for voluntary sector agencies to provide sustained crisis intervention.

As part of the Mental Health Strategy Develop a Bespoke Youth Specific Care Strategy to include:

- Youth Specific Space and Services
- Rapid, easy and affordable access to support
- Awareness, engagement and integration
- Early intervention
- Youth voice
- Family engagement and support
- Prevention
- Holistic Care

Create a compulsory curriculum programme for all schools and colleges on mental health and wellbeing that helps to raise awareness and challenge stigma and that allows young people to access consistent mental health information.

Mental health and well-being training for all teachers, school support workers and youth workers so that this can be delivered effectively.

Voices

Children and young people don't have as much power as adults. They can't vote and they don't have as much money, However, article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says they still have the right to opinions and for these opinions to be heard and taken seriously.

NIYF was founded in 19679 on the basis of article 12 – to promote the voice of young people. This continues to be the key priority for NIYF as the system keeps pushing young people's views to the side.

Government Position:

The 10 year strategy for children and young people says that the voices of children must be listened to.

The Department for Education's Priorities for Youth (2013) says that it will set up new ways of hearing young people's voices.

A Northern Ireland Youth Assembly was set up in 2021 to include 90 young people aged 13 to 17 years old. Members of the Youth Assembly have opportunities to make an impact on decisions made by Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly (MLAs);

Our Rights:

According to UNCRC Article 12 State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Our Research Says:

The Department of Education's youth work policy has diluted the voices of young people and the new structures promised 10 years ago have not been developed.

Whilst we have a Youth Assembly there are concerns over the age band and its long term position - especially given political instability.

Young people see the value in politics but feel disconnected from the system and those who are elected to represent them.

COVID-19 highlighted an alarming mistrust in politicians to act in young people's best interest and listen to their views.

The voices of 18-25 year olds are sometimes not heard - particularly for those most marginalised as they are not specifically protected by the UNCRC.



Young people do not feel listened to and recent changes within the Education Authority have diluted the youth voice.

According to our 'Young People of the Peace Process' research:

- The majority of young people (72%) have a degree of interest in local politics but a similar number (62%) felt that politicians did not value their views and/or opinions.
- 72.5% of respondents feel that their voice has not been considered as important
- some 80% feel that decision makers aren't listening
- 88% feel it is important that young people are part of the decision-making process

Our Asks:

Pass legislation for a NI Youth Assembly to ensure it is not dependant on Stormont objectives or funding and to ensure it has independence and influence within the local assembly.

Broaden the age Range of the NI Youth Assembly to include those aged 11-25

Lower the voting age to 16 for all Elections in NI

Through an all-party working group for youth, establish an inclusive youth participation framework led by young people to ensure meaningful engagement between young people government departments, and public bodies.

Allocate a ring fenced budget within each Assembly department to facilitate the engagement with young people via the voluntary sector.

Enhanced protections and opportunities for those aged 18-25 via a new Youth Work Policy that all departments are accountable to.

Commission Youth participation and rights training for government departments and statutory bodies

Legislate for Youth Councils that are run by local councils, in each of the 11 NI local authority areas

Develop a New Youth Work Policy that gives greater protection to young people's right to have a say.

Develop a policy for pupil participation in schools to include young people's representation at a Board of Governor's level

Education

Definition:

Education is a cross cutting issue for young people. It is highlighted as key in almost every other area of concern. The role of education is vitally important, it should develop critical thinking. Education helps an individual meet basic job qualifications and makes them more likely to secure better jobs. It is much more important than achieving good exam results.

Government Says:

“We will work together to deliver an education system which meets the needs of all our children and young people, developing all of their talents, skills and abilities. This requires an ambitious and radical programme of change. We want to bring significant improvements in where and how our children and young people are educated. By doing this, we will improve outcomes and transform lives.” - DE Education Transformation programme

The New Decade, New Approach Deal outlined an ‘external, independent review of education provision’

Our Rights:

Article 28 of the UNCRC says that children and young people have the right to education no matter who they are: regardless of race, gender or disability; if they’re in detention, or if they’re a refugee.

Children and young people have the right to both primary and secondary education and should be able to choose different subjects when in secondary school. This should include the option of technical and vocational training, so they shouldn’t have to focus on academic subjects if they don’t want to.

UNCRC Article 29 education should develop young people’s personality, respect for others’ rights and the environment

Universal Declaration on Human Rights Article 26: Everyone has the right to education. Primary schooling should be free. We should all be able to continue our studies as far as we wish. At school we should be helped to develop our talents, and be taught an understanding and respect for everyone’s human rights. We should also be taught to get on with others whatever their ethnicity, religion, or country they come from. Our parents have the right to choose what kind of school we go to.

UN General Comment No. 1 - The Aims of Education: The goal is to empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence. “Education” in this context goes far beyond formal schooling to embrace the broad range of life experiences and learning processes which enable children, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities and to live a full and satisfying life within society.



UNCRC Concluding Observations 2016:

- Enhance efforts to reduce the effects of the social background or disabilities of children on their achievement in school;
- Abolish the transfer test;
- Allocate sufficient resources for the development and expansion of early childhood care and education, based on a comprehensive and holistic policy of early childhood development, with special attention to the children in the most vulnerable situations.

Our Research Says:

Young people do not want to be measured by getting 5 GCSEs or not. The fact that education is results driven places pressure on teaching and learning is based on exams – particularly in secondary school.

Young people are frustrated with lack of choice and government funding in terms of different types of education for example Irish medium, integrated etc. They also want more choice in terms of subjects, curriculum and vocational study.

Education is a cross cutting issue for young people which impacts on many other areas of life.

The current curriculum is not meeting the needs of many young people and there are particular concerns about the lack of education with regards to social issues, coping and life skills.

Exam stress is a key issue. (Top issue EA Regional Assessment of Need 201)

School Rules are often outdated i.e. haircuts, piercings – not embracing individuality – young people see that this is often about control and disempowerment; how pupils must address teachers – disempowering

Young people want a role in shaping the education system. (NIYF Presentation to Education Committee 2013)

Young people want 'a curriculum for life'.

Our voices: Are not in Lockdown NIYF July 2020 – Education and Learning Ranked as 3rd top issue behind mental health and boredom ref: COVID-19 (1065 respondents) – with fear and uncertainty with regards to exam results being a major factor

Our Voices: Speaking Truth To Power – NIYF Nov 2020 – Education ranked as the second top issue in relation to COVID-19 (2564 respondents)

Education goes beyond the classroom. Youth Work has an important role to play. The Education Authority's current policies and operations exclude many young people and voluntary organisations.

Our system is socially segregated – it is well documented that this is to the detriment of all

The impact of COVID-19 has widened the gap - e.g. digital divide; support networks etc.

During lock down there was no infrastructure for many at home to support learning



Young people's support needs not being met in school. There is a need more focus on wellbeing – e.g. counselling, anti bullying, food, etc

Lack of access to diagnostic services - to help young people with additional needs

No time invested to rebirth a love for learning particularly for those young people who have become so disaffected.

The transfer test can be detrimental to young people's development and self-esteem. The GL and AQE systems divide children along sectarian lines.

Disabled young people and those with special educational needs are often discriminated against by the Education Authority in schools and youth settings.

Our Asks:

Broaden the external, independent review of education provision' to include more youth engagement and include a root and branch review of the Education Authority to determine if it is fit for purpose

Abolish 'league tables' – places unnecessary pressure on teachers and pupils.

Give young people a meaningful voice in the Education System:

- Reinststate policy which gave young people a direct link to the Minister for Education.
- Seek to appoint young people onto the Children and Young People's Services Committee, the board of the Education Authority and CCEA.???
- Appoint young people on to school board of governors
- Implement a policy for mandatory pupil voice mechanisms in all schools.

Give young people more choice in Education through:

- Enhanced funding for Irish Medium and Integrated education.
- Education Authority should adopt a more creative approach to widening subject choices across schools and enhance different career paths with regards to 21st century jobs and opportunities.
- Invest in modern and creative industries including gaming as realistic career paths

A curriculum for life to be timetabled across all schools to include:

- Mental health curriculum and provide accessible, discrete counselling and therapeutic support in schools
- Enhanced careers support provided in schools
- Knowledge of Rights
- Homelessness prevention
- Radically improved relationship and sex education
- Financial capability

Increase the Education Budget:

- Mandate the Department of Infrastructure to fund home to school transport - thus freeing up a substantiation proportion of the education budget
- Increased Investment in Special Educational Needs including greater protections for staff that work in this field.

Invest in voluntary youth services; develop a new Youth Work Policy and review the impact of the EA funding scheme on the voluntary sector.

A youth led review of the system for young people's transfer from primary to post primary school.

More protections and funding for young people with Special Educational Needs including an endorsement of 'Harrys Law' that would address the restraint and seclusion of young people with special needs in schools.

Housing

During the Pandemic Youth Homeless rose by around 500%. Those aged 18-25 have been highlighted as most vulnerable.

The problem of homelessness needs intervention at all levels. The causes of homelessness are complicated and happen at different levels. There is no joined up, cross departmental approach to homelessness and no specific policy on youth homelessness.

Homelessness goes beyond those who are street homeless. Hidden homelessness is a growing problem with many young people who are sofa surfing or living in hostels often not seeing themselves as homeless.

The rising cost of living, benefit cuts and a lack of support services are making things worse.

Government Position:

If you are under 18 Social Services or the Housing Executive must help you if you have nowhere safe to live. If you are over 18 The Housing Executive has to find you long-term housing if you are homeless.

Your immigration status may mean that you cant get help. If you have been involved in some types of Anti-Social Behaviour you may not be able to get help.

The Housing Executive can help you when you're homeless but they don't have to prevent homelessness.

Our Rights:

International human rights law recognises everyone's right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate housing and how this can be embedded in local policy.

Adequate housing was recognized as part of the right to an adequate standard of living in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Other international human rights treaties have since recognized or referred to the right to adequate housing or some elements of it, such as the protection of one's home and privacy.

UNCRC article 27 says that every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.

Our Research Says:

Young people do not feel that they have equitable access to secure, stable, affordable and decent housing.

There is no statutory duty for homeless prevention - if government had to prevent homelessness it could make a major difference.

There is no duty on government departments to work together to address homelessness. Homelessness is caused by a wide range of issues which are the responsibility of different parts of government.

Young people's support needs are not being met. When they are in need it is hard to get the help needed.

The kNOWhere to go research found that over 60% of respondents did not know who or where to go for help when they are first homeless.

The Our Voices COVID-19 research highlighted that 10% of young people reported their issues are food, feeling unsafe in their homes, housing rights and homelessness issues during the pandemic. If young people are identified this as an issue, the wider picture is much more!

Refugees and those seeking Asylum have very little rights and they are often placed in sub standard accommodation.

Our Asks:

Move legislation to include homelessness prevention as part of NIHE's statutory duties.

Invest in youth specific accommodation and services for those experiencing homelessness or are vulnerably housed

Invest in a government led campaign to end the stigma of homelessness

Move legislation to ensure cross departmental working on housing and homelessness issues

Investment in the peer led approach to homelessness Prevention - this means creating jobs for young people who have experienced homelessness to help young people at risk of homelessness.

Give power to NIHE to build good quality affordable houses in areas where young people want to live.

Enhanced rights for tenants including the student population to mitigate against eviction and substandard accommodation.

Support NUS/USI's call for a Student Renters Bill which guarantees students safe, affordable, good quality accommodation.

Investment across all government departments and adequate support services for those most vulnerable



Policing, Justice & Safety

The Police are responsible for maintaining public order and safety, enforcing the law, and preventing, detecting, and investigating criminal activities.

Everyone deserves justice and should feel safe in every aspect of their life.

Government Position:

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has a range of policing and justice responsibilities. This includes juvenile justice, policing, community safety.

As part of the Belfast Agreement in 1998 (known as the Good Friday Agreement), an independent commission was established under former Hong Kong Governor, Chris Patten to look at all areas of policing and to make recommendations for changes in policing.

Our Rights:

Human rights go to the heart of policing. Police are governed by human rights principles and increasingly detailed standards - from arrest and detention to the regulation of protest and the use of lethal force.

UNCRC article 40: A child accused or guilty of breaking the law must be treated with dignity and respect. They have the right to legal assistance and a fair trial that takes account of their age.

Governments must set a minimum age for children to be tried in a criminal court and manage a justice system that enables children who have been in conflict with the law to reintegrate into society.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 7: The law is the same for everyone, and must treat us all equally.

Our Research Says:

The relationship between young people and the police has been found to be tense, with police officers' attitudes and behaviour towards young people found to reduce the young people's willingness to contact the police when they have been the victim or witness of a crime.

NI remains a society in transition from conflict. Non-State forces still operate and the threat from these organisations, while reduced, remains real.

Children in NI represent a disproportionately high proportion of persons stopped and searched by the PSNI.

Violence against girls and women is a big concern.

During Black Lives Matters protests the police response with unfair and discriminatory.

Our Asks:

Enhanced protections for young people as victims of crime recognising their rights as equal citizens including young people under threat and young women and girls through delegating power to the victims of crime commissioner a specific units within their office on youth and young women.

Implementation of Anti Age Discrimination legislation that protects everyone against discrimination including those under 16.

- A government lead campaign to influence attitudinal change, negative language and stereotypes on the basis of age, gender, religious belief, political opinion, race, disability, marital status, dependants and sexual orientation etc.
- End the stereotyping of children and young people by the PSNI, Policing Board and others including a ban on negative social or print media that stereotypes young people.
- The Police Ombudsman to promote their services and create awareness through education on their role as well as becoming more accessible and youth friendly

Raise the age of criminal responsibility to 16

Ongoing police training on engagement with young people

Re-establish and reconstitute the Policing Board's youth advisory panel to include young people as members.

All stop and searches to be filmed by body cams and outlawed against children.

Outlaw spit and bite guards

Outlaw mosquito devices

More support for young people when engaging with the police.

Hate Crime Legislation should include age.

Relationship and Sex Education in schools should be enhanced and compulsory and include issues such as sexual consent, FGM, forced marriage and domestic violence.

Poverty

Poverty is when you don't have the resources to meet your minimum needs - like not being able to heat your home, pay your rent, or buy the essentials for your children. It means waking up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty, and impossible decisions about money.

It means facing marginalisation – and even discrimination – because of your financial circumstances. The constant stress it causes can lead to problems that deprive people of the chance to play a full part in society.

Government Says:

The Department for Communities has responsibility for developing, co-ordinating and driving the Executive's priorities for tackling poverty.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 includes a duty on the Executive to “adopt a strategy setting out how it proposes to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need”.

In line with New Decade New Approach, the Department is developing an Anti-Poverty Strategy that aims to address inequalities and obstacles that directly affect the everyday lives of the most vulnerable people in society and will bring focus to identifying and addressing the issues, barriers and disadvantages that undermine equality of opportunity.

Our Rights:

Article 27 of the UNCRC says that every child has the right to a standard of living that allows them to develop physically, mentally, spiritually and socially. Poverty can mean children have a standard of living that falls below this threshold.

UN Declaration on Human Rights Article 25: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Our Research Says:

13% of people (approx. 241,000) in Northern Ireland live in absolute poverty before housing costs. This can be further broken down to: 17% of children, 14% of pensioners and 11% of the working age population. The causes of poverty are many and varied. (Dept for Communities)

Young people are systematically discriminated against in terms of economics and poverty.

Rising cost of living, fuel costs, student fees and a lack of employment opportunities are pushing young people further into poverty.

Northern Ireland has never witnessed anything like the energy price hikes it is currently experiencing and we are now living with home heating oil prices going up at alarming rates since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Child and Youth Poverty is on the increase with around one in 4 children are living in poverty in NI.

Economic wellbeing underpins many other areas of life. Economic disadvantage limits life chances, increasing the risk of ill health, creating a barrier to developing important life skills, and preventing young people from achieving their full potential.

NI has the highest Youth Poverty level in the UK.

Poverty is perhaps the single most powerful reason why people become homeless.

Our Asks:

End age disparity in the minimum wage - equal pay for equal work. Everyone, regardless of age, should receive the living wage.

Take urgent action to be taken to increase Salaries to meet rising costs of living across all sectors.

Create more 'decent jobs' – better jobs with better wages that recognise the rising cost of living.

Urgent Government Action to address the rising cost of living.

More opportunities for meaningful well paid apprenticeships that lead to employment

Better protections for people on zero hour contracts.

Extend the welfare reform mitigations package.

Economic investment in the youth work sector to support pathways to sustained employment that works in partnership to meet the needs of the most vulnerable young people, furthest from the labour market.

Money management and financial capability skills to be rolled out as part of the school curriculum.

Enhanced Careers guidance in schools.

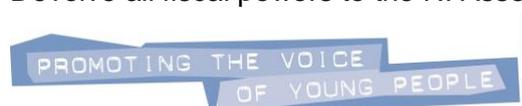
Combat Period Poverty through provision of free sanitary products in public toilets funded by government.

Abolition of student fees

Protect EMA

Launch an inquiry into the student finance system with a view to reforming the student loan system to address student poverty.

Devolve all fiscal powers to the NI Assembly



Transport

Young people rely heavily on public transport for education, work and socialising. The UN's sustainable development goals recognise the importance of transport.

Sustainable transport achieves better integration of the economy while respecting the environment. Improving social equity, health, resilience of cities, urban-rural linkages and productivity of rural areas.

Government Says:

The Department of Infrastructure has a lead role in bus, rail and ferry travel including relevant legislation and our supported travel programmes.

If you're aged 60 or over, or you have a disability, you may be entitled to concessionary travel on bus and railway journeys within Northern Ireland. Translink and some other transport operators also offer half fare travel for children and young people up until 30 June following their 16th birthday.

Free travel on bus or rail is available if you have refuge or emergency accommodation through Women's Aid or the NI Housing Executive.

Belfast City Council called for free public transport for young people in January 2022. Stormont and Translink rejected these appeals in February 2022.

Our Rights:

UNCRC article 15 (freedom of association) Every child has the right to meet with other children and to join groups and organisations, as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights.

Article 26 of the UNCRC says that you should have social and economic help to remove barriers to participation.

Article 13 UN Declaration on Human Rights says that everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

Our Research Says:

Lack of transport acts as a barrier to young people in accessing services, facilities and social events.

Rural transport is not adequate

Segregation makes transport more difficult across communities

The cost of public transport is too expensive for many young people

The public transport infrastructure is not adequate - we need better bus and railway routes.

Young people often experience negative treatment from public transport providers

Young people sometimes get charged adult fares because drivers do not believe their age.

There are little opportunities for safe active travel.

Our Asks:

Better engagement between drivers, conductors and young people.

Training for transport staff around engagement with young people

Free public transport for young people

Greater access to transport in rural areas including an enhanced bus and railway network.

Translink proof of age card to be issued to all young people when they enter year 8.

Establishment of a youth friendly complaints system.

Establishment of bike schemes for young people similar to the cycle work scheme.

Investment in active travel such as safe cycle lanes.

Investment in the transport infrastructure including the bus and railway network.

Inclusion & Diversity

Our mission at NIYF is to empower young people to challenge disadvantage and inequality; effect change and contribute to building a just, fair and equal society.

Young people are concerned about inequalities on the basis of race, ability, sexual orientation, gender, age or on any other basis. We believe that it is important to provide equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or mental disabilities and members of other minority groups.

Diversity is about including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc.

Government Says:

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act places a statutory obligation on Public Authorities to carry out their functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations in respect of religious belief, political opinion, gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependants and sexual orientation.

Rights:

UNCRC article 2 (non-discrimination). The Convention applies to every child without discrimination, whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities or any other status, whatever they think or say, whatever their family background.

UNCRC article 3 (best interests of the child) The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.

UN Declaration on Human Rights Article 1 All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

UN Declaration on Human Rights Article 2 Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Our Research Says:

Young people face systematic inequality in many of the services that they try to access including health, leisure, retail.

Those from an LGBTQI+ background experience inequality and exclusion in many areas of their lives.

Young Asylum seekers have little to no rights and are denied access to services, adequate housing, education, employment and social / sporting / leisure activities.

Disabled young people experience multiple disadvantages and have been denied having their voices heard by services providers.

Our Asks:

Expedite legislation for a Bill of Rights for NI. If this can't be agreed locally should it be passed by Westminster based on the work of the Ad Hoc group.

Enhanced rights and opportunities for refugees and those seeking asylum to work, study and have their emotional and social needs met.

The school curriculum to be further developed to promote inclusion and diversity including specific minority groups living in NI.

Implementation of the expert panel's action plan founded from the sexual orientation strategy with a funding stream attached.

Ban conversion therapy.

More education to the wider population on LGBTI+ issues through media and schools.

Environment

From climate change, deforestation and other misuses of natural resources, loss of biodiversity, pollution, or contaminated water supplies - environmental challenges are plentiful. How leaders, scientists, and individuals respond to these challenges directly impacts the environment and the opportunities that we live with today and tomorrow.

A global survey illustrates the depth of anxiety many young people are feeling about climate change. Nearly 60% of young people approached said they felt very worried or extremely worried. More than 45% of those questioned said feelings about the climate affected their daily lives.

Government Says:

The Northern Ireland Assembly has passed climate change legislation committing the region to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. A Bill tabled by Agriculture and Environment Minister Edwin Poots passed its final stage in the Assembly chamber and will now go forward for Royal Assent.

While there is an overall net-zero target for 2050, there is a separate reduction target of 46% for methane emissions, which are largely associated with the agricultural sector. Northern Ireland has been an outlier in terms of climate change laws, having previously been the only part of the UK and Ireland without specific legislative commitments to reducing greenhouse gas output.

Our Rights:

GENEVA (11 October 2021) – In a historic ruling on the harmful effects of climate change on children’s rights, the Child Rights Committee found that a State party can be held responsible for the negative impact of its carbon emissions on the rights of children both within and outside its territory.

Our Research Says:

Based on the work of the NIYF Environment Sub Group (2020) young people called for urgent action.

Young people are calling for the government to act on climate change. They want to see more renewable energy in NI. Things like wind farms and solar power.

Young people have said that more work should be done to encourage people to use public transport; walk and cycle to school, college or work.

Government should prioritise its work to reduce greenhouse gas and limit the increase in global temperature to 2°C; and raise awareness locally.

We need more awareness on the effects of cutting down rain forests; large numbers of methane producing livestock and burning of fossil fuels on our climate.



Our Asks:

Government investment in affordable and accessible renewable energy to be subsidised for homes.

Plant more trees - a government supported programme to plant trees and wild flowers and promote reforestation on unused land

More education for young people about climate change.

Inclusion of young people in decision making about climate change.

Stronger regulations to limit air pollution.

Help farmers to move away from methods which could damage the environment.

Make ecocide, the mass destruction and damage of the environment by human activity, illegal.

Peace Building

As a society emerging from conflict we all have a role to play in building and maintaining peace. Our society is made up of people with differing opinions.

Peacebuilding seeks to address the underlying causes of conflict, helping people to resolve their differences peacefully and lay the foundations to prevent future violence.

The role of young people in society has a bearing on their leadership potential and their possible role in peacebuilding. The tension between young and old has been one of the key features of inter-generational shifts pertaining to the control over power, resources and people.

Government Says:

The 'Together: Building a United Community' (T:BUC) Strategy, published on 23 May 2013, reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society.

Under Section 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission ('the Commission') is required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. This Good Relations Action Plan sets out how the Commission proposes to fulfil this duty in relation to the functions for which it is responsible.

Our Rights:

We have lots of rights in terms of living in peace.

The UNCRC article 3 Article 3 is one of the most important articles in the UNCRC, and many other articles are related to it. It says that the interests of children and young people should be thought about at all levels of society, and that their rights should be respected by people in power.

In other words, it says adults should think about the best interests of children and young people when making choices that affect them.

Article 19 of the UNCRC makes it clear that children and young people have the basic human right to dignity. This means the right to be protected from violence, just like everybody else.

Article 38 of the UNCRC covers how the rights of children relate to armed forces.

Children and young people should never be forced to fight in the armed forces or go to war. This right covers all jobs in a war, so doesn't just apply to soldiers.

UN Declaration on Human Rights article 3 says that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.; and article 5 says that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Our Research Says:

The NI Youth Forum is calling for an end to sectarianism and division. There is an onus on our elected reps to lead and promote an acceptance of others – diversity of cultures and beliefs.

Young people are tired of sectarian politics.

Community division and segregation in housing, education, public services and leisure facilities continues to be the daily reality experienced by most children. Over 90% of public housing continues to be segregated along religious lines.

Our Young People of the Peace Process Research outlined that:

- 47% of young people 'agreed and strongly agreed' with the statement that politics in Northern Ireland has not changed in 20 years.
- 76% also 'agreed and strongly agreed' that politics in Northern Ireland is defined by the troubles.
- 47% also 'agreed and strongly agreed' that politicians talk about the past more than the present and the future.
- 'Peace or long-term peace' was the fourth biggest issue for young people (selected by almost a third of respondents)

Our Asks:

Invest in voluntary youth services to deliver meaningful, sustained peace-building work at local and regional levels. This work should include international experiences and should be planned and sustained over a period of years.

Recognise the power and influence that young people have and invest in them as young leaders through the youth work sector.

Invest in safe spaces for dialogue on peace-building, legacy and identity including:

- a mechanism via the Executive Office for sustained engagement with young people on peace-building, legacy and identity.
- the establishment of an expert steering group made up of young people, youth advocates, representatives from TEO / NIO & DFA who meet quarterly to provide an opportunity for youth voice on peace-building, legacy and identity.

Work with TEO to support a youth led review of TBUC

APPENDIX

NIYF Research References:

What you say matters: Young People using Rights for Change (2016) – 90 young people

Translink Youth Forum Survey: Young people's views on public transport in NI (2017) – 1,255 young people

Elephant in the Room: Exploring young people awareness of mental health in Northern Ireland (October 2018) - 1,268 young people

NIYF response to Home to School Transport Review on behalf of the Network for Youth (March 2019) - 40 young people

Our Voices: Are Not in Lockdown – seeking the views of young people during lockdown (April 2020) – 1,065 young people

NIYF Bill of Rights Discussion Paper (October 2020)

NIYF Alternative Report Submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (October 2020)

Our Voices: Speaking Truth to Power – seeking young people's views in COVID-19 (July 2020 & November 2020) 4,062 young people *includes 1,065 responses from Our Voices: Are Not in Lockdown April 2020

Presentation to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement (January 2021)

Young People of the Peace Process (March 2021) - 388 young people

NIYF Votes at 16 Policy Briefing (September 2021)

KNowhere to go: A peer approach to preventing homelessness in NI (2021) – 45 young people

Our Voices: Beyond Borders – NIYF Cross Border Research (February 2022) – 657 young people

NIYF / Dept for Infrastructure Youth Forum Event Report (March 2022) – 26 young people

External Research References:

NI Youth Assembly 'Issues that matter to young people' – (October 2021) – 951 young people

Cliff Edge Coalition NI – Welfare Reform Mitigations Briefing Note (December 2019)

Education Authority Regional Assessment of Need 2017 – 2020 (April 2017)