

The Equality Coalition is seeking to focus its work on four strategic areas over the next year.

1: Campaigning to ensure the realisation of 'rights based' power-sharing in Northern Ireland

Last year, we devoted much of our time to the development and promotion of a [manifesto](#) outlining the conditions needed for a 'rights based return' to genuine power sharing in Northern Ireland. In January 2020 - after almost three years without a functioning devolved government in NI - a new cross-party deal paved the way for the restoration of the NI Assembly and Executive. The [New Decade, New Approach](#) (NDNA) agreement contains many positive measures in relation to equality and rights. There are commitments to a number of equality based strategies and a separate legislative package containing an Irish language bill and other provisions on cultural and linguistic diversity.

However, experience shows that the inclusion of such provisions does not mean they will be implemented in practice. Many of these commitments will require support from across the NI Executive and Assembly to progress. Equally, there are provisions contained within the deal that are concerning, including a commitment to conducting a review to 'rationalise' public bodies.

The Equality Coalition will need to campaign to ensure the agreement is implemented in a way that protects rights and furthers equality, with a particular focus on monitoring the implementation of positive commitments that have already been made. As an initial step, the Equality Coalition plans to produce of a detailed analysis and briefing on the rights based content of the deal.

2: Enforcement of the statutory duties on equality, rural needs and cultural / linguistic diversity

We will seek to continue our interventions on the equality duty. Much of this work will be carried out under the auspices of the Equality Duty Enforcement Project (EDEP), which was set up by CAJ with funding from the Baring Foundation to support the work of our members to take forward complaints and other interventions to ensure the equality duty is complied with. We plan to further enlarge this programme of work to include the statutory rural needs duty and the new proposed duties on Irish language standards and cultural diversity found within the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) agreement.

With the reestablishment of devolved government in Northern Ireland, there will be a backlog of nearly three years' worth of policy decisions waiting to be made. Major decisions will need to be taken in relation to key areas such as funding allocation, welfare reform, the outworkings of Brexit, workplace practices and service cuts. In some instances, strategic interventions by the Equality Coalition and our members may be required to ensure the best possible outcome. For this reason, we plan to expand the programme of training and assistance for Coalition members and trade union activists to enable them to increasingly make their own interventions.

3: Protecting socio-economic rights in the context of the UK's EU Exit

The UK has entered a 'transition' period, during which further trade negotiations will take place in relation to Brexit and EU law provisions will be replaced by new policy and legislation within the UK. The Equality Coalition will challenge any attempts to roll back rights that arise from the UK's EU withdrawal. We will also continue to take forward interventions aimed at ensuring that the 'future relationship' between the UK and EU does not lead to a 'race to the bottom' in terms of key standards.

In particular, we will focus on how the UK's exit from the EU impacts migrants in Northern Ireland. In the context of the new land border with the EU, we will further interventions to counter both racial profiling and the sub-contracting of hostile environment measures to public sector staff. We will hold events focusing on the scope and limitations of the Common Travel Area (CTA) after Brexit.

Additionally, we will produce, publish and launch research on the experiences of migrant workers in the post-Brexit context, with a particular focus on employment and public service access. Last but not least, we will facilitate collective campaigning on these issues.

4: Countering hate expression and incitement to hatred

We will continue to engage with the ongoing [Judge-led review](#) into hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland. In addition to this, we will produce a research report on the duties placed on public authorities to tackle hate expression in public spaces (including racist, sectarian, homophobic, disablist and misogynistic expression). We will specifically examine the present 'non-intervention' policy adopted by many authorities, particularly where there is suspicion of paramilitary involvement or endorsement. We will also seek to transfer 'fair employment' workplace experiences to broader sectors and provide training to trade union activists on combating incitement to hatred.