

HUMAN RIGHTS FACTSHEET

What are human rights?

Human rights are the rights and freedoms that all individuals are entitled to, regardless of their nationality and citizenship, simply because they are human beings.

They are fundamentally important in maintaining a fair and civilised society.

What is the European Convention on Human Rights?

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) was drafted by the nations of the Council of Europe (including the UK) in the aftermath of World War II, inspired by the UDHR. The Council of Europe had been founded to defend human rights, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, and to ensure that the atrocities and cruelties committed during the war would never be repeated. The Convention enshrines a number of fundamental human rights, also known as "Convention Rights". These include rights like the right to life and freedom from torture. But they also cover rights in everyday life, such as what a person can say and do; who they can marry; or what they can believe; their right to a fair trial; and many other similar basic entitlements.

The Convention also established the European Court of Human Rights. Any person who feels that his or her rights under the Convention have been violated by a state party can take a case to the Court. All Council of Europe member states are party to the Convention and new members are expected to adopt it at the earliest opportunity.

What is the Human Rights Act?

The Human Rights Act 1998 came into force in the UK in 2000. It aims to give further effect to the rights set out in the European Convention on Human Rights. This means that people in the UK can take cases about their human rights into a UK court, rather than just to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. The Convention Rights are included at Schedule 1 to the Act.

A POTTED HISTORY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Many of the ideas behind human rights have been present throughout history. Some of the key milestones are set out below:

Magna Carta

The Magna Carta was the first document that was forced onto a King by his subjects. It was signed in 1215 and gave British landowners the right to have a say in changes to the law that would affect them.

Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

This French Declaration on the Rights of Man was adopted in 1789 during the French Revolution and guaranteed rights to liberty, equality, property, security and resistance to oppression.

Slavery Abolition Act 1833

This Act was passed by the UK Parliament after many years of campaigning by the Anti-Slavery Society. The Act abolished slavery across the British Empire.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The UDHR was adopted by the newly formed United Nations in 1948 and was created to prevent atrocities like those seen during World War II from happening again. The countries that signed the Declaration were saying they would strive to protect the human rights of their citizens. Nearly every country in the world signed the UDHR.

UNCRC

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was adopted in 1989, is an international human rights treaty setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the child, defined as any person under the age of 18, unless an earlier age of majority is recognised by the country's law.

Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 is the principal statute governing the care, upbringing and protection of children in Northern Ireland. It affects all those who work and care for children, whether parents, paid carers or volunteers. It passed into law in Northern Ireland and was enabled in 1996. It set out the responsibilities of the authorities to provide services to children in need and their families, to provide for and support looked-after children, to investigate children at risk and take appropriate action. A child is defined as aged under 18 and the Order is clear that the child's welfare is paramount.