

Equality Can't Wait Report: Key Facts & Dispelling the Myths.

KEY FACTS

Religious inequality in social housing impacting Catholics in North Belfast has been documented by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and has been **recognised** at prominent international levels, such as at the **United Nations and the Council of Europe**, as requiring concrete and urgent action.

Taking measures to address religious inequality is a **legal requirement** (Section 75 (1) of the Northern Ireland Act).

This report demonstrates how the **NIHE and DSD** have **ignored the issue** (the DSD's flagship Housing Strategy 'Facing the Future' fails to mention inequality in housing); recognised the statistical evidence but then **opted not to do anything about it** (the EQIA on Girdwood recognises religious inequality impacting Catholics but views tackling this to be 'divisive'), or; **adjusted the way in which data is collected** which makes the inequality *appear* to have been reduced thus masking the problem (the NIHE ceasing to monitor 'perceived' religious background in favour of 'self reported' religious background leads to a high number of applicants' religion to be recorded as 'unknown').

Watchdog bodies such as the **Equality Commission** have **not officially recognised religious inequality in housing impacting Catholics in North Belfast** despite the clear statistical basis (the ECNI's Key Statement on Inequalities refers only to the highly segregated nature of housing in N. Ireland)

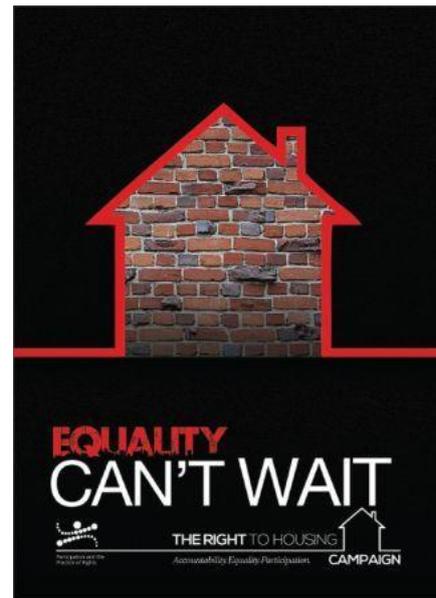
Cross-party political representatives on structures designed to hold housing authorities to account, have **signed off on decisions which exacerbate religious inequality in housing** (Belfast City Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, the Council's Committee with oversight on equality issues, welcomed the Belfast City Centre Waiting List which prioritised the engineering of a 'shared space' over the addressing of religious inequality).

There are no current plans to address religious inequality in housing. The future direction of housing policy in Northern Ireland is set to move further still away from the legal duty to address inequality. These include plans to review how housing is allocated and new build social housing projects in areas with little need.

DISPELLING THE MYTHS

North Belfast waiting list figures show that religious inequality is reducing.

Equality Can't Wait evidences how changes to the way religious background is monitored have made it *look* like inequality has been reduced, but the reality is that inequality is persistent and the gap between Protestants and Catholics has been narrowed largely because of a substantial amount of people whose religious background is now recorded as 'unknown'. In 2011 this led to the NIHE reporting that the percentage of people experiencing housing stress in north Belfast who were Catholic was 46%. However, PPR's own investigations put the figure for 2011 at 76%. For more see the differences between 'perceived' and 'self reported' monitoring methods in **Chapter 3**.



...the housing crisis in North Belfast is as a result of the highly segregated nature of the area and because of a lack of available land to build new housing on.

Equality Can't Wait evidences how consecutive failures to tackle inequality in housing which were presented in opportunities such as the £133 million North Belfast Housing Strategy launched in 2000 (**Chapter 2**), Belfast City Centre (**Chapter 4**), the Strategic Guidelines (**Chapter 6**) and Girdwood (**Chapter 7**) have compounded instead of addressed inequality in housing. Furthermore, the current land potential for new and much needed social homes for North Belfast is being wasted in Belfast City Centre where research shows there is enough room for 60,000 more people to live (**Chapter 4**), and in the Belfast Harbour (**Chapter 5**) where 20 acres of land is available.

...the provision of social housing should be directed towards building a shared future in order to create sustainable peace. This argument is also advanced by OFMDFM in their new strategy Building a United Community.

Equality Can't Wait evidences how the current shared future agenda in housing circumvents the legal requirement to tackle religious inequality which has more weight than the legal duty to promote good relations. The Northern Ireland Act 1998 from which these duties arise also stipulate that the promotion of good relations should only be pursued “without prejudice” to the promotion of equality of opportunity.