

Together we can.

A manifesto for a
safer society for all



If you have any questions about our Manifesto or would like to work with us to endorse any of our recommendations, please contact us.

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Revised and updated September 2025.



Katy Jackson

Public Policy & Advocacy Manager, Thirtyone:eight

Our newly revised and updated Manifesto sets out Thirtyone:eight's areas of interest and activity in relation to legislative and policy change across the UK. We've developed our recommendations by drawing on published evidence and our own research to inform our calls for action.

About Thirtyone:eight

Thirtyone:eight is the UK's leading independent Christian safeguarding charity. We help individuals, organisations, charities, faith and community groups to protect vulnerable people from harm and abuse. We work with a network of thousands of organisations across the UK and internationally helping them to create safer places. We are leading experts in safeguarding, working with governments to inform legislation and promote high standards in safeguarding practice.

Our Manifesto Development Team

Katy Jackson (Public Policy and Advocacy Manager)

Justin Humphreys (Chief Executive)

Peter Wright (Head of Strategic Communications)

With thanks to all our staff, Trustees, and partners who contributed to the development of this Manifesto.

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Together we can create a safer society.



Justin Humphreys
Thirtyone:eight's Chief Executive

For nearly half a century Thirtyone:eight has been at the forefront of safeguarding and child protection in the UK working as a trusted champion for the rights of all children, young people and adults at risk of harm.

The charity's formation in the early 1970's coincided with significant legislative reform to the child protection systems in the UK which sought to put children's welfare at the heart of how we care for the most vulnerable in our society.

Since those early days we've witnessed the development, evolution, and more recently the devolution of the legislative landscape surrounding safeguarding, driven in part by learning from past mistakes, and changes in international law and human rights. That process continues to this day.

In working shoulder-to-shoulder with over 10,000 grassroots organisations from the faith and charity sector across the UK to implement good safeguarding practice, we see the real-life impact legislation has on the ground for those delivering activities, care and support for children, young people, and adults.

In partnership with academic bodies, legislators, policy-makers and other like-minded organisations we've been hard at work to understand the risks that remain and the areas where improvement or development in legislation could help support the creation of safer places across all settings.

Despite the many challenges, the opportunity remains for us to develop laws and guidance which continue to support and enhance the hard-won protections already in place, to reform and strengthen existing legislation, and to break new ground in areas where there is still a lack of clear and effective policy and guidance.

In our ongoing work across the UK parliaments in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England to advocate and engage governments and parliamentarians we've already seen significant success. We know it works.

As a charity, our vision is of a world where every child and adult can feel, and be, safe. Can we make significant and tangible steps toward seeing that vision become a reality in our lifetime? **We believe that together we can.**

Thank you for reading our manifesto. We look forward to engaging with parliamentarians, lawmakers, and like-minded organisations and individuals as we work together to make the most of the opportunities we have identified and outlined in this manifesto.

Together we can make our society a place where every child and adult can feel, and be, safe.



Northern Ireland

The context

Since the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland's 500,000 children and young people have grown-up living in a peaceful society. There have been many positive changes to safeguarding over that time including the introduction of the Safeguarding Board Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act 2014 and the recent Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Act 2022. However, many challenges remain. The figures show that 32,000³ children and young people are living with domestic abuse, 2,310⁴ children are on the child protection register and 1 in 5⁵ children have experienced some form of abuse or maltreatment.

**Together we can create
a safer Northern Ireland.**



What we're asking for

Strengthen the safeguards

Significant opportunities exist within Northern Ireland to tighten up safeguards that are already in place to protect children, young people, and adults at risk of harm. We are asking for the government to improve the level of protection available for vulnerable people in Northern Ireland by reviewing and updating existing legislation:

- 1 Close the loopholes that allow convicted **Sex Offenders to change their name** and avoid detection.
- 2 Introduce a **statutory definition of grooming**.
- 3 Widen the scope of existing **Position of Trust** legislation.
- 4 Implement vetting and barring reform through **Access NI**.

Sex offender name change

The opportunity:

Laws allowing relevant criminal information about a person to be disclosed and shared in certain situations offer significant protections to children and adults at risk of harm. This includes through schemes such as AccessNI and the Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS) Northern Ireland.

The challenge:

The registration and management of convicted sex offenders relies on offenders proactively notifying police and complying with the law. If an offender changes their name and fails to notify police, this presents an increased risk to children and adults as it obscures any conviction information that would normally be shared on an AccessNI check. This legal loophole undermines the effectiveness of safer recruitment practices and means offenders who change their name are unable to be properly monitored within the post-conviction system. .

Our recommendations:

- Close the legal loophole which allows convicted **Sex Offenders to change name to avoid detection**.
- Change legislation so that an offenders name is tied to their **NHS number and National Insurance number** which don't change.
- Increase communication between government departments so offenders cannot acquire identity documents such as a **passport or driving licence in a new name, without their criminal conviction following them**.
- Align legislation with other UK nations so that Northern Irish children are not **disproportionately affected by Sex Offender name change**.

Grooming

The opportunity:

Criminalising grooming offers a much greater level of protection to vulnerable people from those intending to groom. When a person grooms a child or adult, intervention is needed so charges may be brought, and the victim protected from further harm.

The challenge:

Although current laws include scenarios where a person over the age of 18 communicates sexually with a person under 16 or arranges to meet a person under 16 following 'sexual grooming', there remains a lack of a clear and recognised legal definition or statutory guidance as to what grooming is, leaving people at risk.

Our recommendations:

- **Introduce a full statutory definition of grooming with accompanying guidance.**
- **Measures and provision for the online element of grooming to be specifically added to legislation.**
- **Provision under legislation to be extended for young people aged between 16-18.**
- **An offense to be created which focuses on the preceding grooming behaviour.**

Positions of Trust

The opportunity:

Children and young people receive care or support services from adults in a variety of settings. These adults are in a unique and important relationship with the children they interact with. Existing Positions of Trust legislation gives children and young people a level of protection by acting as a powerful deterrent and holding these adults accountable if they exploit their position towards a child to sexually abuse them. For this to be effective it needs to apply to any role that holds a similar level of trust and responsibility across all sectors and settings.

The challenge:

The existing scope of Abuse of Positions of Trust legislation in Northern Ireland, despite being extended in 2022 to include faith organisations and community groups, still creates gaps around other similar settings where children engage with adults regularly including non-religious community groups such as Scouts, which creates inequality and leaves young people without statutory protection across similar settings.

Our recommendations:

- **Update Abuse of Positions of Trust legislation to consider all environments where young people aged 16 and 17 engage with adults in roles that are responsible for caring for, training, supervising or being in sole charge of them.**
- **Supplement the current list of potential settings and roles by making the purpose, nature and context of the relationship between the adult and child the factor which brings a role under the scope of law.**
- **Commit to regularly review the provisions of Article 29A(1) and (2) of The Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Act 2022 to inform the Department for Justice's decision on when to add or remove activities within the scope of Positions of Trust.**

AccessNI Reform

The opportunity:

The vetting and barring service for Northern Ireland – Access NI provides criminal background checks in relation to people working with children, young people and adults at risk in activities that are considered regulated activity. This contributes to the safer recruitment of workers and the protection of vulnerable groups.

The challenge:

Public perception is that AccessNI checks are mandatory and that all people working in regulated activity have undergone an AccessNI check. This is not the case. In particular there is disparity in safer practice on the island of Ireland; as since 2016, Garda Vetting has been mandatory. As the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales) implements the recommendations from the Bailey Report (2023)⁶ this will bring alignment with England and Wales.

Our recommendations:

- **Make AccessNI a mandatory scheme.**
- **Develop AccessNI in a similar direction to the Disclosure and Barring Service in England and Wales as set out in The Independent Review of the Disclosure and Barring Regime (2023)⁶.**
- **Align with Garda Vetting to ensure a consistent approach for organisations operating island wide.**
- **Update the regulated activity lists to include all relevant roles where there is a care and support/close contact/personal involvement aspect.**
- **Update the criteria for Enhanced disclosure checks in relation to adults at risk of harm, so it protects them in all areas of life, not just in relation to health and social care.**
- **Update systems to allow a faster turnaround time on applications and a smoother user experience.**





What we're asking for

Better protect victims and survivors

Significant opportunities exist to better protect victims and survivors of abuse in Northern Ireland through the development of new legislation and amending existing legislation:

- 5 Introduce a **mandatory reporting legislation**.
- 6 **Repeal section 12** of The Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Mandatory reporting

The opportunity:

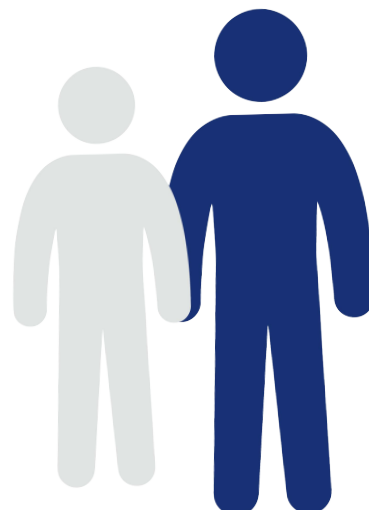
Reporting abuse when it happens should be an absolute obligation with no exceptions. Making failure to report child sexual abuse a criminal offence gives greater protection to children and young people who report any concerns or disclose abuse. Evidence from other countries who already have mandatory reporting laws in place show it works.

The challenge:

Current legislation in Northern Ireland creates a clear obligation for someone to report any offence they know of or suspect someone to have committed. Failure to do so can result in prosecution. However, the law is not specific enough to create a strong and irrefutable mandatory reporting duty that is specifically designed to safeguard children and young people from sexual abuse.

Our recommendations:

- Introduce mandatory reporting legislation that specifically applies to child protection situations.
- Make legislation applicable to those in regulated activities and roles that fall with a wider definition of positions of trust in line with recommendations from The Gillen Review (2019)⁷.



Suspect anonymity

The opportunity:

In legal cases involving sexual offences the privacy and well-being of those involved should be protected. This needs to be balanced with an appropriate level of media reporting that allow other victims and survivors to have their voice heard and be empowered to come forward if they choose.

The challenge:

The Gillen Review (2019)⁷ provides a fair and proportionate framework for protecting the identity of the accused post-charge. However, victims and survivors are often isolated and unaware of other people who have experienced harm from the same person. Without media coverage they would never be aware. New legislation prevents victims and survivors of sexual abuse from naming or sharing any identifying characteristics of their alleged abuser in the public domain in the absence of a criminal charge and for 25 years post-death of the alleged abuser. This poses a risk of harm to others and increases the likelihood of secondary traumatisation to others who may be vulnerable to abuse.

Our recommendations:

- **Repeal section 12 of The Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 that prevents victims of sexual abuse naming or identifying their alleged abuser in the public domain, pre-criminal charges.**
- **Consider a fair and proportionate response to press reporting as recommended in the Gillen Review (2019)⁷ by conducting a full consultation process that includes the survivor voice and the press voice and considers trauma informed practice.**





What we're asking for

Create safer environments

Significant opportunities exist in Northern Ireland to develop new legislation that support the creation of safer environments for all by reducing the risks posed to children and young people from abuse:

- 7 Remove the defence of reasonable punishment** and allow children full protection under law from physical punishment.

Reasonable chastisement

The opportunity:

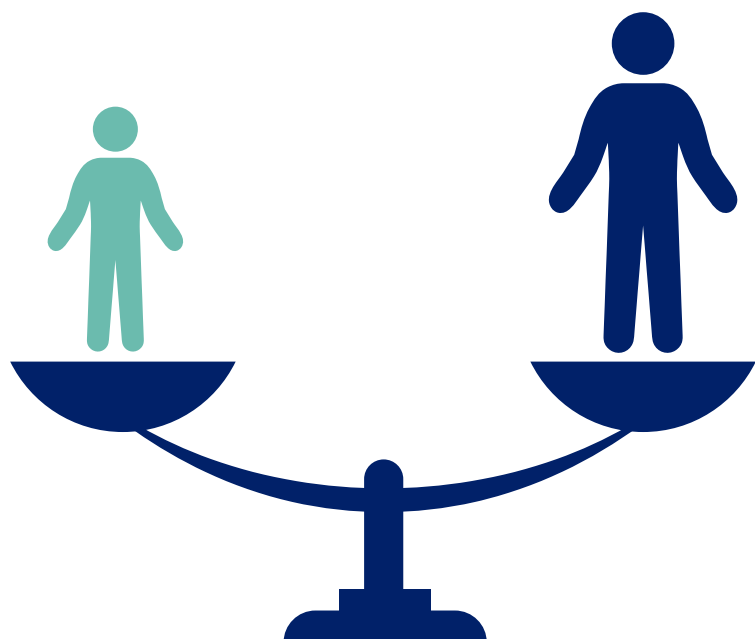
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that children have the right to have their best interests considered and to be protected from violence, abuse, and neglect. This would include the physical punishment of children.

The challenge:

In Northern Ireland adults are protected under law from common assault (and other forms of violence) whilst children are allowed to be subjected to physical punishment, amounting to common assault. Parents can invoke a specific defence, allowing them to physically harm their children.

Our recommendation:

- Remove the defence of reasonable chastisement and allow children full protection under law from physical punishment.**



Speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable

Proverbs 31:8 (CEB)

If you have any questions about
our manifesto or would like to
work with us to endorse any of our
recommendations, please contact us.

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Creating safer places. Together.