

# CALL TO ACTION

18/02/2026

**THE ASK:** BIHR has approached organisations across sectors and nations to help us make a short video explaining why universal human rights matter to the people/ communities you work with. We've carefully selected these organisations to demonstrate the wide reach and relevance of the ECHR whilst keeping the video focused and impactful.

**We're now inviting wider organisations to stand with us.** If you'd like to show your support, please add your organisation's name and logo to [this MS Form](#) by **Monday 23 February at midday**. These will appear at the end of the video as part of a collective show of support, helping to demonstrate the breadth of backing behind this message. You can find the draft video text at the end of this document; we'll share the final video script with all signed up orgs via email before the video is shared publicly.

**WHY:** The UK Government is part of a fast-tracked Council of Europe process aimed at limiting protections under Articles 3 (protection from inhuman & degrading treatment) and 8 (private & family life) of the European Convention on Human Rights – setting a dangerous political path for the erosion of universal rights for everyone. We know from our work across the UK that these are 2 of the most often relied on rights by people in their everyday lives, from survivors of violence being able to hold authorities to account for failing them, through to children in mental health units, and disabled people's equality.

**YOU:** At a time when evidence is being sidelined for politicised narratives about migration, and human rights being the stage to perform "toughness" civil society can come together to speak clearly and collectively. A shared video message offers a rapid, proportionate, and unified way to mark this moment, challenge the narrative, and show solidarity across sectors – signalling very clearly why this matters to all of us, setting a shared marker against the erosion of universal human rights.

## UK Government Joins Moves to Curb Universal Rights at the Council of Europe

International Human Rights Day on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2025 should have been a moment of reaffirmation. Instead, it marked the start of a political process that

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could reshape the future of our universal rights. [Ministers from 27 countries of the Council of Europe](#) (COE) set in motion a fast-tracked political process to explore “limits” to how the European Convention on Human Rights protects people in an area of migration dealing with removals. The particular rights being targeted for “directions” to the court in this political process are the right to protection from inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 3) and the right to private, family life, home and correspondence (Article 8). We know these are key protections for people across the UK in their everyday lives.

This movement of COE Ministers has triggered what is now known as the Chişinău Process: a compressed timeline in which government experts, through the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH), will produce the analysis for a new Political Declaration, with key meetings in February, a full draft due by 22 March, and planned adoption by the Council of Europe as [the Chişinău Declaration](#) on 14–15 May 2026. A further report from the Secretary General will follow before the end of the year, extending the political momentum.

A political declaration of this kind wouldn’t be legally binding but could pave the way for an Additional Protocol – the only way to formally amend the Convention. The impact of this outcome would directly affect a very small number of people, but profoundly. The process and the evidence base for this is rightly being challenged by organisations working in these areas, and by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) itself. The Court didn’t attend the meeting but [submitted a factsheet](#) showing how disproportionate this process is. The factsheet, and a [Bonavero Institute of Human Rights](#) report, shine a light on the wider context:

- Immigration applications accounted for only 1.5% of all applications, with violations found in only 6% of these cases.
- In the UK since 1980, the ECtHR has ruled against the UK in only 13 removal cases and just four of those concerned the right to family life, which is at the centre of the discussions.
- The Court has only ruled three times that the UK’s immigration rules violate the ECHR in the past 45 years.

## **A Political Strategy, Not a Legal One**

This moment is no longer about evidence. It is about the political usefulness of claiming there is a problem with migration, then presenting the chipping away at people’s human rights protections as the solution. This is how the playbook begins: not with dramatic exits but with a slow drip of “concerns”, “exceptions”,

and “reforms”, all framed as “reasonable” and “targeted”. Erosion starts at the margins but rarely stays there. And that is why this matters. Because eroding universal human rights protections on the basis of a political story that has become so instrumentalised is a profoundly dangerous idea. Our human rights were set down in laws precisely in response to such political moments, and to guard against them. What is happening now is a slippery slope that any future government can accelerate with ease. Today’s UK Government should know, and do, far better.

## **Why Must We Act Now: Truth, Power, and Avoiding Dangerous Precedent**

Our Call to Action is for all of us in the human rights sector, and beyond. We need to be alert to what has started here. The dangerous precedent of tinkering with legal protections, behind closed doors by the very people bound by these rights: governments. The rapid sequence – moving from informal discussions to a coordinated, Europe-wide declaration – has profound implications for universal human rights, and **it is vital that UK civil society speaks with clarity and unity now.**

As a human rights sector, we should not give oxygen to bad faith narratives based on division; that framing is part of a political strategy built on shutting down discussion and avoiding evidence. We can however all say something essential: the reality of human rights law simply does not match the political story being told, yet politics is pressing ahead anyway.

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We seem to be at a point where facts are ignored. But truth still matters, and the truth is this: cases about immigration form only a tiny part of what the European Court of Human Rights deals with, and the Court rarely finds a breach. Essentially, the curbs governments claim are placed on their power are vastly overstated. The very real pressures people in the UK feel daily – NHS backlogs, crumbling social care services, housing shortages, rising insecurity and inequality – require genuine government action to secure everyone’s rights, not scapegoating or

distraction. Blurring this reality and using human rights as the stage on which to perform political “toughness” serves no one and diminishes all of us.

## Protecting What Matters Most

As civil society, we do not need to accept the narrative of any political moment so severe – real or imagined – that it enables those with power to override people’s universal human rights. This narrative is political, not legal, and certainly not rooted in the reality of how human rights protections work.

### This Moment Calls for Solidarity and Action to:

**1. Challenge the narrative:** Where evidence does not support claims of systemic judicial overreach, we must say so. Facts matter, and so does truth – including the truth about why this narrative diminishes us all.

**2. Stand firm on universality:** Human rights are not a menu from which governments select what is convenient. They are safeguards against misuse of power, safeguards that are vital for all the people, communities and issues we speak for.

**3. Work collectively:** Civil society has already shown remarkable strength – [over 180 organisations stood together on Human Rights Day](#). That solidarity must continue.

### Get Involved in BIHR’s Joint Action – **DEADLINE Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb Midday**

We cannot let this moment pass without speaking up but many of us are unsure how best to respond. This situation at the Council of Europe is the first of its kind. Many of us are not technical experts on the detailed arguments about Articles 3 and 8 in these narrow contexts, and we’re conscious that engaging directly may simply amplify the claims with unintended consequences for those at the sharpest end of public power. Our perspective at BIHR is that there is limited value in engaging in the Council of Europe process, and a joint letter to the Government would add little to what they already know – many of us are already engaged in direct conversations. What we can do, proportionate to our influence, is mark the moment. We can speak collectively, make clear what is happening, and explain why it matters. We plan to create a short video that names the issue and signals shared concern, something we can all stand behind.

## Help Mark This Moment: Add Your Support

We've carefully selected 10 organisations to feature in the video itself, to keep it focused and impactful. However, we're inviting wider organisations to stand with us. If you'd like to show your support, please send us your organisation's name and logo by **Monday 23 February at midday**. These will appear at the end of the video as part of a collective show of support, helping to demonstrate the breadth of backing behind this message.

## The Draft Video Script

### READ BY BIHR:

"Right now, the UK is part of a political process at the Council of Europe where, alongside 26 other member states, our Government is pushing forward a formal process intent on limiting the scope of key legal protections in the European Convention on Human Rights. What's happening is of grave concern, both for those who will be directly affected by the proposals and for the wider precedent this sets, one where Government Ministers tinker with the limits of their responsibilities to upholding people's legally protected human rights.

These actions, at this key moment in history, are unnecessary and deeply risky – but it's not inevitable. We can choose to protect universal human rights, to resist their use as political bargaining chips, and to stand firm in the truth that human rights safeguard all of us."

### WRITTEN & READ BY ASSIGNED ORGS: (suggested sentence structure):

- "For [VAWG GROUP] human rights set down the essential legal protections that help survivors to seek safety, be heard, and hold authorities to account when systems fail them."
- "For [DISABLED PEOPLE'S GROUP] human rights safeguard disabled people's independence, autonomy, and dignity in daily life."
- "For [MENTAL HEALTH GROUP] human rights protect the dignity of people with mental health issues in law, enabling people to challenge ill-treatment, and have a voice in decisions about their care."
- "For [REFUGEE AND ASYLUM GROUP] human rights provide shared protections for people seeking safety and sanctuary in the UK."
- "For [CHILDREN'S GROUP] human rights help ensure children's best interests are central, and their voices are heard in decisions that shape their lives."

**READ BY BIHR:**

“Our human rights hold the line for everyone; outlasting political moments and bringing our shared humanity through the darkest times.”